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"But, Whatever The Reason, His Heart or His Shoes, He Stood There on Christmas Eve, Hating the Whos": Dr. Seuss' The Grinch as The Racialized Other in American Culture

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“BUT, WHATEVER THE REASON, HIS HEART OR HIS SHOES, HE STOOD THERE ON
CHRISTMAS EVE, HATING THE *WHOS*”: DR. SEUSS’ THE GRINCH AS THE
RACIALIZED OTHER IN AMERICAN CULTURE

A Thesis

by

MARINA MALLI

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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“BUT, WHATEVER THE REASON, HIS HEART OR HIS SHOES, HE STOOD THERE ON
CHRISTMAS EVE, HATING THE *WHOS*”: DR. SEUSS’ THE GRINCH AS THE
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August 2014

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ABSTRACT

Malli, Marina., “But, Whatever the Reason, His Heart or His Shoes, He Stood There on Christmas Eve, Hating the Whos”: Dr. Seuss’ the Grinch as the Racialized Other in American Culture. Master of Arts (MA), August, 2014, 59 pp., references, 56 titles.

This thesis analyzes Dr. Seuss’ the Grinch as a modern myth in US society that provides an imaginary resolution to the perceived encroachment of racial and cultural heterogeneity in the various time periods in which the text has circulated. Each chapter closely reads three different versions of the story, including Dr. Seuss’ children’s book published in 1957, the 1966 animated TV special directed by Chuck Jones, and the 2000 film directed by Ron Howard and starring Jim Carrey. In each chapter, I consider the racial politics prevalent in each time period in order to elucidate my claim that various media representations of the Grinch reveal American culture’s attitude towards the racialized Other. Ultimately, I argue that the Grinch functions to represent an imagined racialized Other who in each text must become acculturated in the end, thereby paralleling US cultural attitudes toward the “other” who must conform to US dominant culture.

DEDICATION

The completion of my Master's degree would not have been possible without my parents, who – even from far away – have wholeheartedly supported me. Thank you for never doubting me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| DEDICATION..... | vi |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | iv |
| CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER II. THE GRINCH AS THE IMAGINARY RESOLUTION TO THE THREAT OF THE “OTHER” IN THE 1950S AND 1960S..... | 19 |
| CHAPTER III. <i>DR. SEUSS’ HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS</i> (2000) AND MULTICULTURALISM..... | 36 |
| CHAPTER IV. EPILOGUE..... | 49 |
| REFERENCES..... | 55 |
| BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH..... | 59 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Grinch as a cultural icon has become a ubiquitous and integral part of the Christmas celebration in the United States since Dr. Seuss' children's book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was published in 1957. The Grinch is as fundamental in Christmas celebrations and popular culture as Scrooge or Santa Claus (Pease 115-6). The story's success can be measured in its numerous adaptations in different decades and media. The story's first adaptation was for the small screen and it is titled *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas: a thirty-minute TV special* directed by Chuck Jones and narrated by Boris Karloff, which was first broadcasted in 1966 on CBS. In recent years, a live-action film was made in 2000 sharing the same title as the TV adaptation; it was directed by Ron Howard, starring Jim Carrey, and was released by Universal Studios. The story has also been turned into a musical adapted by Timothy Mason, which was first performed in 1998 at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, and was directed by Jack O'Brien (Hischak 96). The musical also appeared on Broadway in November 2006 through January 2007 at the Hilton Theatre, and was directed by Matt August. The cultural impact of the Grinch can also be observed in the existence of countless merchandise items of the Grinch, such as toys, ornaments, household items, and apparel which appear on the shelves of department stores every holiday season. Furthermore, the Christmas song "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" first played in the 1966 TV special, can be heard on radio around Christmas and is as popular as "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer," or "Frosty the Snowman." In addition, a new adaptation

of the story appears to be underway as *The Hollywood Reporter* writes that Universal Studios are planning an animated remake of *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* which is estimated to be released in 2017 (Kit).

The story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is pretty well known: in the original Dr. Seuss tale, the Grinch is the only citizen of the imaginary Who-ville who doesn't like Christmas. The Grinch hates the holiday so much that he tries to steal Christmas by stripping the town of all its Christmas decorations and by taking away the Whos' holiday dishes. In the end, however, Christmas does arrive in Who-ville even without the decorations and the food. This is a turning point for the Grinch as he realizes that Christmas does not depend entirely on material things, "Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! / 'Maybe Christmas,' he thought, 'doesn't come from a store. / 'Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more'" (n. pag. emphasizes and ellipses in the original). These famous and often quoted lines signify that the spirit of Christmas is "a little bit more" than material belongings. After this realization, the Grinch experiences a change of heart about Christmas, joins the Whos in their celebration, and even carves the roast beast that he had stolen the night before. Most importantly, however, the Grinch undergoes an internal change as well when his abnormally undersized heart "Grew three sizes that day!" The story has been loved by US audiences and embraced by popular culture probably due to its depiction of the Whos as innocent and humble and independent of material goods – that is, as the portrayal of a perfect society.¹ Who-ville is a model society that is so strong and tightly knit that it manages to incorporate even the most marginal of its citizens, as the Grinch becomes part of Who-ville in the end. Since the U.S. has aspired to become a unified

¹ Thomas Burns explores the story's enthusiastic acceptance into American popular culture, and he explains that the story follows the same structural and symbolic patterns of other popular Christmas tales (195-6).

homogenized society, as captured in the “melting pot” metaphor, Who-ville is an ideal representation of the United States.

Cultural harmony was especially sought after in the U.S. when the early versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* were produced. Dr. Seuss’ book and its TV adaptation were created in a time period in which racial identity as well as racism were central in social and political discourse. Michael Omi and Howard Winant encapsulate these decades:

The racial upsurges of the 1950s and the 1960s were among the most tempestuous events in postwar American history. The struggles for voting rights, the sit-ins and boycotts to desegregate public facilities, the ghetto rebellions of the mid-1960s, and the political mobilizations of Latinos, Indians, and Asian Americans, drastically transformed the political and cultural landscape of the U.S. The postwar period has indeed been a racial crucible. During these decades, new conceptions of racial identity and its meaning, new modes of political organization and confrontation, and new definitions of the state’s role in promoting and achieving “equality” were explored, debated, and contested on the battlegrounds of politics. (95)

The 1950s and 1960s saw important political movements emerge, starting with the Civil Rights Movement which paved the way for other major movements such as Chicano Movement. The Civil Rights Movement accomplished a number of “limited but real” reforms by mid-1960s in legislation and racist practices (Omi and Winant 104). In addition, during the Chicano Movement, “Chicanos lashed out in an unprecedented fashion against what they perceived to be forces of oppression, exploitation, and racism – the nation’s political and economic systems” (Navarro 9). It is, therefore, at a time of change in the racial formation of the United States,

during which ethnic groups come more to the social foreground, that the Grinch develops to a cultural icon. I argue that the story of the Grinch serves to mitigate the force of the social movements and the threat they impose on the perceived homogeneity of “American” culture. The myth of the Grinch reinforces an imaginary resolution to racial heterogeneity by acculturating and assimilating the racial Other.

This thesis closely reads different media and popular cultural representations of the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* argues that the tale of the Grinch functions as a “modern myth” in American culture, which creates the illusion of a homogeneous society during a time when racial and ethnic diversity is increasing, and of social harmony during a time of de jure and de facto racial segregation. The Grinch as a myth gives an imaginary resolution to the issue of racial and cultural heterogeneity in the United States by enforcing the idea of the melting pot and of one unified culture. The character of the Grinch, therefore, functions to symbolize the racial Other who is perceived as a threat “American” values and traditions, and to the presumed uniformity of “American” culture.

The metaphor of “the melting pot” is well known and it is used to indicate that all the people who arrive to the United States merge together to form one unified culture. Paul Spickard underlines that “the melting pot myth is an extremely powerful rhetorical tool,” and which “promises that everyone who comes to America will change, and will change together” (11). He describes the effect of the melting pot discourse, “All this is pleasant, positive, hopeful. The promise of the melting pot is that America will become a happy place where everyone blends together and turns out somewhere in the physical and cultural middle” (12). However, Spickard warns that, while the paradigm of the melting pot is pleasant, it also has another “hegemonic” side to it. He writes that the melting pot is actually used to signify “Anglo-conformity” rather

than multiculturalism (12). Spickard also explains the difference between *assimilation* and *acculturation*: *assimilation* means “the incorporation of an immigrant or racial minority group into the dominant Anglo-American group structurally, in terms of participation in dominant-group institutions, intermarriage, and common identification as one people,” while *acculturation* is “the adoption of the cultural skills of the dominant Anglo-American group” (12).

Nevertheless, Spickard points out that both terms are equally associated with Anglo-conformity. In other words, the melting pot metaphor signifies the perceived homogeneity of US culture, which coincides with Anglo-American culture. It is this notion of a homogeneous “American” culture that the myth of the Grinch serves to preserve. In the chapters that follow, I discuss the 1957 children’s book in association with its TV adaptation in 1966 as well as the more recent real-action film in order to demonstrate the function of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* as a modern myth which perpetuates the notion of a single unified US culture through the acculturation and incorporation of the Other.

Analysis of Modern Myth

In my thesis, I am using the theoretical framework for the interpretation of modern myth provided by Roland Barthes. Barthes uses Claude Lévi-Strauss’ study of myth in different civilizations to analyze modern myth in 20th century France. Lévi-Strauss’ “The Structural Study of Myth” is a fundamental contribution to the field of myth analysis, and was later utilized by Barthes and other theorists. Fredric Jameson explains that Lévi-Strauss’ readings of myths “impose a basic analytical or interpretive principle: the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (77). Lévi-Strauss, for instance, shows that the Oedipus myth functions as an imaginary resolution of the

discrepancy between the old belief that men were created from the Earth and the knowledge of the actual biological birth of man:

The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous ..., to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. (216)

He continues that myth provides the “logical tool” to validate the original viewpoint of the origin of man. The Oedipus myth reaffirms that, “Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true” (216). In this way, the myth give a resolution to the contradiction existing in Ancient Greek thought.

Roland Barthes, in his famous *Mythologies*, utilized the interpretive method provided by Claude Lévi-Strauss to analyze contemporary myths and the way they function in his contemporary French society. Barthes writes that “*myth hides nothing*: its function is to distort, not to make disappear” (232 emphasis in the original), and he shows how different myths – from narratives, to physical objects –impose a bourgeois conception of the world. One of the modern myths that Barthes examines is toys, and what he calls the “embourgeoisement of the toy” (60); he explains that toys prepare children to become bourgeois consumers:

Only, confronted with this universe of faithful and complicated household objects, the child cannot constitute himself as anything but an owner, a user, never as a creator; he does not invent the world, he utilizes it; gestures are prepared for him without adventure, without surprise and without joy. (60)

Another example of a modern myth that Barthes dissects is a famous photography exhibition, “The Family of Man,” which presented pictures of the stages of life from all around the world. Barthes explicates how the exhibition distorts the viewer’s reality by naturalizing history, “This myth of the human ‘condition’ relies on a very old mystification, which consists in always placing Nature at the bottom of History” (197). It follows from these two examples that modern myths also serve to resolve contradictions of the culture in which they are found; namely, toys come as a resolution to the issue of man as creator vs. man as a user/consumer, and “The Family of Man” is the answer to the conflict between nature and history.

I will analyze the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* as a modern myth that function in American culture. The Grinch as a myth belongs to the wider discourse of Christmas that is composed of other myths that function in different ways to form our perception of the world². Roland Barthes defines myth as “a type of speech”: “myth is a system of communication ... it is a message” (217). Indeed, the Grinch is a message that is communicated every time the story is read, heard, or watched, and every time the character appears in popular culture as an item or a picture. The Grinch, in particular, is generated out the contradiction between the concept of the “melting pot,” a culturally homogeneous America, and the reality of a heterogeneous culture.

An issue that is worth mentioning is that Dr. Seuss openly opposed discrimination through his writings. One of his well-known stories, for example, “The Sneetches” satirizes discrimination and anti-Semitism. In the story, some of the creatures called the Sneetches have a green star on the bellies, and they discriminate against those Sneetches that do not possess a star. The story underlines the absurdity of discrimination when a smart merchant presents the

² Other myths that comprise Christmas are, for instance, *A Christmas Carol*, the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, etc.

Sneetches with two machines, one that adds a star to the starless Sneetches, and one that removes the star. At the end of the story, the man becomes rich and leaves the Sneetches penniless, while the Sneetches learn their lesson and become friends. Dr. Seuss, also, attacked racism and discrimination through some of his political cartoons, many of which “question Jim Crow labor practices; one criticizes Eugene Talmadge, the white supremacist Governor of Georgia; another shows a line of people waiting to be inoculated by a ‘Mental Insecticide’ that gets rid of the ‘racial prejudice bug’” (Nel 59). My argument in this thesis is not that Dr. Seuss’ intention was to create the Grinch as the image of the Other but rather that the Grinch functions as a myth offering an imaginary resolution to a real problem. Furthermore, Dr. Seuss lived and operated within the dominant culture whose ideology permeated his works. Even though Dr. Seuss appeared to resist and oppose the racist thought of his time, US dominant ideology still influenced him in less obvious ways.

Christmas in the United States

This thesis is part of the scholarship that discusses the celebration of Christmas in the US. The myth of the Grinch becomes important only due to the major role of the Christmas holiday in American culture. Christmas in America is observed as a secular national holiday that carries the values and traditions of the culture. There have been many studies devoted to the analysis of American Christmas, and which underline the great significance of the holiday in the United States. An earlier examination of Christmas celebration in the US was performed by James Barnett in 1957, who calls Christmas “a diffuse, popular cult” (129). Barnett, while accepting the Christian element of Christmas, he emphasizes the secular, nationalistic character of Christmas in America, which it is believed to be “a vital and unique symbol of our national life and culture”

(141). He continues “This is especially true of the folk Christmas, which reflects American secular culture more extensively than does religious observance of the occasion,” and he points out that “The widespread identification of Christmas with the American way of life has added nationalism to Christian beliefs, brotherhood, and family ties as major forces tending to perpetuate the cult in the United States” (141, 145). Many studies of Christmas in America include historical accounts of Christmas in America (Barnett, Waits, Restad, Marling), and others examine the way Christmas is expressed in popular culture (Santino, Connelly). All scholars seem to agree on the grand importance of American Christmas. Penne Restad, among others, underlines the holiday’s significance and magnitude in the United States; she writes that Christmas holds the “unchallenged position as the most important of national holidays” (ix). In addition to that statements, Karal Ann Marling points that, unlike other American holidays, Christmas is “unavoidable” and “ever-present” (ix). Furthermore, Christmas constitutes the expression of American values; Mark Connelly comments that “the values of Christmas have become those of America” (3). Restad also writes that Christmas developed as a national holiday in early America due to lack of such (91-2), and that, starting in late 19th century, “the nation’s Christmas encompassed the quintessence of America’s beliefs and values” (108).

It is because Christmas stands for American values that the character of the Grinch becomes a threat to American culture, as he is the outsider who attempts to steal it. Furthermore, it is the centrality of Christmas to American culture that facilitates the parallel between America and Who-ville. It is not just because the author of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is American that Who-ville represents the US, but because the Christmas-loving Whos are the ideal representation of tradition-observing Americans. In other words, Who-ville has been embraced in popular culture as the ideal “America.” My thesis serves to explain the popularity of the

Grinch but it also helps shed light on the importance of Christmas in America. Christmas is invaluable to American culture not only because it carries out its customs and traditions, but perhaps because Christmas is composed of myths, like the Grinch, that support the continuity of American culture.

Critical Interpretations of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

The children stories of Theodore “Dr. Seuss” Geisel have had an immeasurable influence on popular culture in the United States and abroad. Earnest Bracey’s words capture Dr. Seuss’ great cultural impact: “Indeed, Dr. Seuss’ inimitable artwork and wit have had a profound influence on contemporary American popular culture, and his quaint and outrageous ideas have given a new dimension to the cartoon picture storybook” (81-2). Despite the Grinch’s popularity and major presence in American popular culture, there has not been a significant number of critical interpretations of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, as the anti-commercialist meaning of the story is often considered self-explanatory. However, the story has a greater impact on popular culture surrounding the Christmas holiday, and it deserves its own thorough study. This thesis serves to contribute to the interpretation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* as well as to shed light on the Grinch’s relationship to the broader Christmas discourse and to our understanding of the holiday, a subject that has not received adequate attention.

Dr. Seuss’ other stories and characters and their impact have received more attention by literary critics; for example, Earnest Bracey in his essay on Dr. Seuss’ *The Sneetches*, comments on the racial tolerance prevalent in the children’s story (87), and Timothy Cook discusses the representation of the political leader in Dr. Seuss’ stories like *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbin*, *Yertle the Turtle*, and *Horton Hears a Who* (328). Furthermore, due to his big audience

and public acceptance, Dr. Seuss has been the subject of many studies that offer interpretations of his work as well as numerous publications dedicated to Geisel's life (Burns; Cook; Morgan and Morgan; Fensch; Minear; Bracey; Wolosky; Nel; Short; Pease). Furthermore, the effect of Dr. Seuss' stories on popular culture is also underlined by Philip Nel as he talks of how many have "misappropriat[ed] Seuss," and discusses the ways writers and journalists have used Dr. Seuss to serve different purposes often discarding the original meaning of the stories (179). Nel points out that the Grinch often stands for the "universal 'bad guy'"; he mentions, for example, that in the mid-1990s Newt Gingrich was depicted as the Grinch in a parody named "How Gingrinch Stole Congress" (180). Nel adds that, after September 11, 2001, even Osama Bin Laden was called "The Binch" (182). Many publications concerning the story focus more on commenting or explaining its popularity (Burns; Pease; Coleman), the whereabouts of its writing (Morgan and Morgan), and a big number is dedicated to the story's film adaptation (McCarthy; Stone; Felperin; Goldberg; Nel; Hischak). Often *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is mentioned as part of the greater work of Dr. Seuss (Morgan and Morgan, Nel), or the TV special is referred to as part of America classic TV adaptations (Santino, Hischak, Permuter Beier).

Overall, there seems to be a general agreement over the meaning of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and the most commonly accepted interpretation is that the story carries a moral lesson against commercialism (Morgan and Morgan; Nel; Beier; Hischak). This also appears to be the author's intention who planned to write "'a big book' to protest the commercialization of Christmas" (Morgan and Morgan 157). In the story, the Grinch wrongly believes that Christmas is a materialistic holiday that it relies on gifts, decorations, and holiday meals. When the Grinch realizes that Christmas can take place without these material belongings and that friendship and joyfulness is more important, he sees the true face of Christmas, and decides to join the

celebration. The moral lesson indicated in the story is that Christmas should not be celebrated only as a commercial holiday, but people should pay attention to the true meaning of Christmas, which is “a little bit more”; in other words, people should celebrate the invaluable aspects of life such as family and friends. This is the most common interpretation of the story, and Philip Nel points out that even the 2000 film, which received a lot of negative criticism – is in accord with the deeper meaning of Dr. Seuss’ tale, i.e. community over capitalism (132). There are a few scholars that have suggested different interpretations, which, however, do not substantially alter the reading of the story but emphasize its didactic nature.

Robert Short offers an interpretation of the story “through the lens of Christian faith” (xi). Short claims that the tale serves as a parable in which the “little bit more” in Christmas is nothing else but “The Spirit of Christ, which is really the spirit of Christmas,” and which “is unstealable – as the Grinch found out” (68). Short, thus, emphasizes the Christian message of the story as opposed to its warning against dependence on material goods. Furthermore, Short sees the Whos as an allegory for Christians; he says that the Whos are depicted “in exactly the same way the Bible depicts Christians. They are the little people, the humble, the weak ones whose weakness leaves plenty of room for God” (71). Short, therefore, interprets the story as a Christian parable that reveals the true meaning of Christmas, i.e. the religious aspect of the holiday. This interpretation would come in opposition to Dr. Seuss’ intention, which was to keep the story’s message secular; the author “had agonized for months about how to keep the ending from seeming trite or religious” (Morgan and Morgan 191). Morgan and Morgan quote Dr. Seuss, who did not wish for *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* to have an overtly religious ending, “I got hung up getting the Grinch out of the mess. I got into a situation where I sounded like a second-rate

preacher or some biblical truism”; finally the author decided to present the Grinch and the Whos eating together (158).

On a slightly different note, Kendall Lange offers another interpretation of the tale, still maintaining the concept of the moral lesson. Lange claims that *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* does not just talk against materialism but it cautions against being an outsider in your community; she writes “Through the Grinch, Dr. Seuss argues that outsiders, left alone to envy and detest to envy and detest inclusive communities, pose a danger to themselves and others” (70). Robert Schichler also maintains the view that the Grinch symbolizes the outsider, and he draws a parallel between the Grinch and Grendel in *Beowulf*. Schichler argues that Dr. Seuss created the Grinch after himself who also hated “all the holiday hype and the mad circus atmosphere of toys and bothersome noise,” and who felt an outsider in his own life (102-3). My interpretation of the Grinch endorses the view of the Grinch as the outsider, and more specifically, the outsider, the Other, in American culture.

Furthermore, scholars have pointed out the Grinch’s resemblance to Ebenezer Scrooge from Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. Natalie Neill, who studied the film adaptations of Dickens’ novella, argues that, “A midcentury *Christmas Carol* spin-off that goes unmentioned in Guida’s³ list is the Dr. Seuss children’s book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957)” (75). Neill points out that, “Both *A Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* are redemption narratives,” and that they both “give accounts of the integration into the community of hardened, cynical outsiders” (75-6). She finally comments that the actor Jim Carrey was picked to play the Grinch in the real-action adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and Ebenezer Scrooge in the 2009 animated film *Disney’s A Christmas Carol* directed by Robert

³ Guida, Fred. *A Christmas Carol and Its Adaptations: A Critical Examination of Dickens’s Story and Its Productions on Screen and Television*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2000. Print.

Zemeckis; this choice “suggests that the correspondences between the two characters were not lost on casting agents” (76). Thomas Hischak agrees with this view and writes that, “Dr. Seuss’ *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* is a variation on the Dickens classic” (96).

Finally, the majority of the critical reception on the story’s adaptations praise the 1966 TV special and criticize the 2000 film adaptation.⁴ Thomas Burns, for instance, writes:

... with Boris Karloff as the narrator and with Geisel in control of the enormous visual expansion for animation, the slight verbal expansion, and the fit between the two, the animated version of the Grinch story succeeds in retaining if not exceeding the quality of the expression in book form. (194)

Thomas Hischak, after also praising the 1966 TV special, he contrasts it to the 2000 film:

The live-action 2000 film version, on the other hand, is everything Seuss feared: a crass, charmless, noisy piece of commercialism with the soul of a cash register. From the grotesque makeup to the overbearing acting, everything in the film feels wrong. The critics disparage the movie (though some thought Jim Carrey as the Grinch a comic tour de force) and the public was curious enough to make it a holiday hit. (96)

In my close examination of the 2000 film, I argue that the criticism the film faced is due to its treatment of the Grinch as Other. The film does not demonize the Other in the way the 1966 TV special does but explores his past and attempts to understand him. By opening a window into the Other’s world, the film adaptation takes away some of the force of the story that advocates cultural homogenization. This approach of the Other is the outcome of the time’s changing

⁴ The musical adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* seems to have gotten mostly positive reviews (Armstrong; Hischak).

attitudes towards multiculturalism. In the late 1990s and early 2000, the U.S. is more accepting of the presence of different cultures and ethnicities. Nevertheless, the kind of multiculturalism that society embraces is celebratory multiculturalism, which attempts to momentarily “get in the Other’s shoes,” to understand the Other on a superficial level, without interfering with the hegemonic forces that keep the Other marginalized. The film, therefore, gives some insight into the Grinch’s psyche, but in the end, it reaffirms the need for his acculturation.

The Grinch as the Racialized Other

In my interpretation of the Grinch, I am using the term *Other* to mean the self’s projection, in the way the term has been shaped by Edward Said and postcolonial theory. The Other is constructed by the Self, and the Other defines the Self by being its opposite. Said utilized Jacques Derrida’s concepts *center* and *margin* as well as *self* and *Other*: “For Said, the ‘margin’ of the East helps define the colonial center of the West, and the Oriental ‘Other’ is a projection of the Western view that constructs it” (Richter 1988). In his famous work *Orientalism*, “Said discusses how European and U.S. literary and cultural representations, academic disciplines, and public perceptions foster biases against non-Western peoples, casting them as oriental Others” (Richter 1986). In the context of US culture, Toni Morrison has provided the framework for thinking of the Self and Other in terms of racial representation and marginalization in the United States. Her concept of Africanist presence in US literature, where she argues that African Americans are rendered as Other to an Anglo-American Self helps to form the representation of the Grinch as Other. In the case of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch is the Other, and the Self is the mainstream, “uniform,” Anglo-American society portrayed by the Whos. The Grinch as Other represents the contrasted image of the mainstream

culture, and he poses a threat to the Self; for this reason the Other needs to be absorbed and become part of the Self. In the story, this takes place when the Grinch begins to celebrate Christmas and sits at the table with the Whos, thus becoming one of them.

Another term in need of clarification is *racialization*. In my analysis, I interpret the Grinch as the racialized Other. I am using the term to refer to the fact that the Grinch is ascribed a racial category which defines his social role. Steve Martinot explains that through the process of racialization, “race is produced and bestowed on people by institutional social actions” (13). Martinot continues by stating that “people are racialized by a social process of categorization and stratification through which race is then ‘perceived’” (23). In the story, the Grinch becomes racialized, i.e. he demonstrates distinctive characteristics, due to the fact that he does not share the same values and traditions as the mainstream society, i.e. the Whos. The Grinch’s difference places him in the role of the outsider, and prevent him from participating in the culture. At the end of the book, when the Grinch is assimilated, he loses these differentiating characteristics, and becomes the same as the Whos, both internally and externally. In this way, the Grinch represents the racialized Other, who is attributed distinctive characteristics which assign him a certain social role.

In the chapters that follow, I provide close readings of the three major versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*: Dr. Seuss’ book, the 1966 TV special, and the 2000 live-action film. I will also discuss the overall cultural impact of the Grinch as a myth. In this way, I will track the evolution of the myth in time, and the myth’s association with the period it was produced. The myth’s endurance and its multiple adaptations also signify the culture’s perpetual need for homogeneity. The tale of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* continues to offer an imaginary resolution to the cultural heterogeneity in the United States.

In Chapter II, I compare the 1957 book with its 1966 TV adaptation, and I discuss the portrayal of the Grinch as Other in relation to racial politics of the 1950s and 1960s. Since those decades constituted a tumultuous period, in which the issues of race and racism were central, I argue that *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* the time's response to the racial Other. I argue that the story provides an imaginary resolution of racial conflict and cultural heterogeneity in the United States that was especially needed at the time the book was written as the mobilization of ethnic groups threatened the dominant ideology. Since the 1960s saw the full-blown force of social rights movements, the 1966 adaptation depicts a more racialized and threatening Grinch who is a danger to wellbeing of the society he inhabits. The Grinch represents the racialized Other who does not share the same customs and values as the dominant culture. The myth which shows Grinch acculturated and assimilated into mainstream culture, creates the illusion that the Other will be incorporated, thus forming a homogenized culture.

Chapter III is dedicated to more recent representations of the Grinch starting with the 2000 film. The chapter includes a close reading of the film and focuses on the elements introduced and especially on the introduction of the Grinch's history. This chapter argues that the film's innovation is due to an attempt to approach the racial Other. However, the film's message coincides with that of the other versions, i.e. the Other's acculturation. This signifies that the US society in the beginning of the 21st century has started to embrace multiculturalism and to attempt to understand the Other, yet cannot entirely accept difference and heterogeneity but still strives for cultural uniformity, as the Grinch's acculturation is unavoidable. . The second part of the chapter deals with the way the Grinch is used in popular culture and what it entails. The examination of the utilization of the Grinch reinforces the conception of the Grinch as the racialized Other in American culture.

Finally, Chapter IV connects *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* with today's view of the Other in the United States. Furthermore, I also refer to the forthcoming animated adaptation which is expected in 2017, which shows that cultural heterogeneity is still an unresolved issue in the United States. The need for cultural uniformity can still be perceived today, and the battle against immigration is still a valid one.

CHAPTER II

THE GRINCH AS THE IMAGINARY RESOLUTION TO THE THREAT OF THE “OTHER” IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

In this chapter, I examine the early versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Dr. Seuss' children's book (1957) and its TV adaptation directed by Chuck Jones (1966). *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was written at a time in which there were specific social groups that were perceived as Other to dominant US culture. When the book was published in 1957, the American South was still segregated and racial minority groups had started to mobilize and demand their rights in Anglo-American society. These groups “reshaped the political and cultural landscape of the nation” (Omi and Winant 117). I argue that the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* presents an endorsement of dominant US culture and an imaginary resolution to the perceived “threat” of cultural heterogeneity, by incorporating the racial Other into mainstream Anglo-American culture at a time that dominant culture felt threatened.

More specifically, in the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement won “limited but real” battles in legislation and policies for the advantage of African Americans (Omi and Winant 104), and also paved the way for the mobilization of other ethnic groups, such as Mexican Americans and Asian Americans. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in their study of racial politics in the United States, write that, “In the 1960s, race occupied the center stage of American politics in a manner unprecedented since the Civil War era a century earlier,” and they call this time “a period of intense conflict in which the very *meaning* of race was politically contested” (2

emphasis in the original). It is this time of heightened racial contestations that gave birth to the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. In this chapter, I analyze the Grinch as the depiction of the racialized Other who becomes a danger to mainstream US culture. The Grinch represents the Other who does not share the same values and traditions and therefore threatens the uniformity of “American” culture. Since Christmas in the United States represents a national rather than a religious holiday,¹ the Grinch’s hostility towards Christmas constitutes an offense to the integrity of the culture. I argue that the Grinch, as a cultural icon and myth, gives an imaginary resolution to the perceived threat of racial and cultural heterogeneity in the United States by enforcing the idea of the melting pot, where all cultures are expected to assimilate into one homogenized “American” culture. The tale is particularly valid during the time it was created as the mobilization of ethnic groups in the United States and their demands for social and legal rights was a perceived threat to the “uniform” Anglo-American culture, and a sign that the “melting pot” was giving way to a more multicultural society. It is important to note that the children’s book was written at a time when de facto racial segregation was still in practice in the United States, while the TV adaptation was produced in the middle of the 1960s, when racial and ethnic movements were in full action, having achieved the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. By examining and comparing the two early versions of the story, I argue that that the TV special, which was produced when race was more prevalent in the discourse of the time and when social movements had already achieved a number of goals, presents a more malicious and unforgiving depiction of the Other. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* attempts to restore some of the “lost” homogeneity of US culture by reinforcing the idea of unity and the Other’s assimilation.

¹ See Introduction for more information on the celebration of Christmas in the U.S.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas: A Dr. Seuss Original

From the very beginning of the book, Who-ville's idealized homogeneity is emphasized and contrasted to the Grinch's Otherness. The first pages of Dr. Seuss' book introduce the fictional Who-ville to the reader. Who-ville is a town inhabited by the anthropomorphic creatures the narrator calls the "Whos." The beginning of the book also associates Who-ville with the U.S., and calls the reader to identify with the Whos, who represent the Self.² The first piece of information that the reader gets about the Whos is their strong fondness of Christmas, which seems to be their main characteristic; the book begins, "Every *Who* / Down in *Who-ville* / Liked Christmas a lot" (n. pag.). As the story progresses, the Whos are presented as benevolent, fun-loving, and forgiving creatures. Right from the beginning of the book, it is easy to draw a parallel between the imaginary Who-villians and the United States "citizens" considering the great importance of Christmas in the U.S. Many studies of Christmas underline the holiday's significance and magnitude in the United States, and they point out that Christmas is the U.S.'s greatest national holiday, which embodies the values of the culture (Connelly 3). In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Whos' boisterous celebration of Christmas is linked to the holiday's grandiose celebration in the U.S. The Whos "[hang] their stockings," decorate their houses with Christmas trees, "ribbons ... wrappings ... tinsel ... trimmings," they "rush for their toys," they have a grand feast, and they "SING! SING! SING! SING!" It is significant that the Whos are portrayed as a unified whole as they all have the same customs and participate in the same activities; togetherness is overall emphasized, "Every *Who* down in *Who-ville*, the tall and the small, / Would stand close together, with Christmas bells ringing. / They'd stand hand-in-hand.

² As opposed to the Grinch who represents the Other. Who-ville is the center and the Grinch the margin. See Introduction for the way Edward Said uses these terms.

And the *Whos* would start singing!” Who-ville, then, represents an idealized American society that is unified and shares the same beliefs and traditions.

Immediately after introducing Who-ville and the Whos, the narrator draws the reader’s attention to a creature who is not like the other Whos because he hates Christmas. The Grinch is depicted as the Other, who is the opposite of the Whos and lives on the margin of society. The Grinch lives “just north of *Who*-ville” in a cave, which emphasizes his solitary nature. He seems to be close enough to the city to gaze upon it and hear the noise of the Christmas celebration, but far enough for him not to be an organic part of Who society. As he is depicted glaring at Who-ville on Christmas Eve, the Grinch becomes a marginalized character. The Grinch differs in the most fundamental way from the Whos, i.e. the celebration of Christmas, which makes him Other.

The Grinch’s Otherness is stressed not just due to his strong dislike for Christmas, but also due to his appearance which is different from the Whos. The Grinch stands out among the Whos, who have a uniform appearance indicating their solidarity. Indeed, the Grinch is drawn with coarse hair on his body and head, which gives him a sullen, unkempt look, while the Whos look well-groomed. What strikes the reader more, however, are the Grinch’s glaring, pinkish red eyes that stand out against the black and white background. Overall, the Grinch has a grumpy and sour demeanor. It is significant that there appears to be no real reason why the Grinch hates Christmas,

The Grinch *hated* Christmas! The whole Christmas season!

Now, please don’t ask why. No one quite knows the reason.

It *could* be his head wasn’t screwed on just right.

It *could* be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight. (emphases in the original)

It is implied in the story, then, a reason not to like and celebrate Christmas does not exist.

Following the parallel between Who-ville and U.S., this detail suggests that everybody should participate in “America’s greatest holiday” and those that don’t are not – or should not – be part of American society. The narrator suggests that the only plausible reason for the Grinch’s aversion to Christmas is that “his heart was two sizes too small.” This is an essential component of the narrative as the Grinch’s heart grows “three sizes” at the end of the book and after he discovers the true meaning of Christmas, which signifies the internal change the Grinch has to undergo in order to be incorporated in the Who society.

The depiction of the Other is not simply of a marginalized character, but of a tangible threat to the functioning of mainstream society. In the story, the Grinch does not simply dislike Christmas but he tries to prevent it from coming, to steal it: the Grinch – to quote the famous line – “GOT A WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA!” His elaborate plan is to act as a perverse Santa Claus and to steal the Whos’ Christmas decorations and holiday food. In this way, the Whos will not be able to celebrate the holiday, and Christmas will not arrive. The Grinch is drawn with a wicked, self-satisfied smile as he conceives his horrible idea, and the reader’s attention falls on the Grinch’s sinister pink eyes. The Grinch then sews a Santa costume for himself and he attaches antlers on his dog Max to make him look like a reindeer; then he puts some empty sacks on his “ramshackle sleigh” and heads to Who-ville. He then proceeds to go down the chimneys of the Whos’ houses and – as a reverse Santa – to steal the decorations by pushing them up through the chimney. The Grinch’s deed is so atrocious that even his dog disapproves of it and looks sad to be forced to take part in it – he is, however, a loyal dog so he complies.

Through his malevolent plan of ruining Christmas for the Whos’, the Grinch becomes a threat to their traditions. Given that Who-ville is a metaphor for Christmas-loving U.S., the

Grinch becomes the Other who threatens to strip American customs and values and is a danger to homogenized American culture. Since the US – as well as Who-ville – celebrates Christmas as a national, secular holiday (Waits 3), the Grinch as Other attacks the very core of American culture, rather than its religion. Even though the Grinch can be visualized as the non-Christian Other, it would be more valid to define him as the Other who does not share the same American values, the immigrant, the foreigner, or the member of an ethnic minority; this could coincide with the non-Christian Other but not necessarily. In an older study of Christmas, James Barnett, while accepting the Christian element of Christmas, he emphasizes the secular, nationalistic character of Christmas in America, which it is believed to be “a vital and unique symbol of our national life and culture” (141). Barnett continues “This is especially true of the folk Christmas, which reflects American secular culture more extensively than does religious observance of the occasion,” and he points out that “The widespread identification of Christmas with the American way of life has added nationalism to Christian beliefs, brotherhood, and family ties as major forces tending to perpetuate the cult in the United States” (141, 145). Most importantly, however, Barnett addresses the issue of acculturation of foreigners through the celebration of Christmas, “[Christmas] has become so intimately identified with national life that adoption of the Santa Claus figure, the Christmas tree, and gift exchanging now demonstrates an important stage of acculturation for recent immigrants” (141-2). The use of Christmas as a factor of acculturation is a key point in my argument of the Grinch as Other. In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, there is the implication that the Other who does not celebrate Christmas is a serious threat because he jeopardizes the culture’s traditions and values. The Other cannot simply dislike the holiday but will attempt to abolish it, and with it, the foundation of American culture. Penne Restad writes that Christmas developed as a national holiday in early America due to lack of such (91-2), and

that, starting in late 19th century, “the nation’s Christmas encompassed the quintessence of America’s beliefs and values” (108). If one takes into consideration that Christmas symbolizes American values and unity as a whole country, then the Grinch is a character who divides the nation and leads to the breakdown of “America” as an ideological construct. Recently, a diffuse fear of Christmas being threaten has manifested itself. This fear has also been expressed by John Gibson, who maintains that “millions and millions of Americans ... feel that Christmas is under attack in such a sustained and strategized manner that there is, no doubt, a *war* on Christmas” (xvii emphasis in the original). While it is difficult to estimate the percentage of the American population that shares this fear, the notion is still part of US popular culture.

In the story, it is significant that the Grinch decides to dress up as Santa Claus to steal Christmas. The Grinch does not really need to use a disguise to steal the Whos’ decorations because he breaks into their houses at night like a burglar. His Santa disguise does serve him to get rid of young Cindy-Lou, who confronts him about stealing their Christmas tree, but since the little Who is only a toddler, he could have devised some other excuse. The Grinch’s disguise does not make his deed easier, just more horrendous. The Grinch does not merely steal the Whos’ Christmas decorations, but he does it while dressed as the holiday’s greatest benefactor. In this way, he uses Christmas’ own means to distort and destroy it. When little Cindy-Lou discovers him and asks “Santy Claus, why, / *Why* are you taking our Christmas tree? **WHY**” (emphasis in the original), it is the fact that the Grinch is dressed as Santa when he deceives her and sends her back to bed that makes his act hideous, and renders the Grinch a true villain. In this way, the Grinch as Other also threatens to distort American traditions to the point that they lose their true value; this is represented by the Grinch dressed as a fake Santa.

The tale's epitome lies in the Grinch's acculturation as he is overpowered by the spirit of the Who community. This change in the Grinch and his incorporation into Who-ville manifests the victory of the dominant culture over the Other. In the story, after the Grinch has managed to steal all of the Whos' Christmas belongings, the villainous creature reaches a turning point. Even though he expects that the Whos will be mourning the loss of Christmas, they still manage to celebrate the holiday, sing, and be merry. To the Grinch's great surprise, "Every *Who* down in *Who*-ville, the tall and the small, / Was singing! Without any presents at all! / He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming!" The Grinch then realizes that Christmas does not depend on material belongings, "'Maybe Christmas,' he thought, '*doesn't* come from a store. / 'Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more'" (emphasis and ellipses in the original). The Grinch's epiphany leads to his transformation: he then returns the Whos' Christmas decorations, presents, and holiday food, and he sits at the Whos' holiday table; the narrator tells us that the Grinch even "*carved the roast beast*" (emphasis in the original). Most importantly, though, the Grinch's realization of the true meaning of Christmas creates an internal change as "the Grinch's small heart / Grew three sizes that day!" The Grinch, therefore, does not only alter his behavior but changes to his very core. This entire transformation can also be observed in the book's final drawing, in which the Grinch is sitting alongside the Whos. His appearance has changed, and the Grinch now truly resembles a Who: his hair is no longer looks coarse, and his features are now smooth. The reader cannot see the Grinch's pinkish red eyes since his lids are closed as he smiles happily while cutting the holiday roast. In the end, the Grinch truly becomes a Who.

This change in the Grinch denotes the Other's acculturation and his embodiment in American culture, which is the way this modern myth functions. The Other who constituted a threat to American values and traditions is organically incorporated, and undergoes an internal

and external change in order to participate in the American culture and be part of the whole. Furthermore, the fact that the Grinch fails to destroy American traditions signifies that American spirit cannot be broken; the Whos still sing and celebrate despite the Other's attempts. In the end, the Other is overcome by American ideals and has no choice but to join the culture. In this way, the Grinch as a modern myth functions to eliminate the perceived threat of the Other inside the US society, and to provide reassurance of the Other's cultural assimilation. The myth's imaginary resolution to multiculturalism in the US is the factor that has led to its prevalence and its endurance through time.

The Grinch Turns Green: Horror and the 1966 TV Special

In the plethora of representations of the Grinch in popular culture and merchandise items, the villainous creature always has a green color. In fact, it might even come as a surprise to some that the Grinch is drawn in black and white in the classic Dr. Seuss children's book. Morgan and Morgan report that Dr. Seuss was hesitant to portray the Grinch in a different way in the TV special, but was eventually persuaded by the director Chuck Jones, "Ted [Geisel] and Jones battled. What color should the Grinch be? Just the way he had drawn him, Ted replied, in black-and-white with pink eyes. But for television, Jones convinced him, the Grinch's eyes should be a villainous green" (190). The insertion of color emphasizes the difference between the Grinch and the Whos and makes it much clearer that the Grinch represents the racial Other. The existence of color – in contrast to the black-and-white book drawings – differentiates the Grinch from the Whos in more levels than in the book. My argument is that the green color serves to racialize the

Grinch and turns him into the archetype of the Other in American society.³ The Grinch's color, of course, does not associate the character with a particular race; however, it is sufficient that the Grinch's color is different from the light-skinned Whos.⁴ In addition, many Whos have blond hair that resembles human hair unlike the few strands of hair that the Whos have in the book. While the Grinch's Otherness is emphasized, the Whos resemble an idealized and homogenized Anglo-American culture. The Whos' appearance is uniform in every scene not just in skin tone but also in facial features, and they are shown to be a well-knit society that lives and works harmoniously together. Furthermore, the young Cindy-Lou Who is now blonde with big blue eyes and light skin tone. The toddler has more humanlike qualities than the rest of the Whos, apparently to stress her innocence and exceptional character; at the same time, though, she receives race-specific characteristics that contrast with the Grinch's Otherness. Cindy-Lou's round face and smooth facial features give her almost angelic qualities. Morgan and Morgan write that director Chuck Jones, after studying Dr. Seuss' book, realized that Cindy-Lou is "not a regular little girl" (190). Even though in the book Cindy-Lou is depicted as a tiny Who with two antennas on her head instead of hair, in the TV special she becomes Caucasian.⁵ Moreover, the generic way in which the Grinch represents the "colored" Other can receive distinct racial and/or ethnic identities in separate time periods. The Grinch, therefore, stands for the racialized Other who is different from the dominant, white culture.

Furthermore, the Grinch's evil nature is more accentuated in the TV adaptation. I associate the Grinch's bellicosity with the social struggles of the 1960s. The Other in the United

³ The Grinch's green color can also be associated with the green card; in this way, the Grinch as Other is envisioned as the immigrant in the United States.

⁴ The Whos have light, pinkish white skin tone in the vast majority of the scenes, and in very few of them they have orange skin.

⁵ Cindy-Lou Who maintains these features in the 2000 film, in which she is portrayed as a white girl with blue eyes. The young Who is still depicted with antennas projecting through her blond hair in the TV special but loses them in the film.

States appears to have gained some power during the mobilization of minorities in the 1960s who are fighting for their rights. The perceived threat to dominant culture that these ethnic groups represent at the time is translated into a more belligerent Grinch as Other. The TV special shows the Grinch as pure evil, thus, demonizing the Other that the Grinch represents. In this section, I also analyze the song “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch,” which makes its first appearance in the TV special. In my close reading of the song, I show how sonically the Grinch has been rendered as Other in popular culture.

The Grinch, who is now green, obtains more villainous characteristics than his black-and-white self. The color differentiates him from the Whos in a more apparent way, while endows him with monster-like qualities as opposed to the more humanized Whos. While the Whos are presented as a homogeneous whole, the Grinch appears more menacing with his green skin and yellow eyes with red pupils. His facial features and expressions reveal his evil character. Overall, the Grinch seems to constitute a greater threat to the innocent and benevolent Whos. Considering that the 1960s saw the rise of minority movements, the Grinch’s emphasized belligerence can be associated with the mobilization of different ethnic groups. At the time the TV special was produced, social rights groups were demanding their rights, and their militancy could be conceived as a threat to dominant, white American culture.

The Grinch’s evilness manifests itself in different ways. When the Grinch is first introduced in the book, he appears sullen, and he looks grumpy as he stares down at Who-ville. In the TV adaptation, however, he looks wicked and malevolent. The Grinch’s frown turns into an evil smile in the TV special. When the Grinch conceives his “WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA,” his face is now warped into a truly malicious smile, far more evil than in the book. The

Grinch's expression is so menacing than it scares his dog Max who goes into hiding frightened.⁶ The Grinch's mean character is also apparent in his abuse of his dog Max which does not take place in the book; the Grinch is even shown to whip his dog as he pulls the Grinch's makeshift sleigh. Max is also depicted laboring and sweating on the sewing machine while helping his owner make the Santa costume, and the wickedness of the Grinch's deeds is underlined when he ties up the horn on Max's head with a black thread as opposed to a red thread in the book.⁷ The Grinch's attitude is also described using stronger words; in the book he "like[s] least" the Whos' singing, while he "hate[s]" it in the TV special. Moreover, the Grinch now talks about his feelings and lays out his evil plans in the first person, whereas he is talked about in the third person in the book. In this way, the TV special ensures that there is no doubt about the Grinch's wicked character and evil intentions. The Grinch appears to have no remorse, and the viewer gains insight into the villain's criminal mind. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, therefore, becomes a sort of horror movie with the Grinch as the monster. The horror aspect of the TV special is accentuated by Boris Karloff's narration, "a master of horror roles" (Morgan and Morgan 191).

A parallel can then be drawn between the Grinch and the Monster as Other in American horror movies as it is analyzed by Robin Wood.⁸ Wood writes that in the horror film "the dual concept of the repressed/the Other" is dramatized "in the figure of the Monster" (68). He also defines Otherness in this way: "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with (as Barthes suggests in *Mythologies*) in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it,

⁶ Conversely, in the film, the Grinch's evil plan looks more comical, and the Grinch inspires more pity than fear.

⁷ The thread returns to its original red color in the film.

⁸ Indeed, the Grinch is called "a monster" in the song "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" that plays in the TV special as well as in the film.

converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself” (65-6). The different forms of Otherness are expressed as the Monster in horror films.⁹ The basic characteristic of the Monster, according to Wood, is that it threatens normality in the film (71); like the Monster, the Grinch seeks to ruin the life of the normal citizens of Who-ville. In addition, much like the Grinch, the Monster in the horror film, “is clearly the emotional center, and much more human than the cardboard representatives of normality” (72). Indeed, the Grinch maintains his human qualities: he thinks and speaks, he owns a dog, and he is capable of devising elaborate plans and uses deceit to achieve his goal. Indeed, the Grinch expresses his maliciousness in a very much human way. In this way, the Grinch as Monster can be conceived as the racialized Other, who needs to become assimilated into the mainstream culture.

An essential addition to the animated TV special is the song “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch,” which can still be heard on the radio during the holiday season. The song plays three times in the TV special: once while the Grinch is making his Santa disguise, and twice while he’s stealing the Christmas decorations and gifts. The song serves to accentuate the evilness of the Grinch’s deeds.¹⁰ The song addresses the Grinch and reiterates his foul nature; it begins,

You’re a mean one, Mr. Grinch;

You really are a heel.

You are cuddly as a cactus, you’re as charming as an eel.

Mr. Grinch! You’re a bad banana with a greasy black peel.

⁹ Wood lists the different groups that are Other in white, bourgeois society: women, the proletariat, “other cultures,” “ethnic groups within the culture,” “alternative ideologies or political systems,” “deviation from ideological sexual norms – notably bisexuality and homosexuality,” and children (66-7). The Grinch falls into the category of the Other who is an ethnic/racial minority within the culture.

¹⁰ The song also acts as a filler since the story had to be thirty minutes long and reading the book out loud takes about twelve minutes (Morgan and Morgan 190).

The song continues,

You're a monster, Mr. Grinch;

Your heart's an empty hole.

Your brain is full of spiders, you got garlic in your soul.

Mr. Grinch! I wouldn't touch you with a thirty-nine-and-a-half-foot pole.

The song's importance lies in the Grinch's construction as the image of the Other.¹¹ The Grinch's Otherness is underlined by the fact that he is the opposite of the normal, the self – which, in this case – is the Whos as Americans. The Grinch has all the negative characteristics that constitute him abject,¹² a marginal citizen,¹³ and this is why he is a threat to the normality of Who-ville/America.

Another essential aspect of the song is that the Grinch is accused of being dirty and smelly; the narrator calls the Grinch “vile,” “foul,” “a nasty wasty skunk”; his “heart is full of unwashed socks,” and his “soul is full of gunk.” The narrator adds,

The three best words that best describe you,

Are as follows, and I quote,

“Stink!

Stank!

Stunk!”

¹¹ When the song is played in the 2000 film, the Grinch seems to embrace the lyrics, and he sings part of it.

¹² Julia Kristeva describes the abject as “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. . . . The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I” (1).

¹³ The Grinch lives on the outskirts of society, in a cave “just north of *Who-ville*.”

This is significant as the racist discourse that has surrounded racial and ethnic minorities through the years utilizes the stereotypes of unwashed, foul-smelling racialized Other. The “dirty” stereotype has been imposed – among others – on African Americans, Mexican Americans and Mexican and Latino immigrants as well as people of Middle Eastern origin. Guy B. Johnson discusses the pre-Civil Rights stereotypes of African Americans, “One might compile a catalog of ‘What Every White Man Thinks He Knows about Negroes.’ Its main themes would be as follows: The Negro is lazy. ... He is dirty, ‘smelly,’ careless of his personal appearance” (3). John Brigham in an article published in the early 70s also writes that negative stereotypes attributed to African Americans, such as “superstitious, lazy, dirty, and ignorant” were becoming gradually modified but white Americans still maintained “radically different” views about African Americans than other white Americans (20). The Grinch becomes, therefore, the representation of the racialized Other who is dirty and unpleasant.

Apart from the Grinch’s changed appearance, his transformation in the TV adaptation is greater and more substantial than the book, and so is the coming of Christmas in Who-ville that inspires this change. In the book, the Whos are depicted celebrating Christmas morning holding hands in a semicircle in book pages filled with red color. Compared to the Grinch’s vision of the Christmas celebration, the actual celebration’s grandiosity is denoted with the abundance of the color red – the drawing of the Whos celebrating in the Grinch’s mind has only a little bit of red with the rest of the page being white. In the TV special, however, the celebration has a magical/spiritual element because in the middle of the circle of the Whos a bright light rises towards the sky symbolizing the spirit of Christmas. The light resembles a star, which becomes brighter and rises higher and higher causing the sky to change color and the Grinch to seriously question his deeds and beliefs. Morgan and Morgan report that Dr. Seuss did not wish to give the

TV special a religious tone and created a nondenominational star. They write, “the filmed *Grinch* emerged as a rare Christmas special without religiosity. Noble¹⁴ recalled, ‘[Ted didn’t want] a star coming down from the sky, so I had it come from the hearts of the people of Who-ville and float upward as the Whos sang Ted’s beautiful song’” (191). The spirit of Christmas is secular and derives from the hearts of the Whos; this, however, does not diminish its strength. Since Christmas is celebrated as a national holiday in the US, the spirit of Christmas is American spirit. The Whos as Americans defeat the threat of the Other, and American/Christmas spirit prevails. In fact, American spirit is so powerful that it causes the Other to change and become assimilated.

Indeed, when the Grinch has his grand revelation that “Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more,” the change in his appearance is immediate. The evil Grinch at once receives a benevolent countenance: a dreamy smile appears on his face and his coarse features become smoother. More importantly, though, a more race-specific change takes place as his evil eyes change color from yellow and red to blue resembling Cindy-Lou’s angelic eyes. This change is at first temporary as the Grinch’s eyes go back to normal as he struggles to save the sleigh full of toys from falling off the cliff, but afterwards, his eyes stay blue and match Cindy-Lou’s as they sit together on the Christmas table. The change in eye color is the external outcome of the Grinch’s change in attitude that accompanies the internal change, which is the Grinch’s heart growing three sizes. When the narrator says “then the true meaning of Christmas came through,” the Grinch is shown with an almost angelic face – save for his green color – and his now blue eyes shining reflecting his changed soul. This signifies that it was the spirit of Christmas/America that inspired this change; in this way, American spirit is able to overtake the racial Other and integrate him as he acquires some of the features of the unified whole.

¹⁴ Maurice Noble, set designer (Morgan and Morgan 190).

The Grinch's acculturation and his incorporation into the Whos' society constitutes the imaginary resolution to cultural heterogeneity. The Grinch symbolizes the Other who is assimilated enough so that his threatening characteristics are nullified and he can now safely become part of the homogenized culture. The resolution given is at the expense of the racialized Other, who is acculturated and homogenized. By being assimilated, the Other is no longer a threat and becomes part of the mainstream culture. It is only by changing its distinctive characteristics that the Other is not malignant and can finally participate in the American society. Indeed, the last scenes have the now blue-eyed Grinch sitting on the table and sharing the Whos' roast; the Grinch now fits in with the other Whos as he shares the same facial features and benevolent smile, and his eyes matching Cindy-Lou's eyes as they sit side by side. The Grinch symbolizes the minority ethnic group who, in order to become acceptable have to "behave as we do and become replicas of the good bourgeois, their Otherness reduced to the unfortunate difference of color" (Wood 67). This imaginary resolution was particularly reassuring at a tumultuous time of social change like the 1960s, during which the hegemony of Anglo-American culture seems challenged.

CHAPTER III

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS (2000) AND MULTICULTURALISM

After examining the way the Other was depicted in the two earlier versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, I analyze the story's more recent film adaptation and I argue that it represents an example of celebratory multiculturalism. In this chapter, I look at the representation of the Other through the character of the Grinch, and its relation to the society of the late 1990s and early 2000, which is more positively inclined towards multiculturalism. The film advocates a more liberal¹ illustration of the racial Other, and sheds some light on the Grinch's past when he was victimized by the Whos. In an attempt to understand the Other, the film allows the Grinch a motive for his hostility to Christmas, and lessens his evilness. Nevertheless, the film does not alter the final message, which is the Grinch being assimilated into dominant culture and sharing its customs.

Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas was released by Universal Studios and was directed by Ron Howard and starring Jim Carrey. Despite the animated TV special's success in 1966 and its endurance through time, the 2000 film received a plethora of negative criticism. The main reasons for the negative criticism are two innovations introduced in the film: an insight into the Grinch's trouble past and a more realistic, less-than-perfect representation of Who-ville. I argue that the reason the film faced such negative reviews is that it does not demonize the Other

¹ The film's political discourse seems to be detected by the one of most vehement critiques of the *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, which was published in the conservative magazine *National Review*. Its author, Jonah Goldberg, associates the film with society's contemporary tendency to analyze and give motives to its Others (26).

in the way the TV special does. In this way, the film mitigates some of the force of the modern myth, which offers an imaginary incorporation of the Other into the U.S. culture. The film appears to offer a more liberal depiction of the Other, and to attempt to understand the Other by looking at the circumstances of his actions. The film now gives the Grinch a reason to hate Christmas and the Whos – apart from his abnormally small heart –, the Whos receive a portion of the blame, and they become responsible for the incorporation of this marginal character. However, the Grinch’s acculturation is a requisite for his integration into mainstream culture. The film’s attempt to understand the Other makes progress towards a more multicultural society; nevertheless, the multiculturalism it adheres to is a “celebratory” multiculturalism that simply gives insight into the life of the Other and “celebrates” diversity instead of “critical” multiculturalism, which tries to resolve the perpetuation of unequal social conditions (Palumbo-Liu 2; Chalmers 295; Sears and Hughes 136-7). In the film, the attempt to understand the Other does not contradict the need for the Other to undergo a cultural change in order to be an active member of the society, because the Grinch has to embrace the dominant culture’s traditions and celebrate Christmas before he can become one of the Whos.

Critical Multiculturalism vs. Pluralism

David Palumbo-Liu draws attention to a trend in academic curricula in mid-1990s to include ethnic literature following a general climate that celebrates “diversity” in the United States (1-2). Nevertheless, Palumbo-Liu warns that this inclusion of ethnic literature is only a superficial form of multiculturalism he defines as pluralism, and does not lead to a critical multiculturalism, i.e. to “a critique of the ideological apparatuses that distribute power and

resources unevenly among the different constituents of a multicultural society” (2). Palumbo-Liu argues that,

these discourses incorporate minority discourses into the general paradigm of liberal humanistic understanding, they erase the complex material specificities of these [ethnic] texts and vacate the term “multicultural” of its progressive intellectual, pedagogical, and social goals. (2)

Furthermore, the reading of ethnic literature generates a momentary “mystified” understanding of the Other, which instead of combatting hegemonic discourse, it strengthens it (Palumbo-Liu 12).

This superficial and temporary understanding of the Other can be witnessed outside of the study of literature, in society’s perception of multiculturalism which involves a frivolous celebration of “diversity” as opposed to a struggle for the subversion of hegemonic discourse. In my analysis, I argue that the 2000 film adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a product of the prevalent attitude of celebratory multiculturalism. Through the unveiling of the Grinch’s troubled past, the glimpses of his grim everyday life, and his unlikely yet tender friendship with young Cindy Lou, the film makes the viewer sympathize the Other. This approach and understanding of the Other, however, does not challenge dominant ideology but reinforces it, as the values and traditions of the dominant cultural group prevail and overwhelm the Other who becomes acculturated. In the end, the Grinch as a modern myth functions in the same way as in the earlier versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, i.e. it creates an imaginary acculturation of the Other and his incorporation into the dominant culture.

The Other Gets a History: The 2000 Film

Despite the 1966 TV special remaining the most iconic depiction of the Grinch that is still prevalent in today's popular culture, the most recent adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was for the big screen. *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was directed by Ron Howard and starring Jim Carrey. Even though the TV special's critical conception was mostly positive (Morgan and Morgan 191), the film received many negative reviews that heavily criticized the film's take on the Dr. Seuss classic (Cooper; Felperin; Goldberg; McCarthy; Stone). One of the reasons is that whereas the 1966 TV special vilified the Grinch, the 2000 film sheds light on the Grinch's sensitive side, and reveals that the Grinch had also been a victim before turning into a perpetrator.

The film heightens the difference in appearance between the Grinch and the Whos introduced in the 1966 TV special, but it prevents the Grinch from being entirely evil and the Whos from appearing overwhelmingly benign. This more realistic depiction of the characters' inner world contributes to the viewer's understanding of the Other. The Grinch thus becomes more approachable as he is no longer the mindless villain he was in the TV adaptation. However, his Otherness is still emphasized in the film, as the Grinch keeps the green color he acquired in the TV special. The Grinch is now presented as a big hairy monster with coarse green hair and yellow eyes,² while the Whos now look like humans save for their small noses and big teeth. The Grinch remains green but is overall less menacing. Furthermore, the Grinch's hatred of Christmas and his actions could be justifiable as they are the result of the Grinch's victimization by the Whos during his childhood.

² It is characteristic that Jim Carrey wore a hot and uncomfortable body suit for his role along with large and painful contact lenses.

The Whos, on the other hand, lose some of their overall benevolence, and become commercialized resembling the American middle class. The Whos now live in an area looking like American middle-class suburbs, and they engage in frantic holiday shopping and gift-giving.³ Less than the perfect, the Whos reveal their human side and display their negative traits as well. It seems that the film's focus is on critiquing commercialism more explicitly than the book and the TV special, as the film's opening scenes highlight the chaotic shopping spree that takes place every holiday season in Who-ville as well as the United States. Philip Nel writes that the film's critique of capitalism is in accord with Dr. Seuss' intention, "To be fair to the filmmakers, they do get the central message of Seuss's book," i.e. that Christmas "is more about community than capitalism" (132). The film's representation of the Whos as middle class consumers is not viewed in a positive manner by all critics; for example, Rand Richards Cooper criticizes this rendering of the Whos, "Apparently neither Howard nor his screenwriters saw that rewriting the Whos as rampaging materialists, far from deepening the fable's moral, would make hash of it. If the Whos have lost their way, how can they help the Grinch find his" (15). The Whos might not be perfect anymore, but they are definitely more human and they embody the average middle-class American.

The film, while attempting to explain the Grinch's inner world, at the same time depicts him as Other. In this way, while the film encourages an understanding of the Other, it still emphasizes his Otherness. The film, then, represents the Grinch in a more comical tone than the earlier versions; he is no longer pure evil. Despite being more approachable, the film depicts the Grinch's Otherness in new ways that were absent from the previous versions, i.e. the Grinch's representation as a terrorist, and as the hypersexualized Other. In the opening scenes, the Grinch

³ The beginning of the movie also has Cindy-Lou's mother, Betty Lou Who, in hot rollers competing with her neighbor for the biggest Christmas lights display.

is shown wearing a mask and a hooded robe and infiltrating the Whos' Christmas shopping. The Grinch plays pranks on the Whos and even gives a handsaw to two little girls. The Grinch's presence in Who-ville is funny as the film is made for a children's audience; however, there is an indication that the Grinch is a kind of terrorist – however comical – as he walks the streets of Who-ville in disguise causing havoc. Indeed, when the name of the Grinch is spoken, all activity in Who-ville comes to a terrified halt and there is even a car crash. The mayor then bans the Grinch's name from being uttered so that it won't spoil the Whos' Christmas preparations. The Grinch's mask found lying on the floor is a sign that the Grinch is present and the camera zooms into the mask with suspense. The viewer, however, soon realizes that the Grinch is not as evil as implied as he saves Cindy-Lou's life when she trips and falls into a machine that sorts out parcels in the post office.

The Grinch's Otherness in the film is also denoted by his hypermasculinity. This element along with the Grinch's love affair with Martha May is entirely new and it shows that the Other is constructed in different ways in different periods of time; while the Other is more approachable, he remains Other and cannot become the Self. In other words, the viewer can understand the Grinch by seeing his past, and identify with him to a degree but the Grinch is still marginalized and rendered Other. In *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch's now overtly animalistic nature⁴ is linked to a virility that is absent from the rest of the Whos. The Grinch's exaggerated masculinity is seen in Martha May's reaction to the green protagonist. When recalling the Grinch's childhood incident, during which the Grinch lifts the Christmas tree and tosses it on the floor, Martha May exhales "the muscles!" Furthermore, when the Grinch suddenly appears at the national Whobilation, the Whos' yearly celebration, there is a scene full

⁴ In the film version, the Grinch becomes more distinct from the Whos as he is the only one that has bodily hair, does not wear clothes, and possesses a more prominent snout, whereas the Whos are human-like.

of sexual connotations between the Grinch and Martha May that denote the Grinch's hypersexuality. The Grinch is launched onto Martha May's chest burying his face in her décolleté while she lets out a high-pitched scream and falls to the ground. The scene then shows the Grinch lying on top of Martha with his face on her bosom and Martha with her eyes and mouth opened in a shocked expression. After the Grinch gets off of her, Martha stays on the floor panting still having her mouth open and placing her hand on her chest. It is also implied that Martha May's feelings for the Grinch are to a degree forbidden due to the Grinch's nature and difference from the Whos. Martha is embarrassed by her feelings and tries to conceal them but she is betrayed by her facial expressions. When Cindy-Lou interviews her about the Grinch, Martha exclaims "Did I have a crush on the Grinch? Of course not," to which Cindy-Lou responds, "I didn't ask you that." Martha then stares at her and says "Oh! Right."

The film also addresses the Grinch's Otherness in the form of a joke. As the Grinch creates havoc at the Whobilation, he tries to catch a taxi. When the cab driver doesn't stop for him, he humorously exclaims, "It's because I'm green, isn't it?" Even though this is supposed to act as a joke, it shows that the Grinch is meant to represent the racialized Other. Most of the Whos have light skin with the exception of a few dark-skinned Whos, but they are united. It is the Grinch's different color that matters as it racializes him and constitutes him Other to the Whos. The Grinch then stands for the Other that becomes stratified due to his color difference, the Other who becomes racialized.

Cindy-Lou's depiction in the film also bares race-specific characteristics. Not unlike the 1966 TV special, the young Who is light-skinned and has blond hair and blue eyes, but she is now a child as opposed to a toddler. Her role is also much more significant as she takes interest in the Grinch and unveils his past. In the film, there is a parallel between Cindy-Lou and the

Grinch in their resistance to Christmas and commercialism; Philip Nel points that “the film has Cindy-Lou Who and the Grinch each undergo spiritual crises about the meaning of Christmas so that each may separately conclude that the holiday is more about community than capitalism” (132). Cindy-Lou now questions the commercialism that surrounds the holiday as well as the Whos attitude towards the Grinch; she not only wishes to know more about the green creature but also decides to help him come back to the community. It is mostly Cindy-Lou that allows the viewer to gain an understanding of the Grinch and to sympathize with him

The insertion of the Grinch’s motive into the plot is the major contribution to the film’s take on multiculturalism, as this key innovation makes the viewer sympathize with the Other and understand his viewpoint. Whereas both the book and the TV special assure us that “No one quite knows the reason. / It *could* be his head wasn’t screwed on just right. / It *could* be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight. / But I think that the most likely reason of all / May have been that his heart was two sizes too small” (n. pag. emphasis in the original), the film allows us a glimpse into the Grinch’s past. Cindy-Lou’s interviewees tell her that the Grinch had always been different ever since he was a baby, and it is indicated that he arrived in Who-ville by mistake as it was “a strange wind that blew that night” when baby Grinch was brought to Who-ville. The elderly sisters who brought up the Grinch tell Cindy-Lou that they “knew right away that he was special,” and a flashback shows the baby Grinch being offered a plate of Christmas cookies but biting off the Santa plate instead.⁵ The baby Grinch then utters “Santa—bye-bye,” which makes

⁵ The sisters tell Cindy-Lou that all Who babies arrive in baskets from the sky and into their families’ doors. However, it was a strange wind that brought the Grinch to Who-ville on Christmas Eve. The basket carrying the baby Grinch is shown to receive a sudden gust of wind and knock another basket out of its way. That other basket is supposedly carries the normal Who baby whose place the Grinch takes. The baby Grinch lets out a wicked giggle when his baskets bumps into the other one.

the sisters gasp. The viewer finds out that the Grinch always expressed a dislike for Christmas and Santa Claus, but he did not demonstrate any villainous behavior and overall tried to fit in.

The main episode that facilitates the viewer's empathy with the Other is revealed during the flashback into the Grinch's childhood. This episode is the most fundamental in making the Grinch a likable character and a victim. The flashback urges the viewer to identify with other and at the same time lays some of the responsibility on dominant society for discriminating against the Other. When the Grinch was a child at school, he develops a crush for Martha May – now the mayor's girlfriend and future fiancée – who appears to like him back. Around Christmastime, the Grinch's class exchange gifts, and the Grinch handcrafts an angel for Martha May. This signifies a crucial point in the Grinch's attitude towards Christmas as he appears to attempt to become part of the celebrations and gift-giving. Another important aspect of the Grinch's childhood is that he is bullied for his appearance. Unlike the human-like Whos, the Grinch is short, green, and hairy, and has an animal-like snout instead of the human nose the Who children have. Apparently jealous of the mutual liking between the Grinch and Martha May, Augustus Maywho, who later becomes mayor and proposes to Martha, makes fun of the Grinch's unusual appearance. Augustus cruelly points out the Grinch's difference from the other Who children; he rebukes him, "You don't have a chance with her [Martha]. You're eight years old and you have a beard!" As his classmates laugh, the Grinch becomes painfully aware of his appearance. After he is teased about the way he looks, the Grinch decides to shave his face to win over Martha, which only makes matters worse. The next day, the Grinch tries at no avail to hide his shaven face that is full of nicks and cuts; when he is revealed, his classmates and even his teacher cruelly laugh at him. Even though the Grinch appeared to give Christmas another chance by participating in the

gift-giving in order to express his love to Martha,⁶ after he is reprimanded by his classmates, the Grinch completely swears off Christmas and the Whos. The young Grinch tosses his gift for Martha at a pile of presents, yells “I hate Christmas,” and he picks up the Christmas tree and throws it on the floor. It appears that Martha May is the only one who sympathizes with the Grinch, and she cries as she picks up her now broken present from him. Martha tells Cindy-Lou that, “It was a horrible day when they were so cruel to him. I could hardly bear it.” The Grinch then proceeds to run away and he climbs up Mt. Crumpit while repeating “I hate Christmas!” After the story is told, the young Grinch is shown on top of Mt. Crumpit gazing bitterly at Who-ville and sobbing. The image of the young Grinch then fades out and is replaced with that of the adult Grinch still glaring at Who-ville and panting. While the Grinch is apparently recalling the memories of his childhood incident, the narrator grimly repeats the verses from the early version of the story, “So, whatever the reason, his heart or his shoes, he stood outside his cave, hating the Whos.”⁷ This scene indicates that the Grinch does indeed have a reason to hate the Whos and that it was the Whos who ostracized him.⁸

The significance of this addition to the narrative lies in the Other’s rejection by society itself. Whereas the original narratives present the Other entirely from the point of view of the Self, the movie allows a glimpse from the Other’s viewpoint. This addition mitigates the view of the Grinch as pure evil and it blurs the boundaries between Other and Self. The racialized Other still constitutes a threat for American culture but this time it is shown that the threat is created by the culture itself. The Other makes clear attempts to fit in and take up the culture’s traditions as it

⁶ The sisters tell Cindy-Lou that that year the Grinch “really got into the Christmas spirit for the first time.”

⁷ The lines are slightly changed; the original ones from the Dr. Seuss book read, “But, / Whatever the reason, / His heart or his shoes / He stood there on Christmas Eve, hating the Whos.”

⁸ In another scene, the Grinch is shown to voluntarily attempt to make his heart smaller. He holds a radiograph showing his small, withered heart, at the sight of which the Grinch happily exclaims, “Yes! Down a size and a half! And this time I’ll keep it off!”

is indicated by the Grinch handcrafting a gift for Martha, and even painfully tries to become assimilated as he shaves his facial hair. The Other's attempt to become part of society is expressed when the Grinch agrees to participate in Whobilation after Cindy-Lou invites him and nominates him for "the holiday Who-ville Cheermeister," an award given every year to the Who that excels in "Whodom and Whodery." The Grinch appears to fit in for a while; despite being slightly overwhelmed by the Whos' Christmas celebrations, he seems to overall enjoy himself. However, when the mayor of Who-ville gives him the cruel gift of an electric shaver, which causes everybody to laugh, he reminds the Grinch that he his difference from the Whos is ever-present; the Grinch cannot be fully accepted as he is. The shaver sparks painful memories which cause the Grinch to once again turn against the Whos, destroy their celebration, and burn down their Christmas tree. Nevertheless, this scene signifies that it is society itself that rejects the Other and racializes him.

Since this glimpse into the Grinch's history lays much of the blame on mainstream society, the amount of negative criticism it received is perhaps anticipated. Jonah Goldberg harshly criticizes the rationalization of the Grinch's actions,

But did we really need to know that the Grinch was the victim of a cruel childhood? Did we need a debunking of the 'myths' of Whovilleian virtue? Did the black-and-white story have to be smudged into shades of gray? Of course: That's what Hollywood does. Indeed, what better vehicle could there be for the exaltation of the individual, the fetishization of the victim, the deconstruction of the 'mainstream,' than a beloved family entertainment? (26)

Moreover, Goldberg relates the film with what he describes as a tendency in today's society to justify evil thus eradicating "real evil" (26). He is quick to undermine academic analysis of

“*fictional* villains” and adds “We’ve now seen witches and vampires equated with persecuted feminists, sexual minorities, and brave nonconformists” (27 emphasis in the original). Finally, Goldberg concludes, “If we overrationalize a tradition, it will lose the sentiment that sustains it” (27).

The importance of the Grinch’s narrative in popular culture and its function as an imaginary resolution of the real issue of cultural heterogeneity in the United States can be seen in the disturbance the addition of the Grinch’s motive causes. It appears that there is a need in the culture for an unquestionably evil Other is overtaken by the culture’s force and becomes acculturated.

Among the negative reviews the film received are Todd McCarthy’s and Leslie Felperin’s, who both criticize the decision to give the Grinch a motive, and Jay Stone calls it a “vulgarization of the original story,” even though he praises Jim Carrey’s acting (1D). Rand Richards Cooper comments that the knowledge of the Grinch’s past is superfluous, “In 1966 we didn’t need an hour of psychological exposition to explain why a miser hated Christmas. Back then it was enough to know that his heart was two sized too small” (15). Yet another negative review is written by John Larsen, who resists the innovations made in the film. Larsen contrasts the 2000 film to what he calls a “faithful short cartoon adaptation that was made in 1966” (49). Interestingly enough, the TV special also introduces a number of new features including a major change in the Grinch’s appearance who becomes green with yellow eyes for the first time. Furthermore, Larsen point out that “the only worthwhile moment is when star Jim Carrey, buried beneath amazing make-up, reenacts the character’s devilish grin” (49). It is true, however, that the Grinch first displayed “devilish grin” in the TV adaptation, whereas the book only allows the Grinch a naughty, self-satisfied smile. It appears, therefore, that it is not innovation that

displeases the viewer but rather the representation of the Grinch as victim rather than an evil villain. This tendency demonstrates the narrative's function as a modern myth in the U.S. The changes that were fitting to the Grinch's function as the racialized Other (green color, evilness) are accepted by the viewer as natural and appropriate, but those that put the blame on mainstream society and depict the Other as a victim are redundant.

Despite the changes in the Grinch's story and motives, the message of the film remains the same, i.e. the Other is at last incorporated into the culture. The film allows the Grinch to keep some of his individuality while following the traditions of the Whos and his external appearance does not change except for the smile that replaces his usual sulky expression. In fact, when Cindy-Lou kisses the Grinch on the cheek, he is scared that his facial hair would bother her but she says that his cheek feels warm. Moreover, the holiday feast takes place in the Grinch's cave instead of Who-ville, which suggests a bigger acceptance of the Other. Nevertheless, the narrative still functions in the same way: it shows the Other being acculturated even if it displays some concerns about the Other's identity. A resolution that would challenge dominant ideology would be if the Grinch still hated Christmas but was still able to live and function as a citizen of Who-ville. In the film, the Other might be understood to some degree but eventually the need of acculturation prevails. The final point of the film, then, is the necessity of creating a unified culture in the United States. In this way, while the film adaptation allows for an understanding of the Other, ultimately, it supports the hegemonic discourse that demands compliance with the dominant culture.

CHAPTER IV

EPILOGUE

The Issue of Multiple Versions of the Myth

It is true that the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* has undergone different adaptations, each contributing different elements to the story. As it is shown in the previous chapters, the 1966 animated TV special accentuates the Grinch's Otherness and demonizes him. The adaptation gives him a green color, depicts him as a monster, and emphasizes his wickedness; in this way, this version of the story illustrates the Other as a menace to mainstream society. On the other hand, the 2000 film mitigates the Grinch's acculturation and lays some of the blame on the culture that victimizes the Other, fact that caused a good deal of negative criticism. The question could be raised about the validity of each adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* in relation to the 1957 children's book. One claim could be that the original Grinch is found in the Dr. Seuss book and that the other versions are nothing but poor attempts to recreate the story. Another could be that the 1966 Grinch had the biggest effect on popular culture and is easily identifiable as the most iconic representation of the character; this is the one we mostly witness in popular culture and holiday merchandise. The issue of different versions of the same myth, however, is very common. In fact, this phenomenon can be observed with many modern myths but also with ancient myths.

Claude Lévi-Strauss in his famous study of myth draws attention to this issue that has troubled specialists in the past, i.e. the fact that older versions of the same myth include different

elements from later versions, for example, earlier versions of the Oedipus myth omit the key aspects of Jocasta committing suicide and Oedipus blinding himself (216). Lévi-Strauss responds to what he calls an obstacle “to the progress of mythological studies, namely the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one” by viewing myth in its totality (216 emphasizes in the original). He defines “the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such” (217). In the case of the *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, I have argued that the TV adaptation sees the Other and an imminent threat due to the social changes of the 1960s which challenged the dominant Anglo-American culture. On the other hand, the 2000 film’s victimization of the Grinch is perhaps an indication of the culture’s greater tolerance of Otherness and its attempt to approach and understand the Other, without however, subverting the hegemonic ideological apparatuses that marginalize the Other. The broader message of the Grinch as a myth, that is, the acculturation of the racialized Other remains unaltered in the different versions of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Furthermore, Claude Lévi-Strauss responds to the quest for originality by arguing that, “There is no single ‘true’ version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth” (218). It follows, then, that – despite its relative unpopularity and the severe criticism it received – the 2000 film version of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, is still a valid version of the myth and it expresses the needs of the time it was rendered, i.e. the more humane treatment of the Other that will lead to his acculturation. The fact that the core of the myth is not altered shows that the need for a homogenized society still exists in the United States. Ultimately, despite the changes and innovations the story undergoes, its function remains the same, i.e. presenting the illusion of a culturally uniform society.

The Cultural Impact of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

Paul Davis in his study of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* writes that the story "could be said to have two texts, the one that Dickens wrote in 1843 and the one that we collectively remember," and calls the second a "culture-text" (4). The same can be claimed about *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. *A Christmas Carol*, of course, has been adapted many more times than *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*; nevertheless, the Grinch has become an inseparable part of Christmas tradition in the United States and is as central to the holiday's popular culture as Santa Claus. Along with Ebenezer Scrooge, the Grinch has become a universal bad guy, synonymous with the hater of Christmas and everything that is fun and festive. Both characters' names have entered the English vocabulary, and just like "Scrooge" is used to refer to a miserly person, a "Grinch" is somebody who spoils everyone's good time in general, or Christmas celebration in particular. Often in Christmas movies or Christmas TV specials, a person who does not participate in the festivities and/or ruins everybody else's fun is quickly labeled "the Grinch."

The name of the Grinch, however, is not only used in association with the holiday. Perhaps by looking at the instances in which the word is used, we can come into conclusions about the significations the Grinch has in the popular mind. Philip Nel lists what he considers misappropriations of the Dr. Seuss character.¹ Nel comments that often in popular culture "the Grinch has lost his primary meaning as anti-materialist grouch, and has instead become a generic villain – albeit one who often steals something" (180). He observes that the use of the Grinch as the thief in political discourse was very popular in late 2000 and early 2001 which, of course, coincides with the time the film *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was released. One of

¹ By following Claude Lévi-Strauss' argument about the different versions of the myth, though, these uses of the *Grinch* are not misappropriations but part of the modern myth.

the examples Nel brings is the aftermath of the 2000 presidential elections, during which both Al Gore and George W. Bush were parodied in two different versions of the story, “How Al Gore Stole the Election,”² and “How the Grinch Stole the Election” with Bush portrayed as the Grinch (180). Nel points out that political parodies of the Grinch, such as the one of Republican politician Newt Gingrich portrayed as “the Gingrinch,” are “far from the cynical critic of consumerist morality invented by D. Seuss” (180). Nevertheless, these depictions of different politicians as the Grinch denote the function of the Grinch in popular culture as the threat to the U.S. The controversy of presidential elections over the objectiveness of the results that sparked the parody of the two politicians can be conceived as a threat to American democracy. Considering the importance of democracy in the United States as an ideal, the ambiguity over the counting of the votes puts US values in jeopardy. Therefore, just like the Grinch in the original story threatens American values by stealing Christmas, the politicians involved in the controversial election threaten American democracy and are thus illustrated as “Grinches.”

A key utilization of the Grinch in popular culture that validates the conception of the character as the Other in American culture took place after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Shortly after the attack, Rob Suggs, “a Christian humorist and educator,” portrayed Osama Bin Laden as the “Binch” (Nel 181). The lines of the parody are worth repeating,

Every U down in Uville liked the U.S. a lot,
But the Binch, who lived Far East of Uville, did not.
The Binch hated the U.S! the whole U.S. way!
Now don't ask me why, for nobody can say!

² This parody began, “Every voter / Down in Florida / Liked elections a lot // But Al Gore, / Who lived North of Florida / Did NOT” (qtd. in Nel 180).

It could be his turban was screwed on too tight.
Or the sun from the desert had beaten too bright....
The Binch stole some U airplanes in U morning hours,
And crashed them right into the Uville Twin Towers.... (qtd. in Nel 181-182)

Philip Nel reports that the author, Rob Suggs, sent the parody to some of his friends but soon “The Binch” was shared on the internet, heard on the radio, and printed in newspapers across the nation (181). While Suggs received some criticism for bigotry, the depiction of the par excellence Other, Osama Bin Laden, as the Grinch confirms that the Grinch embodies the racialized Other in the US culture. Nel comments that the rendition of Osama Bin Laden as the Grinch is the only one that “invoke[s] ethnic differences” (181). Nevertheless, I have argued in this thesis that the Grinch stands for the racialized Other in the original version of the story. The particular identity of that Other will be filled in by the needs of the time. Therefore, the Grinch becomes Osama Bin Laden in post-September 11 U.S., when the fear of the Arab Other climaxes. If the film adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* was created after September 11, 2001, then maybe it would have presented the Grinch in a very different way maintaining perhaps the 1966 TV special’s menacing illustration of the Other.

Concluding Thoughts

The Grinch as modern myth resolves an issue that the U.S. has wrestled with for centuries, the culture’s ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. In this thesis, I have argued that the representation of the Grinch in different times reflected the current dominant discourse on the U.S.’s Other. The U.S. today still battles with the notion of the Other, and the concept of the “melting pot” is still present today. Indeed, Stephan Thernstrom, in an essay published in 2004,

supports the idea of the melting pot, and argues, “the fact remains that, throughout our history, the vast majority of immigrants have been absorbed into the nation – and with impressive speed... the process of assimilation captured in the melting pot metaphor is still going strong” (47). Thernstrom adds that the melting pot does not need to be reinvented but rediscovered (47). The U.S.’s Others are still today the illegal immigrants that arrive in the States mostly from Mexico and Central America. The majority of the news media distill fear towards immigrants, and reinforce the idea of a homogenized, English-speaking “America.”

As I mentioned in Chapter I, Universal Studios have announced their plans to produce yet another adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* that is expected in 2017. If this new adaptation is indeed created, then its depiction of the Grinch will be in accord with the culture’s current attitude towards the Other. Considering that immigrants remain the U.S.’s racialized Others, then perhaps the new film will present a Grinch bearing some characteristics of an “illegal alien.” Or, perhaps, the culture has now reached the degree of critical multiculturalism, and the film will critique the ideological apparatuses that create Others in the dominant culture. Will the Grinch finally be allowed to hate Christmas, or is his acculturation truly unavoidable?

Finally, this thesis has shown how hegemonic discourse enters our daily life in ways that we are often unaware of. Like Roland Barthes showed in *Mythologies*, everyday life is composed of modern myths that are permeated with ideology that excludes members of society and reinforces hegemony. Analyzing *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and other myths we live by, and exposing the hidden ways dominant ideology enters our everyday discourse perhaps brings us closer to subverting it. Even though the story of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* will be retold for decades to come, maybe at some point, Whoville will embrace its green, Christmas-hating Others that won’t have to lose their individual characteristics to become Whos.

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