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Research Article

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## EXPLOITATION OF THE BORDER ISSUE IN GEORGE SAUNDERS'S *THE BRIEF AND FRIGHTENING REIGN OF PHIL*

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### ABSTRACT

*The border issue stands at the heart of American writer George Saunders's novella "Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil" (2005). In his political satire, Saunders shows the symbolic meanings of border and highlights its significance between ethnicities, nations, and states through creating a fantasy world populated by not-quite-human inhabitants who possess anthropomorphic characteristics. In his fable, Saunders deliberately draws an analogy between the functioning of a modern human world and that of the non-human creatures by focusing on the role of border, territory, self and group identity, and state. Saunders's novella primarily shows how the border issue is potential to be exploited by a populist racist political leader whose personal complexes and desire for power mostly control his actions and decisions. As we argue in this paper, by using the issue of border area, Phil quickly tumbles his nation into an ultra-nationalistic, authoritarian regime which mainly functions by its self-proclaimed leader's exploitation of the militia, the economy, the bureaucrats, and the media.*

**Key words:** *the border (conflict), extranationalism, authoritarianism, George Saunders, The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*

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## George Saunders'in *Phil'in Dehşet Verici Kısa Saltanatı* Adlı Kısa Romanında Sınır Konusunun Kötüye Kullanımı

### ÖZET

*Sınır meselesi, Amerikalı yazar George Saunders'ın "Phil'in Dehşet Verici Kısa Saltanatı" (2005) adlı romanının merkezinde duruyor. Siyasi hicvinde, Saunders, sınırın sembolik anlamlarını göstermenin yanı sıra sınırın farklı etnik kökenler, uluslar ve devletler arasındaki önemini vurgular. Saunders bu konuyu antropomorfik özelliklere sahip olan ama tam da insan olmayan sakinlerin yaşadığı bir fantezi dünyasını yaratarak yansıtır. Masasında, Saunders sınır, bölge, benlik ve grup kimliğiyle birlikte devletin rolüne odaklanarak modern bir insan dünyasının ve insan olmayan yaratıkların işleyişi arasında kasıtlı olarak bir analogi çizer. Saunders'ın romanı öncelikle sınır sorununun kişisel kompleksleri ve iktidar arzusu çoğunlukla eylemlerini ve kararlarını kontrol eden popülist ırkçı bir siyasi lider tarafından nasıl potansiyel olarak kullanılacağını gösteriyor. Bu makalemizde ana karakter olan Phil'in sınır bölgesi sorunlarını kullanarak ulusunu hızla aşırı milliyetçi ve otoriter bir rejime dönüştürdüğü tartışılmaktadır. Böylece kendini lider ilan eden Phil milisleri, ekonomiyi, bürokratları ve medyayı sömürmek suretiyle nasıl çalıştırdığı sorunu ele alınmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** sınır (çekişmesi), aşırı milliyetçilik, otoritecilik, George Saunders, *Phil'in Dehşet Verici Kısa Saltanatı*

### Introduction

The border is a political issue in our time. It is a symbol of stunning differences between races and nations. As a result of the ongoing conflicts across the borders around the world, many strict border policies are developed and pursued by different countries. In this regard, the contemporary American writer George Saunders's *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005) can be read as a story entirely dedicated to the significance of the border in our time. Saunders's

satiric novella shows how a border dispute and conflict can end in horrific mass crimes such as genocide<sup>1</sup>.

Since Saunders frames his story around the political aspect(s) of the border issue, his novella can be analysed as a political fiction. According to Irving Howe's argument in *Politics and the Novel* (1957), political novel has "dual mission ... to illuminate the shortcomings of the prevailing political order and to identify how best to transcend them" (Scheingold 8). Addressing the "shortcomings" of the border politics in contemporary time, Saunders's novella is an attempt to find a way out of the existing, unresolvable conflicts over the subjects such as immigration, nationalism, and violence in foreign policy.

Saunders is mainly known as an experienced writer of short fiction. He published many short stories and short story collections before his first and only novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017). According to Steve Gronert Ellerhoff and Philip Coleman, "In terms of his output as a short story writer alone, Saunders counts as one of the most significant and influential practitioners of the form in recent memory" (2017: vi). Saunders's (short) fiction is mostly about the moral, philosophical, and metaphysical issues. "George Saunders", in Ellerhoff's and Coleman's words, "writes with a strong sense of the moral agency of literature. His stories, without simply moralizing, often affirm certain moral positions that can be troublingly ambiguous. One thing Saunders is unambiguous about in his speaking engagements is the necessity for goodwill in people's relations with one another" (2017: vii). By focusing on the lack of "goodwill" in the central

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<sup>1</sup> In his exclusive short essay for Amazon.com, Saunders talks about the various referents for the represented duality, which is the "Greatest Common Denominator for tyrants", in his story: "I had in mind, at various times, Rwanda, Bosnia, the Holocaust and, ... Islamic fundamentalism, the war on terror, the invasion of Iraq, red states vs. blue states, Abu Ghraib, Shia vi. Sunni, as well as smaller, more localized examples of Us vs."

character Phil's "relations," Saunders in *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* explores the enormous potentials of human beings in provoking violence against each other.

Commenting on this novella in his short essay for Amazon.com, Saunders states that "the story came [to me] to be about the human tendency to continuously divide the world into dualities." By using black humour, Saunders portrays the way the border is potential to act as a dividing element and main source of conflict between two different identities. Political practices, as Saunders represents in his novella, can bring about a deadly violence through imposing highly subjective interpretations on the border. Through focusing on the symbolic functions of the border as a dividing line, Saunders unveils a morally corrupt political leader's destructive impact on both his own citizens and on the people of a neighbouring nation he tries to present as their dangerous enemy.

Critics mostly include Saunders's allegorical fable in his short fiction set of works since, rather than with the genre novel, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* has more in common with the form short story. Kirkus Reviews describes Saunders's novella a "speculative, experimental fiction, a mind-bending work inviting readers to ponder the nature of parable and the possibilities of language" (2005). The satirical aspect of the novella is also highlighted in the critical responses to it. For example, according to Clare Hayes-Brady, it "is a story marked by urgent anger, the satire deep, absurd and furious" (2017: 32).

*The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* is about two unequal countries, a very small nation called Inner Horner and a huge one named Outer Horner. The people of the two countries also look dissimilar because of their different living conditions, "the Inner Hornerites [were] frail and small, whereas the Outer Hornerites, with an entire huge country to roam around in, were stocky and hearty" (Saunders 2005: 11). This situation establishes the polarised political

climate in the storyworld and in the narrative structure. Not having enough space within their own country, the Inner Hornerites have to wait inside the Outer Horner country in a place named by Phil as Short Term Residency Zone. The Inner Horner “was so small only one Inner Hornerite at a time could fit inside, and the other six Inner Hornerites had to wait their turns to live in their own country while standing very timidly in the surrounding country of Outer Horner” (Saunders 2005: 1). While the Inner Hornerites expect to be given “a couple hundred extra square yards of that vast unlimited country [the Outer Horner]” (Saunders 2005: 2), the Outer Hornerites feel “very patriotic” of their “tremendous generosity” (Saunders 2005: 1) towards the Inner Hornerites. Reiterating itself in the central character Phil’s discourse, such a polarity builds up the increasingly uncompromising discourses between the two sides of the border, “So it went, year after year, with much mutual glowering and many murmured rude comments and the occasional angry word hissed across the border” (Saunders 2005: 3).

Inter-state borders and territories have always been a constant subject of conflict between races, ethnicities, identities, and states. The border, thus, has changed into a symbolic concept through history. Therefore, as Pablo Vila states, “today there is agreement that the border is real, but that it is also symbolic and metaphorical” (qtd. in Alvarez 2012: 542). The figurative aspect of the border turns it into a constantly changing reality and concept because, as Henk van Houtum points out, “A line is geometry, a border is interpretation. ... It is the symbolic meaning attributed to the appearance of the line which must be seen as constructor of the normative form. A border is made real through imagination ... In other words, a territorial border is the continuous production of a mask” (2012: 412). Accordingly, evaluating the centrality of the border issue in our time, Houtum asserts that “Borders are now typically no longer seen as given, fixed, linear or stable and are conceptualized instead in terms of a much more open perspective on territoriality” (2012: 407). Political or power system is

among the most effective factors in the (re)interpretation or remapping process of the border since, in van Houtum's words, it is "the socially constituent power practices attached to a border that construct a spatial effect and which give a demarcation in space its meaning and influence" (2012: 412). Therefore, as it is the central case in Saunders's novella, "A state border is represented mainly as a strategic and intentional force, as a locus and focus of control" (van Houtum 2012: 411).

"The word 'border'," in Alejandro Grimson's definition, "refers at one and the same time to very different processes and categories: a line appearing on a map, a concrete landmark or river, what separates legal systems and sovereignties, and the limit between identities and cultures." In addition, the function of the border, according to Grimson, is "determining sovereignty ... and acting as a dividing line between regimes of identity and meaning" (2012: 206). Grimson, however, highlights that the border "is never a fixed 'fact', but always remains unfinished and unstable. The border is an object that is constantly being contested and, as the historical outcome of human action, it is something that can be – and is – restructured and resignified over time" (2012: 195). From a socio-political perspective, Grimson identifies four constitutive elements for political borders, "the demarcation line itself and the territories it divides; the population settled on either side of it; the succession of different sociocultural regimes in the border area; and, finally, the different meanings the border acquires" (2012: 94-95).

The border is thus considered a determining cultural and socio-political factor in both disclosing and protecting the different identities on its opposite sides. "Borders and frontiers," according to Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, are "elements in the transforming dimensions of culture, politics, society and economics at every level of social and political complexity, experience and expression across the globe" (2012: 2). The border has even become more meaningful in the

age of (new) imperialism. In other words, ““In today’s ‘new imperialism’,” as James Anderson asserts, “state borders are becoming more complex, variable and differentiated in their permeabilities. Some borders are being weakened while others are strengthened” (2012: 139). Being presented as a political and imperialistic issue in Saunders’s novella, the metaphorical and symbolic potentials of the border provide the opportunity for its ruthless exploitation by an extranationalistic, authoritarian dictator.

### **Phil’s Polarised Mindset and His Subversive Border Discourse**

The storyline in *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* revolves around the titular character Phil’s thoughts and actions. In other words, the novella is firstly about the way Phil’s behaviour inflames the tensions between the two countries. Phil is introduced as “a middle-aged Outer Hornerite generally considered a slightly bitter nobody” (Saunders 2005: 6). Despite his humble beginnings, he immediately changes into the most outstanding and influential character both in the narrative and in the storyworld.

Phil’s appearance is concurrent with the Inner Hornerites’ collective detention. He relentlessly keeps them under his gaze by his words and actions as well as by his powerful, ubiquitous presence. As Leon, who is the Outer Horner Border Guard, tells the people of Inner Horner, ““He [Phil] wants me to keep a better eye on you people, because you’re so sneaky”” (19). Phil’s destructive presence in the narrative begins from the moment when “an affable old man” (Saunders 2005: 21), or the senile President of his country, appoints him as the President’s Special Border Activities Coordinator. Following that, Phil is presented as a totalitarian politician who behaves as a morally corrupt leader, a warmonger tyrant, an oppressor, an enemy of the people and of the (open) society, and a monster or a total personification of evil. He acts and rules based on his personal humiliating experiences,

particularly based on his feeling of inferiority complex that his father once had been “so embarrassed” because of “the humiliation of being publicly corrected in front of a bunch of smirking Inner Hornerites while his wife and child looked on” (Saunders 2005: 106). Besides that, he still feels humiliate that “Many years before, [he] had, from across the border, fallen in love [... and] captivated” (6) by an Inner Hornerite named Carol who “jilted” (8) him because of being “in love with Cal, an Inner Hornerite” (Saunders 2005: 7). During his life, Phil has felt an increasing sense of “bitterness” (Saunders 2005: 7) about this event. Thus, such personal motivations act as the underlying reasons for Phil’s insatiable desire for revenge, which gives him an illusion of betrayal, the illusion that whatever is not in his own favour should not be in the favour of *his* nation.

Phil is a jingoist. In his short essay on his novella, Saunders describes him as “the embodiment of our tendency to turn our enemies into objects, so that we can then guiltlessly destroy them. Happiness, in PhilWorld, consists of the total elimination of the contradictory, the nuanced, the too-complicated-to-decide-at-this-time.” Phil constantly pursues a personal agenda fuelled by his private motivations. His “meteoric rise,” as Clare Hayes-Brady states, “is precipitated not by a fundamental grievance, or a genuine desire to serve, but by a broken heart and a bitter soul” (27). Phil vehemently tries to persuade his fellow citizens to eliminate the Inner Hornerites. His political agenda acts as a coverage for his personal goals. As Clare Hayes-Brady points out, “Phil emerges as a dominant political force early in the story, giving voice to the discomfort and xenophobia of the Outer Hornerites,” (25-26). In other words, by using “an anti-immigration political agenda,” as Hayes-Brady says, Phil’s “language inflames the xenophobic fervor of the Outer Hornerites and devolves into civil war” (26). Under the effect of his restrictive ideology and provocative discourse, “the Outer Hornerites move from civilized apathy to outright

hostility with regard to their (importantly) less affluent neighbours” (Hayes-Brady 26).

*The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* begins by establishing the destructive opposing views of the people living across the two sides of the border. For example, when Elmer, the first Inner Hornerite who inevitably falls into the Outer Horner’s land, says that his country shrinks, Melvin, who is one of the three Outer Horner Militia, says ““Decent countries don’t shrink ... They either stay the same or get bigger”” (5). Calling him an invader, the three members of the Outer Horner Militia agree that they should send the *invaders* out of their country. Larry says, ““I say we expulse the invaders”” (5). According to the people of the Outer Horner, the Inner Hornerites are ““scrappy, stubborn ... Sneaky”” (6). Similarly, in Carol’s and Cal’s wedding party, the Inner Hornerites sing “sentimental songs about the enviable compactness of their country” (7). Phil is somehow thrown into such a diverging discourse.

Phil’s discourse of the border entails a horrific misuse of the democratic apparatuses such as legislation, (controlled and planned) election, (fake) referendum, and inept mass media. Phil’s highly subjective and subversive interpretation of the border manifests itself through his political discourse. In this regard, Phil’s border-bounded-discourse, which raises an acrimonious border dispute, can be analysed based on his mental workings. Phil has a polarised mindset. The uncompromising aspect of its duality functions based on racism and acts as a justification for Phil’s imperialistic greed, populist nationalism, exploitation of democracy and the democratic apparatuses, and finally as the main apology for his totalitarian dictatorship.

Reflecting the shared mental workings of his own people too, Phil’s discourse functions based on a fixed, uncompromising duality – a we/they (Inner/Outer) dichotomy fuelled by an ideology of racism. Phil is introduced into an unstructured dual discourse. His creativity is in

putting the already existing mentality under some categories. In other words, he gives names to some familiar ideas. Ironically, Phil's highly polarised mind is activated whenever his brain jumps off his head, "The bolt holding his brain in position on his tremendous sliding rack occasionally fell out, causing his brain to slide rapidly down his rack and smash into the ground" (9).

Phil's biased and patriotic mind shows itself publically when for the first time his brain jumps off his head giving him a "rush of confidence" (101). He first addresses his own countrymen:

*"I've been thinking about how God the Almighty gave us this beautiful sprawling land as a reward for how wonderful we are. We're big, we're energetic, we're generous ... If we have a National Virtue, it is that we are generous, if we have a National Defect, it is that we are too generous! Is it our fault that these little jerks have such a small crappy land? I think not! God Almighty gave them that small crappy land for reasons of His own. It is not my place to start cross-examining God Almighty, asking why He gave them such a small crappy land, my place is to simply enjoy and protect the big bountiful land God Almighty gave us!"* (9-10)

Under the effect of such a rousing speech, the public opinion finds Phil "so completely accurate" (10). In the highly charged atmosphere of his speech, Phil also addresses the people of the Inner Horner, "As for you Inner Hornerites! ... Please take heed: You are ... so very the opposite of us. Friends, take a look at these losers! If they are as good as us, why do they look so much worse than us? Look how they look! Do they look valorous and noble and huge like us, or do they look sad and weak and puny?" (10). Accordingly, Phil immediately changes from *nobody* to *somebody* in his society. For example, the night after his speech, Freeda develops "a bit of a crush on authoritative, gleaming, shouting Phil" (15) and she agrees with the entire content of Phil's speech by saying "Diligently collecting taxes to protect the security of our nation" (12). Thus, Phil's first public speech

establishes the basic destructive duality within the storyworld and paves the way for his authoritarian regime.

Regarding the increasing crisis of the Inner Hornerites' *invasion* of their "'beautiful country'" (9), Phil offers a practical suggestion, "'What you need to do,'" said someone, with great authority ... "is tax them"' (5). Phil's suggestion seems innovative, or as Larry says, a "'great idea'" (8) to the Outer Hornerites. As Phil suggests, they all agree to "'collect the taxes'" (11). Phil's racist discourse about the border acts as a justification for his imperialistic greed which shows itself in his exploitation of the taxing system. Following Phil's first public speech and under his guidance, motivation, and evocative discourse, the Outer Hornerites, represented by the militia, confiscate the entire property of the Inner Hornerites. When they say they do not have money to pay what Phil calls their *tax*, Phil reminds them of the Outer Hornerites' generosity by broadening the frames of the duality upon which he builds the superiority discourse of his own race:

*"What did you have in mind? Living in our beloved country for free forever? Do you know what we do? In our country? We work. We believe that time is money. Therefore, as time passes, in our land, we diligently work, which produces, guess what? Wealth. Money. Smolokas! You people! Knowing you owed us money, what did you do? You slept all night like babies! Dreaming, probably, of further taking us to the cleaners! So here you are, smolokaless, again owing your daily taxes."* (14)

Phil's humiliating discourse about the Inner Hornerites derives from his negative feeling and thoughts about them. When they say they do not have money to pay the desired tax, Phil asks Leon to take the list of all their properties. Then orders him to transfer the apple tree, the stream, and the dirt, which are the only available items in the small land of Inner Horner, into their own country. When Carol, an Inner Hornerite woman by whose love Phil was deeply captivated in the past, asks "'But what will we eat? ... What will we drink?'" (15) Phil's answer is

an indication of his one-track, apathetic mind, ““That’s not really my problem”” (17).

Phil grabs the power mainly because of the President’s inefficiency and incompetence. The Outer Horner’s President is “an affable old man with five white mustaches and seven ample bellies, who many years before, while a student, had spent a semester abroad in Inner Horner, or at least part of him had, and so the conventional wisdom was that he had a soft spot for Inner Horner and Inner Hornerites” (21). In his own words, the President is ““forgetful and shaky and cantankerous”” (26). He is ironically what, in addressing his mirror-faced Advisors, he denies to be, ““Are you saying I’m so old and fat and nostalgic that I’m becoming increasingly ineffectual and am always repeating myself in a state of perpetual confusion?”” (69-70) His poor memory destroys his consistency. However, to the people of Inner Horner, the President seems to be a “small but impressive man” (22-3). They think if they write a complaining letter about Phil to him, the President will solve their problem. Nonetheless, when he comes to the border after the Inner Hornerites’ letter of complaint, Phil easily deceives him by saying ““these people [the Inner Hornerites] are slandering me”” (27). Phil’s fabricated discourse fundamentally alters the President’s previously positive discourse about the people of Inner Horner. For example, now he finds them ““frivolous”” (28). Besides that, he terms whatever they say about Phil as ““accusations”” (28). When they tell him how Phil who took away their apple tree and stream, Phil again persuades the President by inventing a false memory for him, ““I did take the stream and the tree, but I was only attempting to enforce your decree”” (29). Despite the fact that the President does not remember such an order, ““Tell me, which decree were you enforcing? Was it a good decree?”” Phil persuades him by his own high self-reliance, ““The Short-Term Residency Zone Tax Decree ... A very good decree”” (29). By doing so, Phil also sheds light on the President’s

Advisors. When the President asks one of his advisors, the mirror-faced Adviser, about such a decree, the advisor gives an ambivalent response:

*“Well, sir, it depends ... What we need to ask ourselves is, what, in general, has been the reaction to this Tax? Have the people been in favor of the Tax? If so, then it is my recollection that you did indeed make such a decree. On the other hand, if the people have been unhappy with this Tax, then I very clearly remember you pounding the table, denouncing someone for even suggesting that you make such a lamebrained decree.”* (29)

Accordingly, the advisor suggests a referendum to find out whether the President gave the Short-Term Residency Zone Tax Decree or not, ““we must, to honor our democracy, go to the people, in order to determine just what it is you decreed”” (29-31). The advisor aligns his response to the President’s question with the result of the planned and controlled referendum. He even invents a story to prove that the President himself did give the decree once upon a time, ““You know, sir, in light of that vote, I just remembered something ... You did indeed decree that. It was a Thursday. You decreed the Short Term Residency Zone Tax, and I remember I congratulated you, and then you thanked me for helping you come up with that decree. For sort of laying the conceptual groundwork”” (31). Phil takes the opportunity of this scene and thanks the President “to have been appointed”” by the President as his ““Special Border Activities Coordinator?”” (32) Since the impractical and forgetful President does not remember such an appointment, he again asks his inept advisors about it. They suggest him another referendum in this case. The indifferent and unquestioning people of the Outer Horner “were unanimously pleased with the idea of Phil being Special Border Activities Coordinator.” To support such an outcome, the advisors invent another story, ““so it was determined, by the President’s Advisors, that the President had, in fact, several months ago, appointed Phil to that post”” (32).

Following the two referendums, the President changes his discourse about the Inner Hornerites completely, ““Now as for you people, ... I suggest that, in the future, you refrain from all frivolity and false accusations and obey Phil, who has already done so much for you, and will, I’m sure, continue to do so much for you, including, perhaps, someday, if you remain nonfrivolous, obtaining some replacement trees and a replacement stream, to replace those you so frivolously lost”” (33). The President disdains the people of the Inner Horner and, in doing so, paves the way for Phil’s authoritarian dictatorship. In other words, Phil easily plants his own thoughts in the impaired mind of his country’s so-called President who turns out to pay baseless contributes to him, ““thank you, Phil, ... For doing such a tremendous job of enforcing my decrees and calling me out here to see what a tremendous job of enforcing my decrees you’ve been doing. It does me good to see a young man enforcing my decrees. Sort of a protégé!”” (33)

The President’s brief visit to the border and his unconscious act of giving the power to Phil is represented as the turning point in Phil’s political life. The three militia members and the Border Guard imitate Phil’s discourse voluntarily. The next morning after the President’s visit, they go to the border to collect the tax. Suddenly, when “the big pile of Inner Hornerites [involuntarily] came tumbling down into Outer Horner” (37), they all become shocked. Phil’s conspiratorial mind interprets this event as an aspect of the Inner Hornerites’ malevolency, ““This is an outrage! ... Halt! Advance no farther! Invade us no more! Do you surrender? Surrender at once! Drop your weapons! Does everyone see how forceful I’m being? As Special Border Activities Coordinator, I command you!”” (37) The narrator immediately disqualifies the credibility of Phil’s accusations, “The Inner Hornerites had no weapons, and no desire to invade Outer Horner, and were still dizzy from their fall” (37). This incident, however, creates a new excuse for Phil to advance his oppressive plan. Having led the people of the Inner Horner to the Short-Term Residency Zone, he asks Larry, one of

the militia, to collect the tax. When Larry says that they have no property other than their clothes, Phil pays contribute to him by saying ““Well done, Larry ... An excellent observation. Clothes are indeed a resource”” (38). Thus, under Phil’s order and control, Leon begins collecting the tax for the third time. He directly goes to an old man named Cal who is ““very sensitive about his scar”” (39). Cal’s resistance leads to an “outburst of violence” (40) and Leon returns into the Outer Horner without collecting the taxes. Phil grows angry at this situation and, as it is his usual way, his brain slides down his rack and rolls across the ground. This brings about his usual patriotic misinterpretation of the situation and of the Inner Hornerites:

*“Your disgraceful attitude ... being the result of centuries of taking our people for granted, habitually manifests itself in arrogance, an arrogance that has as its seed the apparent belief that we are less than you and must be subjugated. But we will not be subjugated! We are a noble people, of ancient lineage, and have a right to live and thrive, whereas you, who would take away our right to live and thrive, I’m not sure about you, I’m not sure that you have not, over the long years of taking advantage of our simple generous nature, forfeited certain rights having to do with your continued existence!”* (40-41)

Phil’s dichotic discourse in such situations increasingly, and in a senseless way, becomes polarised. As Larry, his classmate from high school says, ““the longer Phil’s brain stayed off, the less sense he would make”” (41). Thus, when Larry suggests him to ““remount”” his brain, Phil again becomes angry, ““This is not about my brain! ... It’s these idiots who’ve got the brain problem. They owe us taxes! And have refused via violence to pay those taxes!”” (41-42). Phil even devises a set of opposing names for the day—““In light of the heinous events of this outrageous day, which shall henceforth be known as Dark Dark Thursday, but also in light of the valor we Outer Hornerites have shown on this memorable and historic day, which will henceforth also be known as Amazing Heroic Thursday”” (42). He even justifies their failure in collecting the tax under the generosity of the Outer

Hornerites, ““I hereby declare a Federal Tax Mercifulness Occasion. An FTMO. Yes, an FTMO of celebration. That’s it. And I declare this FTMO not out of fear, not at all, but out of pride, pride in our strength! Let us return to the capital on this joyous FTMO, to celebrate our astonishing victory!”” (42) However, Phil becomes obsessed with this event since his mind is closed to any resistance and negation. He feels humiliated as he thinks that the people of Inner Horner “dared openly mock the authority of the President’s Special Border Activities Coordinator” (43). In this way, his sense of desire for revenge controls his thoughts, “Those stupid Inner Hornerites! How he hated them!” He even imagines a time when the people of Inner Horner are extinct and in their place he founded a museum of Outer Horner Culture with “a statue of him” (43) standing in front of it. Such an imagined future becomes Phil’s private agenda fundamentally affecting both his own future and the future of the Inner Hornerites. Phil employs two “enormous muscular young men” (44) and becomes determined to advance his own goals by his private militia. Phil’s answer to the question asked by the two men regarding what they would do for him, shows the destructive aspect of his secret plan cross the border, ““You’d be sort of like special friends of mine. Like bodyguards. You’d just do whatever I told you. Out at the Inner Horner border. I do a lot of work out at the Border, national security work”” (47).

By the help of the two giant “obedient” (50) Special Friends, who just need Phil’s compliments, Phil enters into the practical phase of his dictatorship. They accompany him to the border area to collect the tax. Since the people of Inner Horner do not have any resources other than their cloths, the bodyguards take all their clothes away, leaving “the Inner Hornerites, totally naked” (55). Indifferent to their situation, Phil is satisfied that the taxes of the last two days are paid. The next day in the early morning, Phil again visits the border to collect the tax of the day –four smolokas – knowing the fact that the Inner Hornerites do have nothing, ““You people owe us four smolokas. There’s a law, you

know the law, yet you insist on defying the law. I am really at a loss here”” (58). With his people in the border, Phil discusses the possible way(s) he can make the people of the Inner Horner to pay their daily taxes. They talk about selling the tickets to people watching them naked. Rejecting this idea, Phil gives his most egoistic proposal. His vindictive mind has never forgotten the humiliating feeling of being rejected by an Inner Hornerite—Carol. Seeing her beautiful body naked, Phil proposes to be given her in place of the day’s tax, ““Look, here’s an idea ... I don’t think it’s any big secret that I’ve always had a thing for Carol. How about you people give me Carol, for my wife or whatever, and I give you, not just four smolokas, but *twelve* smolokas? That’s enough for three days’ taxes. What do you say? That sounds fair, doesn’t it?”” (60) This scene is an obvious indication of Phil’s self-centeredness. He usurps power primarily for his own interests. His proposal outrages Carol’s husband Cal who “threw himself at Phil so savagely” that “Phil’s gasket cover flew off and his brain came sliding off his rack” (60). This causes Phil’s patriotic and increasingly violent speech about the Inner and Outer Horner dichotomy. He even fabricates a history in this case to deliberately incite his own people to violence. Having called Cal an “aggressor,” he proposes a referendum, ““I don’t dare undertake such a huge momentous decision on my own, since we are a democracy, so I suggest we take an urgent vote. Let us vote urgently: Do we or do we not enact my momentous decision?”” (61) By abusing democratic tools for his own benefit, Phil orders to ““disassemble”” Cal and he does not tolerate any opposition in this case. When Melvin challenges Phil’s ““momentous decision””, he indirectly accuses him of disobeying his command, ““Do you really want to quarrel with your leader at a time like this, Melvin?”” said Phil. “Is this really the time for naysaying? Do we or do we not enact my momentous decision, namely, to disassemble this aggressor?”” (61-62) Having seen the bewilderment of his own people and the fact that Cal, in Phil’s words, is still ““advocating violence””, he insists on his

destructive plan, ““May I please have a vote? ... Do we or do we not disassemble this aggressor, for the good of the nation, in the interest of preventing further violence?”” (62) Finally, ““the citizens of Outer Horner, casting nervous sideways glances at one another, unanimously voted to support Phil in his decision to disassemble Cal, for the good of the nation, in the interest of preventing further violence”” (62-3). Thrilled by this outcome, Phil orders the Special Friends to ““Kindly enact the will of the nation!”” (63) Having seen that no Inner Hornerite listened to Curtis’s call for “resisting” (56), he boldly advances his plan.

Phil justifies his dual discourse by fabricating a continuous populist national security concern. He misuses the uncritical people’s blind nationalistic feelings merely for the sake of his untruly constructed urgent issue of national security. Phil pretends to do whatever he does, ““in the interest of national security”” (64). In this way, he successfully takes the first step in fulfilling his awful dream about the Inner Hornerites. By saying that ““A nation’s most important asset is its people”” (63), he suggests to have them pay their taxes by their lives. In other words, the national security provides him a publically believable excuse to eliminate the Inner Horner race.

Disassembling Cal affects Freeda deeply. She wrestles with her conscience all night long and finally in a letter to the President she asks him to immediately “do something”, “Is *this what we stand for here in Outer Horner? I hope not. Our country is big, let us be big. Phil is out of control, sir, and must be stopped. Please do something*” (emphasis original, 68). When Phil comes to the presidential palace, the President’s advisors betray him at the beginning by whispering the ““problems”” (71) about the President to Phil’s ears. The mirror-faced Advisor arouses Phil’s suspicion more directly, ““I encourage you to think and say whatever you like, once you leave here, bearing in mind, please, that a weak, infirm, half-crazed President would not at all be the worst thing that could happen to a country that finds itself threatened by

a hostile bordering power”” (72). Before meeting the President, this experience emboldens Phil to do what he has been desiring for a long time—to grab the total power in his own country by removing the legal President from his office.

Since the President suffers from dementia, he does not remember why he called Phil to his palace. When he asks Phil, ““do you remember why I called you here?”” Phil easily plants a false memory in the President’s mind by fabricating a story about the disassembling event:

*You called me here for a report on the situation at the border. And I’m happy to report that I was recently able to gracefully quell a disturbing outbreak of violence at the border by enacting certain physical rearrangements designed to prevent further outbreaks of violence, thus rendering the instigator of the violence incapable of instigating further violence, via separating the instigator’s component parts and relocating them in discrete physical locations. (75)*

The President’s vulnerable situation provides the desired opportunity for Phil to enact what for a long time he longed for, and justify it under the name of national security, “Phil had a sick feeling but also an excited feeling. This was his President? This man was running his beloved Outer Horner? If Inner Horner mounted a full-scale invasion, this was the man who’d be leading the fight? He’d had the vague sense, out at the Border, that the President was not quite as sharp, perhaps, as himself, Phil, but now it was suddenly obvious that he, Phil, was his floundering nation’s only hope” (76). Thus, he orders his Special Friends to lift the presidential palace and move it to his own apartment. In other words, by a close cooperation with the bureaucrats in the palace, he removes the President from power by his own special force.

The Advisors forge everything in Phil’s favour. Their behaviour quickly changes by the changes brought about by Phil. For example, the President immediately changes into Mr. Former President in their

discourse. By their tacit cooperation and contribution, Phil easily destroys the fundamentals of an established political system through inventing a new socio-political tradition. The Advisors proudly stand by the new symbol of power by humiliating the former President. For example, the mirror-faced Advisor says: ““I feel it was somewhat injurious for me, in the prime of my career, to have been serving you, someone growing increasingly weak, when I could’ve been serving someone strong and getting stronger. Strength is, sir, and I expect always will be, a lure for the ambitious and clever. Phil here has, sir, I think you must admit, a great deal of strength. He is not only strong, but getting stronger, I think you must agree”” (82-3). However, despite their betrayal and his own ineffectiveness, the President is the only person in the Outer Horner society that rightly understands the true nature of Phil’s character. Calling him ““a real go-getter”” (80) and ironically admiring Phil’s high speed of action, he warns the Advisors about him: ““I’m not so sure about this Phil fellow. Careful, Al. This Phil, he’s a little frightening. He gets things done, yes, but—”” (83).

Phil’s Inaugural Party is represented as the climax of the Outer Hornerites’ nationalistic feeling, “The Outer Hornerites, deeply proud to be Outer Hornerites” (85). When Phil begins delivering his Inauguration speech, his brain drops into a bowl of chips and, as usual, he gives a conflicting, though extranationalistic, speech. Phil’s speech includes two sets of dichotomy—the dichotomy of the Outer Hornerites and the Inner Hornerites and the dichotomy of the New and the Former Presidents. Highlighting *we* in his speech, on the one hand, he tries to arouse the Outer Hornerites’ sense of patriotism. On the other hand, he attempts to portray the people of Inner Horner as their arch enemy by channelling the Outer Hornerites’ aggression towards them. Thus, he seeks to give the impression that he is the only President who can repel the imminent danger to their existence. He does so through comparing himself to the Former President:

*I have just been saying, namely, that our ancient noble stock has, over many centuries of right living, evolved into the highest and most advanced nation there is, a nation that has, after many years of misrule by that chubby old guy, finally gotten the leader it deserves! That chubby old guy, in addition to being criminally forgetful, was recklessly flagrant. Knowing these Inner Hornerites were prone to unmotivated spasms of violence, he daily proclaimed, via that pathetic mere string of a border: Come in, invade us, feel free to commit your unmotivated violence spasms all over our sleeping innocent babies, while I obsess about my bellies and mustaches. Well, I am not flagrant or forgetful, I have one belly and no mustache, and my only obsession is the safety of my people, which is why I hereby proclaim, as my first Presidential Act, my innovative Border Area Improvement Initiative! (87-88)*

Having prepared the situation by his flattering words, Phil proposes a referendum about his new Border Act by asking people to “sign” for him a “Certificate of Total Approval” (88). This Act is potential to change Phil into a totalitarian, oppressive dictator. Everybody signs it with “eyes closed” (89) although Phil still complains about the way Freeda signed it, “Too bad you didn’t sign it with your eyes closed while facing away from it” (89).

As do the militia, the Special Friends and the Advisors, the media’s ineffectiveness paves the way for the emergence of Phil’s totalitarianism regime. Having his Border Area Improvement Initiative been totally approved at the end of his referendum, Phil suddenly sees “three handsome wellgroomed squat little men with detachable megaphones growing out of their clavicles” (90). When he finds out that they are the little media men, he invites them to the border area to report the way he will implement *the will of the people* against, in Phil’s words, “a violent, irrational people [or the people of the Inner Horner] who really hate” (92) the Inner Hornerites. Calling the media men “skilful truth-tellers” (92), Phil is certain that they will encourage “the nation in its critical hour of destiny” (93). In other words, Phil is clever enough to understand the significance of the media in influencing

the public opinion. As he has already arranged the army, the bureaucrats, and the people close to power, he arranges the media so that he can have a total control on what he is going to do at the border. Phil even promises a financial support for the media men, ““I’d be happy to pay your expenses and a small stipend”” (93). Comparing him to the Former President, “The little media men were amazed and gratified that this new President possessed such a nuanced understanding of the vital role of the media, unlike the old President, who used to claim that their attempts to keep the nation informed made his bursitis worse and shattered the Presidential Cups in the Presidential Cupboard” (93). Therefore, they persuade public mind by spreading Phil’s discourse. For example, after talking to Phil for the first time, they announce such headlines: ““NEW PRESIDENT VOWS TO ELIMINATE BORDER THREAT!” shouted the first little man. “NEW PREZ TO NATION: YOU SHALL KNOW PEACE!” shouted the second”” (emphasis original, 93). It is through their loud voices, which reach “across the farthest reaches of Outer Horner” (94), that the people of Greater Keller learn about Phil, the new President of the Outer Horner.

Greater Keller is a very small neighbouring country, “it was almost nonexistent, it was rarely visited much less invaded, and was therefore very prosperous” (95). The Greater Kellerites live happily. When they learn that the President in the Outer Horner has changed, they decide to invite the new President to visit their country as they did invite the first president. On the day when one of the citizens of Greater Keller named Dale brings the letter of invitation to the President of the Outer Horner, Phil is in the border area with all his people and the media men to implement his disastrous Border Area Improvement Initiative.

Phil’s most urgent agenda after appointing himself as the President of the Outer Horner is to solve what he refers to as the Inner

Horner problem. He goes to the border with his Special Friends, To increase his own confidence, he tries to slid off his brain and having failed to do so, because he does not find it in his rack, he goes into panic. Being hopelessly confused, Phil orders his Special friends to “implement” (101) the First Phase of his Three-Phase-Plan. He uses euphemism calling Phase I as Peace-Encouraging Enclosure, which simply means to put the Inner Hornerites in a an open air jail. When the people of Inner Horner complain about it, Phil says, “How typical of the Inner Horner mindset! ... To be unable to distinguish a jail from a Peace Encouraging Enclosure. Safe inside the Peace Encouraging Enclosure, you will be protected from your innate violent tendencies, and we will be protected from you. It is a real win/win” (102). Then, Phil orders the Special friends to implement Phase II of his plan, to return to itself all Inner Horner resources—soil, shovels, an apple tree, barrels of water, and what looked like an aquarium. They are the properties Phil took away from the Inner Hornerites’ in place of their taxes. The purpose of Phase II is to make the land of Inner Horner a beautiful place because it will be annexed to the Outer Horner country after implementing Phase III, or as Phil says, “At last we are reclaiming our ancient ancestral land, and we want it to look nice!” (104)

Concurrent with the implementing moment of Phil’s Initiative Phases, the flattering media launches reports about the new President’s *success* at the border by giving a heroic picture of him

*PREZ TRANSFORMS VIOLENT MUDDY HOLE INTO PASTORAL PARADISE!”* shouted the first little man.

*“PEACE ACHIEVED AT PROBLEMATIC BORDER AREA!”* shouted the second.

*“VISIONARY LEADER DAZZLES NATION WITH DECISIVE GREATNESS!”* shouted the third. (emphasis original, 104-105)

The media’s acclamation and untruthful exaggeration evokes Phil’s memory. He remembers his difficult childhood life both before his father’s leaving home and after it, “He remembered his pathetic

childhood home, the family crammed into the little kitchen, his father sitting in the sink so his mother could open the refrigerator” (105). He also remembers how before leaving home his father was once humiliated by an Inner Hornerite Border Guard named Smitty, “a humourless jerk with pronounced Inner Horner tendencies, who’d asked Dad to stop, since, strictly speaking, harassing Inner Hornerites was illegal” (105-106). Under the effect of his vivid memory, Phil experiences a belated sympathy with his father, ““The look on poor Dad’s face! He’d been so embarrassed. Phil felt certain that the humiliation of being publicly corrected in front of a bunch of smirking Inner Hornerites while his wife and child looked on had pushed Dad over the edge” (106). This memory empowers Phil before enacting Phase III. Remembering his father’s hateful thought about the Inner Hornerites, “Dad had always said Inner Hornerites were the dirt of the world,” Phil becomes determined to seek an act of revenge on the Inner Hornerites, “now the world was about to be cleansed of dirt, once and for all, by him, by Phil!” (106)

Phil’s memory of his childhood experience encourages him to share with the people what he has been thinking from the very beginning moment of rising to power, “My people! ... As long as they are existent, they seem to keep rising up against us! Therefore, for us to be at total peace, they must be totally gone! Gone gone gone! Let us now create permanent peace, while simultaneously demonstrating good fiscal sense, by collecting the taxes in advance for the next five days, via collecting all their national assets at once, right now!” (106) When Freeda and Melvin ask about Phil’s exact intention, he tries to persuade them by highlighting the conflicting duality between the two nations, ““Are we not us? ... Are they not them? Us being us, do we not, being fully good, have the right to end what, totally bad, threatens us, even in the slightest? Would it not be negligent to do otherwise?”” (107) Not being persuaded by Phil’s words, when Freeda implies her disagreement with him by saying ““I’m not sure about this [eliminating

the whole people of the Inner Hornerite]”, Phil’s answer shows the degree he as a political leader is potential to misuse the democratic tools, ““You’re not *sure* about this? ... Freeda? Did you sign your Certificate of Total Approval? I believe you did”” (108). Under the pretext of what he refers to as ““critical national destiny”” (109), he accuses her, and the other potential ones, of disloyalty. Then, by arguing that ““I simply can’t have someone Disloyal around me, contaminating my nation”” (108), he orders his Special Friends to disassemble Freeda. Phil even threatens Melvin, ““Don’t make me invoke Paragraph H, Nipping Probable Disloyalty in the Bud” (108). Having heard this, Melvin reiterates that he is ““totally fine”” (109) with what Phil thinks about Freeda. By disassembling Freeda as a *traitor*, Phil hopes to give a lesson to all, ““A lesson that the disgusting traits that make those Inner Hornerites so disgusting, such as Disloyalty, such as undermining one’s leaders via constant questioning, can even take root in us Outer Hornerites”” (110). Furthermore, he asks the Special Friends to display Freeda’s parts to people so that her destiny might be ““educational”” to them by reminding them to be ““vigilant”” (110).

Having repelled the internal turmoil in a harsh way, Phil orders his men to finalize his plan by implementing Phase III. Since he feels “spasming sensational” (111) in his head, which is now without the brain inside, he tries to complete his plan as soon as possible before going home and remounting his brain. He orders his men to disassemble Old Gus first. Then, when he asks them to disassemble Curtis, Dale, the Greater Keller messenger enters into the horrific scene. Looking “weird”” to the people of Inner and Outer Horner, compared to them, the Greater Kellerites “had no mechanical or botanical parts, and were tall and ... huge: approximately three times the height of the Special Friends, with significantly less body fat” (113). Having seen what was going on in the Border Area, Dale leaves the place immediately towards his home and in his report, gives the horrific news to the President and

people of his own country. They immediately decide to send their Expeditionary Force to the Border Area.

The arrival time of the Greater Keller Expeditionary Force is coincident with the final step of Phil's Phase III plan. As he asks his Special Friends to disassemble *all* of the Inner Hornerites who, according to Phil, "'are only evil, which must be dealt with harsh, before it spread!'" (117) the Expeditionary Force of the nation Greater Keller arrives. Having seen their huge size, the Special Friends flee away. The media reports these events live. Phil feels disappointed when he sees such a change of fate. He wants to encourage his people to fight against the *invaders*. He still wants to completely actualize his dream, "It could not end this way, it could not end in any way but total triumph redemption of his dream of upward conquest, thereby him, Phil, in gold chair, and all the lessers, lying stretched out at his trenchant feet, citing his blessed nameplate" (119). However, without having his brain, Phil cannot deliver a heroic speech to his people as he cannot talk meaningfully. Then, suddenly he dies, "Then the weight of his brainless rack proved too much, and he slumped over, snagging his rack in the barbed wire of the Peace-Encouraging Enclosure" (120). When the Greater Keller National Force is leaving the Border Area, President Rich gives an emotional and ideal advice to all Hornerites, "'Our advice, to all of you people, is Enjoy! ... Life is full of beauty. Why fight? Why hate? Learn to Enjoy, and you will have no need to fight, and no desire to! Love life, walk in a circle, learn to enjoy coffee! Will you do that? Will you promise to try that?'" (120-121) The Greater Keller National Force's heroic action and their President's advice are counterfactual and implausible aspects in narrative. They are, however, one of the significant political aspects in Saunders's novella since, as Howe argues, "the authentic political novel is constituted by its account of heroic action on behalf of ideals that are forever out of reach" (Scheingold 10).

With the unexpected and natural elimination of Phil, as the only source and cause of terror in the Border Area and within the story world, all his followers change fundamentally. For example, Larry admits that ““Mistakes were made,” and Leon acknowledges that “Excesses were committed” (120). Similarly, the hypocrite Advisors’ discourse fundamentally changes. They fabricate a story to prove themselves innocent:

*“I told Phil this would happen,” said the mirror-faced Advisor.*

*“So did I,” said the smiley Advisor.*

*“I said to him, Phil, honestly, who do you think you are, let’s not get too big for our britches,” said the mirror-faced Advisor.*

*“I think we all said that,” said the mere mouth. (121)*

In a similar manner to the militia and the Advisors, the media men also change their discourse after Phil. They put the blame on the others. As one of them says, ““WHY DID NATION IGNORE REPEATED WARNINGS BY MEDIA?”” (emphasis original, 122) Thus, Phil’s overt and tacit supporters immediately change their discourses against him.

Phil’s death also emboldens people of the Inner Horner. They carry out a frenzied attack on the people of Outer Horner in a way that they put the nation “on the brink of extinction” (123). In other words, in a similar way to the militia, the Advisors, and the media men, the people of Inner Horner do not learn any lesson from their traumatic past life. Pursing retaliation, they just repeat what the Outer Hornerites did against them. In other words, they help the destructive violence over the border continue in the Horner land. Thus, the border-bounded regional conflict seems to be unresolvable as far as the Inner and Outer Hornerites mentality does exist. Saunders solves his problem by using an ancient literary technique called *Deus ex machina*, or a god from the machine who decides the final outcome. Two massive hands appear from the sky and disassemble the entire people of Outer and Inner Horners and, by using their parts, they “rapidly constructed fifteen

entirely new little people” (126). They do not use Phil’s parts. They throw his head into the stream and mount his body on a platform beneath which they mount a plaque reading ““PHIL, ... MONSTER”” (126). The purpose of the new creation, as the Creator says to the New Hornerites, is to be “kind to one another” (127). In a reconstructed world like the *ideal* world of New Horner, people like Phil do not, and cannot, have a place, “the New Hornerites took to avoiding The Phil. Although nobody could exactly say why, The Phil gave them the creeps” (129).

### Conclusion

The plotline in Saunders’s *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* is built around two forms of governance – the premodern absolute monarchy and the modern parliamentary democracy. The inefficiency of such government forms is presented as the primary cause of the absolute catastrophe in the storyworld. In other words, the monstrous Phil is represented both as an effect of the old system’s poor leadership and as a result of the opportunity that the new system provides for the potentially dangerous people to ascend to power. The novella, however, mostly sheds light on the destructive defects in the seemingly democratic system established by Phil. Through characterisation of Phil, Saunders warns us against the ordinary people’ potential to descent into the enemy of social interest and collective harmony by means of usurping the existing democratic apparatuses in modern world. Phil’s far right (nationalistic) ideology, as well as his awareness of the importance of propaganda and election, enables him to realize his own personal desires. Phil usurps power and, through his simplistic interpretation of the border issue, he tries to overcome the sense of humiliation he experienced during his childhood life.

As we have seen, Saunders presents the border more than a dividing line. Its symbolic and arbitrary nature makes its exploitation possible. By focusing on a self-proclaimed political leader, Saunders

shows the direct relationship between his unresolved, personal obsessions and interpretation of the border issue. The represented authoritarian regime in Saunders's novella, which functions based on terror, owes its existences to many factors. Phil has a dictator's mind whose discourse on the border requires the establishment of an oppressive regime which functions based on a relentless implementation of power through violence, genocide, hate crime, and stifling of the internal and external dissents. Phil implements his individualistic and extranationalistic understanding of the Border Area by the covert and overt cooperation of nearly all people in his country. He could not establish his populist authoritarian regime without exploiting the democratic tools, publicising the hate crime, and getting help from the media as well as from the bureaucrats. The militia accelerates his ascent to power, the flattering, servile bureaucrats pave his way towards power, and, in a similar way, the power-dependent media men help Phil to settle his self-centred malevolent plan against the nation of Inner Horner as the Primary National Security issue.

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

*The border is a political issue in our time. It is a symbol of stunning differences between races and nations. As a result of the ongoing conflicts across the borders around the world, many strict border policies are developed and pursued by different countries. The border issue stands also at the heart of American writer George Saunders's novella *Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005). In his political satire, Saunders shows the symbolic meanings of border and highlights its significance between ethnicities, nations, and states through creating a fantasy world populated by not-quite-human inhabitants who possess anthropomorphic characteristics. In his fable, Saunders deliberately draws an analogy between the functioning of a modern human world and that of the non-human creatures by focusing on the role of border, territory, self and group identity, and state. Saunders's novella primarily shows how the border issue is potential to be exploited by a populist racist political leader whose personal complexes and desire for power mostly control his actions and decisions. As we argue in this paper, by using the issue of border area, Phil quickly tumbles his nation into an ultranationalistic, authoritarian regime which mainly functions by its self-proclaimed leader's exploitation of the militia, the economy, the bureaucrats, and the media.*

*Saunders's novella is an attempt to find a way out of the existing, unresolvable conflicts over the subjects such as immigration, nationalism, and violence in foreign policy. Phil's discourse of the border entails a horrific misuse of the democratic apparatuses such as legislation, (controlled and planned) election, (fake) referendum, and inept mass media. Phil's highly subjective and subversive interpretation of the border manifests itself through his political discourse. In this regard, Phil's border-bounded-discourse, which raises an acrimonious border dispute, can be analysed based on his mental workings. Phil has a polarised mindset. The uncompromising aspect of its duality functions based on racism and acts as a justification for Phil's imperialistic greed, populist nationalism, exploitation of democracy and the democratic apparatuses, and finally as the main apology for his totalitarian dictatorship.*

*The symbolic and arbitrary nature of the border in Saunders's *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phi* makes its exploitation possible. By focusing on a self-proclaimed political leader, Saunders shows the direct relationship between his unresolved, personal obsessions and interpretation of the border issue. The represented authoritarian regime in Saunders's novella, which functions based on terror, owes its existences to many factors. Phil has a dictator's mind whose discourse on the border requires the establishment of an oppressive regime which functions based on a relentless implementation of power through violence, genocide, hate*

*crime, and stifling of the internal and external dissents. Phil implements his individualistic and extranationalistic understanding of the Border Area by the covert and overt cooperation of nearly all people in his country. He could not establish his populist authoritarian regime without exploiting the democratic tools, publicising the hate crime, and getting help from the media as well as from the bureaucrats. The militia accelerates his ascent to power, the flattering, servile bureaucrats pave his way towards power, and, in a similar way, the power-dependent media men help Phil to settle his self-centred malevolent plan against the nation of Inner Horner as the Primary National Security issue.*