

## Modern and Medieval Languages, Clare College, 2016

"Language (...) is the parent, not the child, of thought." In this one characteristically Wildean witticism, the modernist genius perfectly captures why language is so important in human lives.

I have for a long period of time been fascinated by the ever-changing and wonderfully complex being that is language. The way that this unique tool, at once the product and the producer of human intellects of incredible scope, operates has never failed to impress me. From a young age I have been thrilled by its infinite delicacies, initially in my mother tongue, slowly shifting to English, and now, realizing a childhood aspiration, conquering what is inarguably one of the most sensuous and intricate languages of the world, la langue de Molière.

The plethora of things that perplex and enthrall me range from rather superficial, nonetheless beguiling aspects, to the discovery of language on much more profound levels. Great examples of the former are the interesting, if somewhat too generalising, deductions one can make about a people's nature based on its language. The predominance of verbal diction in French and English implies dynamism and vivacity of character, in contrast to the mainly nominal and thus a bit lacklustre Hungarian.

However, it is the latter occupation that best reveals the inconceivable complexity of language. The examination of dazzling pieces of French poetry has been enormously humbling as well as instructive in my adventures as a beginner linguist. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, this Bible of La Modernité, form, sound and content are united to construct the bases of a subversively new way of thinking. With poems like *Une Charogne*, Baudelaire verbalizes cardinal ideas of the modern period, demonstrating how the concept of beauty and the perception of all things have become thoroughly relativized due to a complete deconstruction of the human psyche. A bit less famous but alluring work, Huysmans's *À rebours*, displays the same ideas with a mastery of language notable enough to captivate none other than the brilliant playwright mentioned above.

My interest in the deeply contradictory yet vibrantly diverse world of Russian culture began by discovering a little of each aspect of it through various works of music and literature. The heartwrenching story of Pushkin's masterpiece *Eugene Onegin* was a milestone in the process of my initiation to this immense field. By nuancing the Byronian figure of the spleen-struck dandy with unmistakably Russian undertones, Pushkin created the revolutionary character of the superfluous man. Other duly world-famous chefs d'oeuvre, such as Dostoevsky's matchless *Crime and Punishment*, impressed me by showcasing with remarkable eloquence the most complex of emotions, all the while remaining comprehensible and relatable for a wide range of readers. Another extraordinary aspect is how the narrative clouds the fundamental principles of wicked and of righteous that civilised human society is based upon, forcing the audience to reconstruct their idea of these core moral notions. In both of these respects I could, funnily enough, associate it with certain characters in Victor Hugo's work - the figures of Javert in *Les Misérables* or Claude Frollo in *Notre Dame de Paris* are ideal examples of the indefinability of vice and virtue. It is, among many others, the exploration of these somewhat forced, yet apparent parallelisms that I am so enthusiastic about.

Like many modernists, I am also keen on the idea of music being the most perfect form of all arts; having played and mastered the seemingly humble recorder for almost a decade, this education sensitized me to musical aspects of poetry.

As Carl Sagan famously put it, "[w]e are a way for the cosmos to know itself." Regarding this as true takes the already key role of language to a whole another, even more important level, that of the

vast eternal mirror that all human knowledge is reflected in. And I have set it as my goal to get hold of this very instrument.