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**Via Panoramica:
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Anglo-Americanos
Série 3, vol. 12, n.º 1, 2023**

Apresentação

Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos/ A Journal of Anglo-American Studies (ISSN: 2182-9934 | DOI: 10.21747/2182-9934/via) acolhe artigos para os seus próximos números.

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Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos/ A Journal of Anglo-American Studies (ISSN: 2182-9934 | DOI: 10.21747/2182-9934/via) welcomes the proposal of articles for its next numbers.

Via Panoramica is published by CETAPS (Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies), at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto. The journal, which is published twice a year, welcomes essays in Portuguese or in English, within the field of Anglo-American Studies, proposed preferentially by early-career researchers, from post-graduate students to researchers who have recently obtained their PhD degrees. *Via Panoramica* has a Scientific Committee which ensures double blind peer-review of the texts submitted for publication.

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MÁRCIA LEMOS

CONTENTS

A Prefatory Note

Márcia Lemos..... 9

A Dandelion in the Desert of the World: The Love Chase in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

Andriana Hamivka 11

“Water-borne Soil”: Hybridity and Divided Traditions in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*

Gonçalo Dias..... 23

“When you know your name, you should hang on to it”: The Power of Names in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*

Ana Teresa Dias..... 34

“In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters”: Identity and Otherness in Sandra Cisneros’ Writings

Márcia Lemos..... 46

Swede Levov: O Herói Trágico Americano de *American Pastoral*

Diogo Oliveira..... 60

The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man and *The Human Stain*: A Comparative Study on Two Passing Novels

Alice Carletto 73

Harlem Lives: The Significance of the City in Colson Whitehead’s *Harlem Shuffle*

Pedro Costa 89

Black Women’s Journey in America and the Need for Intersectionality: A Comparative Reading of Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise”, Lucille Clifton’s “won’t you celebrate with me” and June Jordan’s “Poem About My Rights”

Ana Rafaela Damas..... 103

Pecking at *Rebecca*: Character(istics)s of Manderley as Symbolised in Hitchcock’s Hollywood Practices in *Rebecca*

Mark Poole..... 114

(Un)Making it in Rapture: The Critique of the Myth of the Self-Made Man, of Ayn Rand, and of Objectivism in *BioShock* (2007) and in *BioShock: Rapture* (2011)

Teresa Pereira..... 130

Reference Guidelines | Normas de Referência Bibliográfica.....159

A Prefatory Note

Márcia Lemos

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The current issue of *Via Panoramica* is a thematic volume which examines hyphenated identities in the United States of America. African-American, Mexican-American, Irish-American, Jewish-American..., there are plenty of rich hyphenated American identities and even when the hyphen is not there, it is most certainly implied, and it indicates a correlation or, quite often, a value scale in which the first word functions as a noun modifier qualifying the American individual(s) under scrutiny. Accordingly, the papers in this issue focus on authors, works and/or topics that fall into this global theme.

In their respective articles, Andriana Hamivka, Gonçalo Dias and Ana Teresa Dias address the work of Toni Morrison, more particularly *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* (1977), the writer's first three novels, to address such relevant themes as identity, tradition, self-love and self-hatred, among others.

Márcia Lemos, on the other hand, focuses on Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish* (2021) to analyse the importance of linguistic choices in representing female identities and experiences of otherness in America.

Diogo Oliveira and Alice Carletto select two works from Philip Roth's American Trilogy in their respective articles. While Oliveira focuses on *American Pastoral* (1997) to analyse the causes behind the tragic story of Swede Levov, Carletto studies the passing theme by comparing Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), published almost a hundred years before.

Colson Whitehead's novel *Harlem Shuffle* (2021) is the focus of Pedro Costa's paper which considers the city as an ambivalent space for oppression and resistance in a "postracial" capitalist context.

Although narrative fiction is the core concern of most articles in this issue, poetry, film, and video games are also represented. Indeed, in her essay, Ana Rafaela Dias provides a comparative reading of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", Lucille Clifton's "won't you celebrate with me" and June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights" through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of "intersectionality"; whereas Mark Poole analyses Alfred Hitchcock's first Hollywood feature, *Rebecca* (1940), by exploring Freudian and Lacanian symbols within the film. And the issue is brought into a conclusion by Teresa Pereira's comparative study of *BioShock* (2007), a science fiction video game, and *BioShock: Rapture* (2011), the novel inspired by the game, which present the viewer/player and the reader with a contemporary critique of the self-made man myth, through the nightmarish fall of Rapture, an underwater city built by a Russian-born American tycoon.

A Dandelion in the Desert of the World: The Love Chase in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

Andriana Hamivka

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DA UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO – CETAPS

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Abstract

The Bluest Eye gives a detailed account of the ways that Afro-American girls' and women's lives are distorted by internalized white standards of beauty. Implicit messages that whiteness is superior are everywhere, from the white baby doll given to Claudia, the idealization of white beauty in the movies, to Pauline Breedlove's preference for the young white girl she works for over her daughter. Adult women who have learned to hate the blackness of their bodies cannot help turning that contempt on their kids: Mrs. Breedlove believes Pecola is ugly, and Geraldine, who has lighter skin, curses Pecola's blackness. Pecola is, indeed, the character who suffers the most from white beauty standards. For her, being beautiful is the required condition for being loved. That is why she feels that having blue eyes will make the harshness in her life disappear and be replaced by healthy affection. This hopeless desire ultimately leads to madness, which suggests that white beauty may destroy black sanity.

Keywords: *The Bluest Eye*; Afro-American identity; White beauty standards; Love quest

Resumo

The Bluest Eye oferece um retrato detalhado das formas como a vida das raparigas e mulheres afro-americanas é distorcida por padrões de beleza definidos pelos brancos e internalizados por todos. As mensagens implícitas de que a branca é superior estão por toda a parte, desde a boneca branca dada a Claudia, a idealização da beleza branca nos filmes, até à preferência de Pauline Breedlove pela jovem branca para quem trabalha em vez da sua filha. As mulheres adultas que aprenderam a odiar a negritude dos seus corpos não podem deixar de desprezar os seus filhos: a Sra. Breedlove acredita que Pecola é feia, e Geraldine, que tem a pele mais clara, amaldiçoa a negritude de Pecola. Esta é, de resto, a personagem que mais sofre com os padrões de beleza branca. Para Pecola, ser bela é a condição necessária para ser amada. É por isso que sente que ter olhos azuis fará desaparecer a dureza da sua vida e será substituída por um afeto saudável. Este último desejo leva, em última análise, à loucura, o que sugere que a beleza branca pode destruir a sanidade negra. Para além de não ser aceite pela sociedade

dominante, esta rapariga é desprezada pela sua própria comunidade, especialmente depois da violação perpetrada pelo seu próprio pai. Sofrendo de uma visão distorcida do que o amor poderia e deveria ser, Pecola é um dente-de-leão, uma flor delicada que teve a infelicidade de nascer em solo violento e sem amor.

Palavras-chave: *The Bluest Eye*; Identidade afro-americana; Padrões de beleza da raça branca; Necessidade de amor

“Amor será dar de presente um ao outro a própria solidão?”

- Clarice Lispector, *Uma Aprendizagem ou o Livro dos Prazeres*

Although a dead baby’s ghost is at the centre of *Beloved* (1987), it is the intensity of a mother’s love and its embodiment that haunts the novel. *Beloved* encourages readers to reflect on the ethics of love. Does love play by different rules at distinct times or in diverse situations? Is it conceivable that Paul D is right - Sethe’s affection is too thick? Toni Morrison’s fascination with love and death, two intimately related realities, can be perceived even through a casual study of her canon. Morrison reframes, problematises, and explores the depth of love not only in her love trilogy - *Beloved*, *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1998) - but also in her debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

The aim of this article is precisely to analyse how love is manifested in Morrison’s first novel and to access the consequences of its expressions. Relatively little research has been done on *The Bluest Eye* and existing research has not sufficiently stressed the importance of the representation of love in the novel. They rather focus on the topics of alienation (Ahmad, Chaudhary & Murtaza), naturalism (Cormier-Hamilton), or body politics (Mermann-Jozwiak).

In Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, even though the characters are unaware of love, they seek it and imagine it incessantly, providing space for reflection on how love can be understood and the various dimensions it can embody. This search for love is carried out by Pauline, Cholly, Soaphead and, of course, Pecola, the eleven-year-old female African American protagonist, who is affected in any possible way by the dominant American culture. Love, that conception that is about strong emotional affection and attachment, whether towards a child, a lover, a father, or a mother, remains elusive. It is possible, however, to think of it as a feeling of protection, servitude and deep devotion directed towards an object of desire.¹

The characters in Toni Morrison’s novel weave dreams and projections of what love can be. Ultimately, what they get are distorted samples of what it can be. Pecola

is, in a sense, the product of a dream of a love that never materialised, and the adults are victims, too, of the lack of love they suffered when they were as young as Pecola. In one way or another, they sought, and still seek, ways to receive what they had been denied. Pauline, Pecola's mother, tries to do so through the Fisher family home where she works, receiving praise and a general sense of satisfaction from their family members. Cholly, the protagonist's father, had sought love, as a young boy, in the search for his father's whereabouts, a search that brings him the displeasure of being confronted with a father figure totally uninterested in the one who tells him, "I'm your boy" (Morrison 155). Soaphead Church, a light-skinned West Indian misanthrope and self-declared "Reader, Adviser, and Interpreter of Dreams" (Morrison 163), tries to find the beauty and affection forbidden to him by an austere and celibate upbringing through young girls, the victims of his obsession. Pecola, for her part, dreams of one day possessing a pair of blue eyes, a white American ideal of beauty that is more than evident and desirable above all things. She dreams of someone who will love her and praise her beauty. She dreams of the iconic figures of actresses with the blue eyes she longs for. Pecola seeks, in her own way, a glimpse of understanding and attention; she seeks the little things that make her forget, for a moment, a world in which love is difficult to find and in which inferiority complexes reign above all, together with deep-rooted prejudices, shame, anger, dissatisfaction and restlessness. Not even the family name, Breedlove, is a mirror or indicator of the existence of love. In Pecola's world, there is only room for dreaming, which is always a dream of love.

Pecola's dream of love is also that of her parents and, in a way, constitutes the ultimate portrait of that search. As a young girl, Pauline, Pecola and Sammy's mother, and future Mrs Breedlove, felt out of place in her own home, her hometown. Her foot disability prevented her from moving according to the rhythms of her family. For that reason, from an early age, Pauline learned to feel apart from her own family, from the other children and from the concept of beauty into which a dysfunctional foot did not fit:

why nobody teased her; why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace. Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot. Restricted, as a child, to this cocoon of her family's spinning, she cultivated quiet and private pleasures. (Morrison 109)

Pauline learned to enjoy the little things and refined her imagination which became vivid, making her tremble with excitement for the future, for the one who would arrive one day and levitate her in a warm wave of affection. The moments of

daydreaming that Pauline cultivated were marked by the arrival of a silent *Presence* that promised her peace and serenity:

Someone appeared, with gentle and penetrating eyes, who - with no exchange of words - understood and before whose glance her eyes dropped. The someone had no face, no form, no voice, no odour. He was a simple Presence, an all-embracing tenderness with strength and a promise of rest. (Morrison 111)

Indeed, when Pauline met Cholly, she was visited by a synesthetic moment, as if her desire for a *Presence* had finally been embodied in this boy. In Pauline's description of her first meeting with Cholly, the reader is presented with an almost idyllic, harmonious scenario in which the foot, which was Pauline's shame, takes on another meaning, not conditioning her at all:

When I first seed Cholly, I want you to know it was like all the bits of colour from that time down home when all us children went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of my Sunday dress, and they mashed up and stained my hips. My whole dress was messed with purple, and it never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me. And that lemonade Mama used to make when Pap came in out the fields. It be cool and yellowish, with seeds floating near the bottom. And that streak of green they june bugs made on the trees the night we left from down home. All of them colors was in me. Just sitting there. So when Cholly come up and tickled my foot, it was like them berries, that lemonade, them streaks of green the june bugs made, all come together. Cholly was thin then, with real light eyes. He used to whistle, and when I heard him, shivers come on my skin. (Morrison 113)

This description has both kinaesthetic and dreamlike qualities since we are confronted with olfactory and chromatic memories that come together in a light and natural way with the emergence of first love between Mr and Mrs Breedlove; a sequence of images that in no way resembles the chaos into which the Breedlove home had become and her present contempt for her husband, Cholly. Pauline stopped being Pauline, the young girl who immersed herself in dreams of love, to become Mrs Breedlove, a bitter woman who lives her days according to arguments with her spouse. The love that had once blossomed freely is now shaped through these quarrels and has become a possibility of imprisonment, a way to possess destructively: "The tiny, undistinguished days that Mrs Breedlove lived were identified, grouped, and classified by these quarrels" (Morrison 39). Mrs Breedlove went from dreaming to believing in

the form of love that is little more than destructive and unhealthy possession: “She regarded love as possessive mating It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way” (Morrison 120).

Once her marriage to Cholly begins to degrade, Mrs Breedlove seeks a fuse of beauty that she can follow, a subterfuge for her unhappy and loveless life. Eventually she finds that outlet in going to the movies. Therefore, as Harold Bloom points out: “when her marriage to Cholly deteriorates she has little else to do but go to the movies, where she is introduced to romantic love and physical beauty” (*Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye* 25). The films end up destroying her even more, making her awaken to a reality where she is not conceptually beautiful like the actresses. In this sense, her daughter Pecola will similarly victimise herself, evaluating herself according to the same standards of beauty that her mother had also deluded herself with. Mrs Breedlove only finds love in the white family home where she works, where she is praised and called “Polly” by the neat, beautiful, and well-dressed Fisher girl, the antagonistic pole to her daughter, Pecola. In McKay’s words, “Pauline . . . finds heaven, hope, life and meaning as a servant to the white, blond, blue-eyed, clean, rich, family to which she dedicates her love and her respect for an orderly life that poverty does not afford” (19).

On the other hand, Cholly was confronted from an early age with a blatant lack of love. At a very young age, he tries to find a father figure and, with him, the possibility of support and guidance. However, none of this is what he finds, and little by little Cholly’s naïve search for love turns into complex feelings ranging from sexual desire to repulsion and hatred. Cholly’s first dream of love was M’Dear, the woman who made his aunt convalesce, and Blue Jack was the only one, apart from Aunt Jimmy, who had treated him like a human being. However, all good memories of that attention he had been given dissipate with the events that gradually shaped his destructive character. As Harris underlines, “Cholly’s brief and emotionally violent interaction with his father serves to wipe away everything he has remembered of good treatment by his Aunt Jimmy, and it sets him on a path of destruction and death” (38). The episode of the hunters, who surprise Cholly and Darlene, just as they were becoming sexually involved for the first time, illustrates quite clearly Cholly’s negative growth and misdirected hatred, which is not channelled towards the voyeur hunters but rather towards Darlene, the victim of the hunters’ “hunger to look” and Cholly’s mute acquiescence to that same hunger:

Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him... His subconscious knew what his mind did not guess - that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. (Morrison 148-9)

The situation of humiliation by the white hunters functions as a psychological castration, “His ‘rape’ by white men denies him just as his rape of Pecola denies her” (McKay & Erle 125). Similarly, the contempt he suffered is repeated with Pecola, in different contours but with the same negative feelings surfacing from the events - just as his father despised him, Cholly also despises Pecola, and in this way the destructive force of the past on the present can be observed. However, Claudia MacTeer, an independent and strong-minded nine-year-old, at the end of her narration and her reflection on the events, reveals that Cholly had a love for Pecola, a love that we can read as a distortion, since it is marked by an incestuous physicality and an act of rape, a love that ultimately destroyed Pecola: “Cholly loved her. I’m sure he did. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelope her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death” (Morrison 204).

When Cholly finds Pecola washing dishes in the kitchen, the sequence of emotions that overtake him demonstrates the complex process that his thought goes through and that triggers the grotesque act of rape: “The sequence of his emotions was repulsion, guilt, pity, then love” (Morrison 129). Memory is essential here, as Cholly cannot stop the memory of Pauline and the movement she made with her foot when the two met, and love blossomed. Pecola, innocently reproducing that same movement, triggers in Cholly’s mind the memory of something that had marked him deeply. In this way, the repulsion he initially feels for Pecola because of her smallness, ugliness, and insignificance is transformed into guilt for feeling so, into pity for her, and finally into love, a love distorted by the memory of the past:

The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe - that was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her in Kentucky. Leaning over a fence staring at nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple gesture, but it filled him then with a wondering softness. Not the usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a protectiveness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth. He did it then, and startled Pauline into laughter. He did it now. The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. (Morrison 160)

In a sense, Cholly physically gives himself to Pecola because it is the only thing he can give her; it is the only form of love, albeit distorted, that he knows. The violation constitutes one of the examples of the various “brutal acts that tragically appear as the only possible version of acts of love” (Caldeira 259, my translation). This father could easily be understood as the villain who robs Pecola of any hope of survival in a cruel and chaotic world. However, placing Claudia as the narrator of Cholly’s past and the path he has taken to become a man incapable of love makes one seek to understand the man’s seemingly inhuman act. It is because the narrator presents us with a monstrous act that we are forced, as readers, to reflect on the “human monster” who committed it, driven by confused feelings of contempt and despair and the subversion of an idea of love. Thus, “Cholly despises Pecola for loving him in spite of his painful failure, and in drunken stupor, in attempt to give the love to his ‘ugly’ daughter that she has never experienced, he ‘tenderly’ rapes her” (Tally 15). It is essential to understand that his act is also devoid of moral notions and instigated, above all, by emotional chaos:

When Cholly approaches his daughter he does so crawling on all fours like a child or the animal which whites have made him feel. Nibbling the back of her leg he regresses into the most primal of experiences, while his closed eyes suggest how he is unable to see the full moral implications of what he is doing. (Bloom, *Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye* 37)

It is through Pecola, the eternal scapegoat, that, like many of the remaining characters, Cholly tries to reach again the *poetry* he experienced with Pauline when they were both young and full of hope and dreams. However, he does so by perpetrating suffering and terror:

He had heard the poetry for the first time with Pauline and tried to capture it again from time to time. This time he tries with Pecola, his own daughter. It is around and through Pecola, the scorned and rejected girl who longs to be beautiful and to be loved, that most of the main characters plod through a desperate, pitiful search for meaning and personal definition. (McKay 19)

Like Cholly, Soaphead Church grew up lacking love. Raised harshly by his father, he has become a celibate man repulsed by all but young girls, in a state of physical and spiritual purity that is a sexual trigger for him. Locked hermetically in his obsession, Church feels that the sexual abuse he perpetrates is proof of love, and it is

through this belief that he finds for himself the satisfaction that no one else has ever given him. For Church, his sick obsession is the only way to love someone: “Have you ever seen them, Lord? . . . One could not see them and not love them” (Morrison 177). When he meets Pecola, who asks him for a pair of blue eyes, Soaphead’s obsession as if suspended to make way for more purified compassion: “I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her” (Morrison 180). The compassion Soaphead Church feels for Pecola and her blue-eyed dream eventually makes the reader share her anger at a god indifferent to little Pecola and all the other Pecolas out there: “Church’s passionate critique of God for allowing the pain of the Pecolas of the world introduces an oddly sympathetic note” (Duvall 33).

The two MacTeer sisters, Claudia and Frieda, soon welcome Pecola into their home and keep her from her loneliness for a while. Claudia, the most present voice in the novel, soon learns to question the beauty standards that the dominant white society forcibly tries to universalise. These notions of beauty, bound up with light eyes, hair, and skin, find a strong materialisation in the white dolls that the MacTeer sisters receive as gifts at Christmas. These dolls are associated with a “false love” since they equate the possibility of love only through external beauty according to preconceived and pre-established standards. As Bloom highlights: “The child Claudia learns ‘false love’ rather than cut herself off from the only model of loveliness she is offered” (*Toni Morrison* 11). What Claudia truly desires for Christmas is not one of these dolls at all, which she destroys as if they were the white girls they represent, but rather an ideal of family love and harmony, a dream of love somewhat similar to the *Presence* of Pauline’s daydreams:

I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone. The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama’s kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (Morrison 20)

When Pecola discovers that she is menstruating, Frieda and Claudia see it as a significant event, and it is in reflecting on such an event and what it entails that Pecola asks the two sisters in what way she could conceive a child:

“Is it true that I can have a baby now?”
“Sure,” said Frieda drowsily, “Sure you can.”
“But... how?” Her voice was hollow with wonder.

"Oh," said Frieda, "somebody has to love you."

"Oh." . . . "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" But Frieda was asleep. And I didn't know. (Morrison 30)

This step highlights a reflection on love, the feeling unknown to Pecola and, in a way, inexplicable to the MacTeer sisters. At this point of the narrative, Pecola's strongly hopes to find not only blue eyes but also love. In the young girl's mind, the answer to "how do you get somebody to love you?" seems to be the blue eyes that will bring everything else with them.

At the end of the novel, when Claudia and Frieda learn of Pecola's pregnancy, they decide to abandon their project of selling marigolds to buy a new bicycle. Instead, they plant the remaining seeds, bury the money they had accumulated in the garden of Pecola's house and pray for her and the baby she is carrying: "Let's ask Him to let Pecola's baby live and promise to be good for a whole month" (Morrison 189) The sisters' attempts to save Pecola's baby and to make Cholly's rape a fresh start for her can be seen as a form of love on the part of Frieda and Claudia, who do not receive the affection they need from adults and therefore understand Pecola's loneliness. The two sisters seem to be the only characters who rebel against Pecola's situation and against the ignorance and hypocrisy of the community, which is also guilty of the destruction of the little girl's life.

Thus, Pecola lives in a loveless house, in an environment where love never grew from an early age. Sometimes she imagines her body slowly disappearing from her home's grey and sad atmosphere. She does not find any crumb of positive attention at school, she is always met with contempt from her classmates because of her appearance and colour, and her *blackness* is constantly associated with *mess*. It is through the contempt of others for her figure that Pecola learns to despise herself: "Pecola never loved herself. Always seeing herself through the eyes of others, she never saw anything to love" (Middleton 16). Pecola ardently believes that if her appearance changes, namely the colour of her eyes, she will be different too and will finally find a possibility to be loved and, consequently, to be able to love herself too: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held pictures, and knew the sights - if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different..." (Morrison 44).

Just as her mother had done in the past, Pecola also learns to cultivate small pleasures, which somehow enable her to survive. In this way, she pays attention to small things that most people ignore, perhaps because she herself, a tiny existence in a superficial, cruel, and cold world, is also ignored - a dandelion in the desert of the

world. It is in her love for these insignificances that Pecola finds an alternative reality to the one she has access to in a universe full of lovelessness:

These and other inanimate things she saw and experienced. They were real to her. She knew them. They were the codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession. She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads, last fall, she had blown away; whose yellow heads, this fall, she peered into. And owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her. (Morrison 45-6)

In her innocence, Pecola wonders about love, how it comes about and what forms it can take. She thinks of her parents, the immediate examples she has. Nonetheless, Pauline and Cholly are not an example of reciprocal, strong and mature love, since they have abandoned their dreams of love and, in their place, have left a void to grow. Pecola concludes that love could be the muffled sounds of her father paired with her mother's silence when they make love: "Maybe that was love. Choking sounds and silence" (Morrison 55).

At the end of *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, in a monologue in two voices, seems to delight in what the other voice tells her about her blue eyes, finally born from her obsession and madness - endless compliments that mirror what possibly everyone else would say about her eyes, had they turned blue: "blue because in Pecola's experience only those with blue eyes receive love: Shirley Temple, Geraldine's cat, the Fisher girl" (Bloom, *Toni Morrison* 97). At this point, reality does not seem to matter, since Pecola, in her alternative world, has finally found that which is beautiful in her eyes. In a way, "Pecola remains frozen in time - a child, trapped in the tragic first verse of her own blues, with her imagined blue eyes and the lack and self-loathing they signify, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye" (Bloom, *Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* 140).

Claudia ends her long story with the certainty that love is submissive to the one who loves - love can be malevolent, violent, and pathetic if the one who loves is also malevolent: "Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly" (Morrison 204). The individual stories of Pauline and Cholly, of Soaphead Church and of Pecola reflect how indescribable, indefinable, and subject to limitations, mistakes and choices love is. Not possessing only one dimension; it can be moulded and take different forms.

It is impossible to leave unscathed after reading *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola is the portrait of a flower that cannot grow in dry, infertile, loveless soil. She is a dandelion, unique but ignored, a weed, a wildflower born in aggressive and atrocious soil: “This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not bear, certain fruits it will not bear” (Morrison 204).

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¹ Two possible definitions of love are:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (Corinthians 13:4-7, *NIV Bible*)

"A lot of people think that love is an emotion. This is almost right. It's not an emotion, because emotions don't last as long as love tends to. You don't stop loving someone when you're asleep, busy with something else, or angry at them. But if you aren't anxious at the prospect that someone will leave you, upset when they're suffering, and at least sometimes happy to see them, then you don't love them. So love is, perhaps among other things, a disposition to feel certain things about a person in certain circumstances." (Olasov 72)

“Water-borne Soil”: Hybridity and Divided Traditions in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*

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Abstract

Considering the “hyphenated identities” present in America, the present essay addresses the role of fragmentation, identity and identification, and tradition in the African American experience as portrayed in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*. Through the lenses of both African American Studies and Identity Studies, the works of Vashti Crutcher Lewis (“African Tradition in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*”) and Stuart Albert (“The Definition and Metadefinition of Identity”), respectively, will be used to ponder how identity - individual and collective - reacts to strict measurement, and how the experience of African Americans is divided under the two points of reference that compose its nomenclature.¹ One may ask, then, how traditions which have been forcefully erased make a claim on the present, even when and where they are at a disadvantage, and how (if at all) identification is possible when obliteration has already occurred; how traditions and experiences co-exist in an environment which favours hierarchy and limitation. Additionally, how do representations of past traditions move in territories and cultures which reject them, and in what ways is fluidity possible? Can the solution be found in the convergence of the opposed experiences, or is there a side to be picked at all times? In what ways does the revelation of hybridity to oppressed and suppressed societies trigger a self-awareness from which there is no escaping? And what is the role of creation and creativity amidst these tensions, considering that identity is composed by the same questions that challenge it?

Keywords: African American Studies; Identity Studies; Tradition; Territory; Hybridity

Resumo

À luz das identidades hifenizadas presentes na América, o presente ensaio considera o papel da fragmentação, identidade e identificação, e tradição na experiência afro-americana tal como surge representada em *Sula* de Toni Morrison. Através da lente dos Estudos Afro-Americanos e dos Estudos de Identidade, os trabalhos de Vashti Crutcher Lewis (“African Tradition in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*”) e Stuart Albert (“The Definition and Metadefinition of Identity”), respetivamente, serão usados para ponderar como a identidade - individual e coletiva - reage a

medição estrita, e como a experiência dos afro-americanos é dividida sob os dois pontos de referência que compõem a sua nomenclatura. Pode-se perguntar, então, como é que tradições que foram apagadas produzem uma reivindicação do presente, mesmo quando e onde estão em desvantagem, e como (se de todo) identificação é possível quando a obliteração já ocorreu; como tradições e experiências coexistem num ambiente que favorece hierarquia e limitação. Adicionalmente, como é que representações de tradições passadas se movem em territórios e culturas que os rejeitam, e de que maneiras é que fluidez é possível? Pode a solução ser encontrada na convergência de experiências opostas, ou existe um lado a ser escolhido a todos os momentos? De que maneiras é que a revelação de hibridismo a sociedades oprimidas e suprimidas desencadeia uma autoconsciência da qual não há escapatória? E qual é o papel de criação e criatividade entre estas tensões, considerando que identidade é composta pelas mesmas questões que a desafiam?

Palavras-chave: Estudos Afro-Americanos; Estudos de Identidade; Tradição; Território; Hibridismo

Identities, both in their shared and individual configurations, have never been linear. Earl Lewis' "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas" (1995) delineates a brief history of identity formation and perception of and by African people in America that highlights the recurrent struggle found in establishing and adapting identity in a culture which rejects black presence, yet is relationally-defined, including a consideration of the transition in nomenclature of this group from Africans to African Americans (E. Lewis 771-2). Moreover, considerations of African mythology and tradition have been located in an American "culturally-specific structure" (Wilentz 21), inside which Toni Morrison's work is recognized as of relevance in establishing African American presence in the relational racial experience as worthy of its own standing. However, *Sula* (both the novel and its protagonist) hasn't been perceived as a questioning of how identity can survive if it is caught between two different worlds, and how the two presented realms may be considered as riddled with expectation and rigidity.

As Stuart Albert places it in "The Definition and Metadefinition of Identity", identity and identification may be considered as questions that defy measurement and limitation:

Identity may define the boundary between utilitarian and deontological logics; it may express a need for uniqueness and privacy. It honors the ineffable. To measure identity may require that one measure its reluctance to being measured, that one study the genius of its disguises and the way it eludes capture while still claiming presence as a core defining feature. (3)

This is especially relevant once one considers that the act of measuring implies being “subject to control” (3), according to Albert. Being caught between obligation and imposed moral structures, selfhood undergoes a circumscription and mutilation that redefines it in acceptability if it is to belong to collective experiences of identification. However, as Albert argues, it is in the nature of identity to reject such limitation and to maintain fluidity, in what becomes an act of resistance.

Toni Morrison’s second novel, *Sula*, introduces the community of the Bottom of Medallion, which suffers from the limitation imposed on identity described by Albert. Having been originated by the deceitful exchange of “hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter” (Morrison 5), for African enslaved work devised by an American landowner, the Bottom of Medallion’s residents are fragmented between two realities and identities.

In the beginning of the narrative, the enslaved African man is already in American territory, and his origins (as well as those of the farmer) are undisclosed. Despite there being no open acknowledgement of both the slave and the farmer’s roots, one can understand the dynamics of their relationship as defined by hierarchized power in their geopolitical location. The African slave expresses no wish to return to Africa because Africa is not a concept allowed to him - all he knows is the American territory and experience in which he is enslaved, and his only possibility for identity is one which he must create himself (in a rather American manner). However, this possibility for identity is undermined by the already-existing identity which, both literally and figuratively, owns the foundation, the grounds upon which the slave’s identity may be built.

As the territory which the slave is to occupy is granted by the white man in exchange for the African man’s labour, so is the African man’s experience dominated and regulated by the (white) American standards and projections of identity that the enslaved man is to adhere to and attempt to thrive in. In an American world of experience, the African man is never to fully belong, regardless of his attempts, because his efforts at power and identity are undermined by those already in power (and part of the dominant identity). The African man develops a community that is never perceived as fully American, but rather African American.

Being African in America means that one’s origins, tradition and heritage refer to the African continent and its multiple experiences; however, in the enslavement of African people and their shipment as material goods to America, this heritage was nullified in favour of white domination. Thus, the reclaiming and regenerating of an

African identity by the slave can only be conducted under the conditions allowed in American land and experience, because this domination remains. As the newly-(re)generated African identity can exist solely in (white) American terms that reject it as exterior, it grows distorted into the white idea of what black existence is and should be - “[a] nigger joke” that is to be manipulated into giving “white folks . . . a little comfort somewhere” (Morrison 4).

The use of “African” in an American territory and experience which rejects the word and its people not only depicts a difference in origin and tradition, but also demonstrates a distinction, a differentiation as a group in the American dynamics and society. If to be African American is to be understood as a part of a group that is inside the American reality, it is also to be understood as solely partially included, as the erasure of the multiplicity of African traditions, experiences, identities and bodies is maintained as a submissive tool that is only allowed survival if it adheres to American systems - in other words, the only part of African Americans that is acceptable inside American society is the “American” one.

In Morrison’s novel, however, Sula and Shadrack reject this erasure in favour of an authenticity that carries African undertones. Both characters understand how the community becomes fragmented in American territory, and denounce these processes of severance and fragmentation, displaying through their fluidity an alternate mode of experience that would be regenerative to the community. Vashti Crutcher Lewis argues that Shadrack and Sula are representative of a “West African water spirit/priest” and “water priestess”, respectively, and that Shadrack’s fluid hands, his material proximity to and subsistence on the river and its resources are part of an African heritage he is capable of recovering (92-3). Aligned with Sula’s contact and perception of water as figuratively *ground*-breaking - her accidental throwing of Chicken Little into the river having severed her connection to American standards and expectations (Morrison 118-9), and her insistence that the Deweys needed a bath (74) - one understands that references to water in the novel are intimately connected with African experience, tradition and identity that are displaced in American soil. Moreover, Shadrack’s understanding of Sula’s birthmark “as a tadpole - a water creature”, defining of African heritage and tradition (V.C. Lewis 93) confirms the connection between the two as water-borne, and, thus, African-borne.²

Indeed, both characters are used by the community as points of opposite reference by which to measure themselves, their value, and their capacity for (American, and, thus, white) identity. As Lewis advances,

Sula and Shadrack represent black sons and daughters of America who would be more at home in Africa. In traditional African cultures, they would be neither pariahs or mysteries, since they both represent tradition and a profound rootedness in African cosmology. To the people of the Bottoms, Sula is an enigma and Shadrack is a downright shame. (V.C. Lewis 92)³

However, Sula, Shadrack and the community of the Bottom of Medallion (hinted to represent a number of African communities in America, by evidencing the plurality of the Bottom and of different Bottoms - in all its scatological expression) are not in Africa, and their African roots have been torn from both African soil, through the institution of slavery, as well as from American soil, as made evident by the white farmer's deceit (and the posterior construction of the characteristically white Medallion City Golf Course). Instead, they are placed inside standards that reject them and attempt to manipulate them into submission and repression - a measuring denounced by Stuart Albert (3) that becomes particularly relevant regarding Sula's birthmark.

The mark Sula has over her eye is solely perceived as a tadpole by Shadrack (in what can also be considered to be an African measuring, in its wish for a shared bond that requires Sula to fully identify with African tradition), but other characters view her birthmark as symbols of their own standing and perception of Sula. From a grounded "stemmed rose" (Morrison 52) to a stinging "rattlesnake" (104), even to the omen-riddled certainty that it represented her mother's ashes "marking [Sula] from the beginning" (114), the protagonist's birthmark was a reflection not only of what the community believed about Sula, but also of her transformative potential. Indeed, Sula may be a tadpole in her capacity for the (re)generation of an African tradition and perception, but the waters she has resided and grown upon are American-based. Her evolution and growth into part of an aquatic or terrestrial environment depended on how the protagonist related to her community and to how this community reacted to the binary limitation of water-soil/Africa-America.

Indeed, the two experiences and traditions co-exist, yet there is a characteristic resistance to convergence insomuch as all characters are forced to 'pick a side' in what turns into hierarchical tension between the two realms. As Monika Hoffarth-Zelloe argues, "[p]aradoxes and split personalities arise out of the conflict between an individual's search for independence and society's demands, norms and values" (115). The African Americans in the Bottom of Medallion are torn between two iterations of societal experience and identity - one that is African in its tradition and history, yet it is inserted in an American territory, and another that is American in its

configuration, and which holds the African one at bay -, they become fragmented in the forced suppression of their collective history. Similarly to how Nel, Sula's childhood friend, develops "a ball of muddy strings" (Morrison 109) composed of her repressed and torn interiority, so do the people of the community suppress their wish for an independent identity, devoid of white pressure, in favour of dominant rule, creating self-rejection and division within the community itself - as made evident from the black-white tension that Nel's mother, Helene, creates and submits herself to when in contact with a white train conductor (20-2).

While V.C. Lewis argues that Sula represents an African tradition and experience that is displaced, the protagonist cannot be solely considered through an African lens. Sula, unlike other characters, including Shadrack (whose African perception exists in opposition to the American standard), understands this division between the two traditions and attempts to develop one that is a convergence of the two, even if such a confluence is frowned upon by the (white standards of the) community of the Bottom of Medallion. Sula, instead, represents a hybridity which cannot be contained by the opposite points of reference, preferring a self-determined spectrum of identity.

As Stuart Albert continues,

Identification is defined, in part, by the kinds of metaphysical quagmires that one chooses to engage. Nor can one discuss the concept of identification without at some point running into all of the difficulties surrounding the concept of self. A definition serving a revelatory function does not hide these troubles because a term is defined by the troubles that are part of its nature. Lear is Lear because of the troubles that surround him and that comprise his nature. (9)

Precisely because Sula lives in rejection of the absolute and defined identities provided to her, opting for a selfhood that embraces both experiences, she is an absolutely fluid character (although not fully aquatic) whose concept of self is undefined and refuses measurement and, thus, control - in her "experimental life", Sula "felt no compulsion to verify herself-be consistent with herself" (Morrison 119). It is through the rejection of hierarchical standings and oppositional referencing that Sula is capable not only of complementing her community's sense of selfhood, but of responding to the unescapable self-awareness in identification and identity. Indeed, "Sula never competed [by entering the oppositional dynamics of the Bottom]; she simply helped others define themselves" (Morrison 95), even if the community of the Bottom of Medallion perceived itself in contrast to the protagonist.

Through her fluidity and her attempted movement towards self-discovery in frustrated artistic capacity (Morrison 121) and sexual intercourse (Morrison 122-3), Sula sought to generate an identity-charged fertile “mud” that would be composed of both African “water” and American “loam” (Morrison 131). The protagonist uses her creative impulses as a means through which a new identity may be built for, as Stuart Albert further argues, “[t]o be generative is to give rise to and, like a magnet, attract clusters of questions” (8). Thus, in accordance with Albert’s argument, Sula provides a series of individual questionings for the community of the Bottom of Medallion in her creational capability. The protagonist’s rejection of a strict control in definition - and even of definition in itself - ignites a critical overview in the community regarding its own functioning and dynamics.

Despite perceiving Sula as a “[d]evil”, the members of the community changed their ways in her presence: “[t]heir conviction of Sula’s evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to protect and love one another” (Morrison 117). The Bottom’s passive attitude towards evil - “The purpose of evil was to survive it” (Morrison 90) - betrayed an observation that, in Sula’s demarcation and creation of a new identity, led them to self-awareness. Indeed, the people of the Bottom of Medallion start behaving differently after Sula’s arrival, which reveals that they were capable of developing critical self-perception, at least to some degree. Even if this shift in consciousness and recognition remained adherent to the white perception rooted in the territory and the community returned to their old habits after Sula’s passing, they could never truly have their connection to African tradition entirely severed.

This shift is the reason why Sula, even in her dying bed, claims that she is “going down like one of those redwoods”, and that she “sure did live in this world”, contrary to the expectations for black women to be submissive in America, the protagonist arguing that they are “dying like a stump” (Morrison 143). Indeed, even if Sula’s roots are forcefully denied by the American soil and its inhabitants, her deep-rooted African heritage - which finds in water its sustenance, survival, and prospering - causes her to become a heavy differentiating force, even after her fall. Unlike those around her, who have attempted to fully give up their African heritage in favour of (white) expectations which perceive them as inferior, Sula develops as an independent product of both African water and American loam, asserting her and the Afro-American experience as a self-defined creation. Sula wishes to create a *reclamation* of African

identity in, as well as with, American land, to trigger the transformation of a barren and suppressed desert into fertile soil from which identity may bloom.

However, Sula's death requires an abandonment of the material body and land in which her creativity resided and that the unyielding land and its dynamics rejected, consequently forcing her to take refuge in an African "sleep of water always" (Morrison 149). The permanence of this protection after destruction is solely possible, nevertheless, because of the protagonist's acceptance of her African heritage and her attempt to create it anew. This is integral both to Nel's movement towards her climatic self-discovery by the end of the novel, as a consequence of her constant circumscription of selfhood into an American image, and the community's confrontation with their own impotence and controlled measuring when facing the New River Road tunnel and attempt to destroy the construction site as a symbol of their collective repression (Morrison 161).

Indeed, Lewis argues that "[w]hat begins in glee and celebration of Sula's death ends in violent rage to kill the memories of deferred dreams in racist America" (V.C. Lewis 96) in the confrontation of the division between an African tradition and an overpowering American experience in the Suicide Day Parade. Lewis' argument that the harsh weather and collective death is a direct and vengeful consequence of the community's scorning of Sula (V.C. Lewis 95-6) comes into fruition when one considers the parallel enjoyment of Sula's death. Just as the community "felt that either *because* Sula was dead or just *after* she was dead a brighter day was dawning" and that "it was with a strong sense of hope that the people in the Bottom watched October close" (Morrison 150-1), laughter issued from seeing Shadrack's proposal for suicide:

Maybe the sun; maybe the clots of green showing in the hills promising so much; maybe the contrast between Shadrack's doomy, gloomy bell glinting in all that sweet sunshine. Maybe just a brief moment, for once, of not feeling fear, of looking at death in the sunshine and being unafraid. [Dessie, and then, the community] laughed. (Morrison 158-9)

When coming into contact with the dismissed African (id)entity that is Shadrack (the corporeal representation of African water and tradition), after the death of Sula (the one who brought to light the limitations imposed on the community and granted them self-awareness), the community of the Bottom revelled in their regained stability. However, this stability and prospering translated into complaisance with the dynamics that repressed them. It is when facing the tunnel that Sula's wish for the community

to understand its own submission is fulfilled. Yet, in their attempt to destroy (and, thus, fully disconnect with) the American experience that was the foundation of their existence, they were flooded and drowned in erupting African water. The attempt to be rid of the rigid soil becomes as destructive to the community as the suppression of water and fluidity, because neither expression of identity represents their reality, and the dominant experience benefits from the correspondingly oppositional standing. As Shadrack had proposed, the community engaged in suicide by dissolving their African heritage and Sula - the emblem for (re)generative identity -, instead maintaining their adherence to the polar systems of identity and identification that benefit the community's obliteration.

Once more, and as in the case of the enslaved African man, the possibility of returning to a fully African identity can no longer be after the forced displacement created by slavery. Although Africa is the place of origin of the traditions portrayed by Shadrack, the community can never fully return neither to the origin nor to the traditions as they were, instead being forced to, like Sula, (re)create, (re)claim and (re-)learn identity. Yet, even if the community has been materially destroyed, one is left to wonder if their (albeit violent) "sleep of water" (149) was not, as may have been the case with Sula, a peaceful reward for their understanding of their suppression and their attempt at liberation. In the convergence of African heritage with and in American land, the community might have been capable not only of discovering an identity that is authentic to its reality, but also one that generates a critical perception over that same experience - yet the community chose destruction instead of natural creation as a means for liberation, consequently being struck by death.

Nevertheless, the questioning and self-discovery is the convergence attempted by Sula, and, in accordance with Stuart Albert's argument, the obstacles her community faces define both her and the community itself: if "a term is defined by the troubles that are part of its nature" and "Lear is Lear because of the troubles that surround him and that comprise his nature" (9), then Sula is Sula due to the troubling experimentation she conducts in her life, as well as to the muddy metaphysical matters of identity she creates in death. Yet these troubles do not define her or the community of the Bottom of Medallion insomuch as they do not present a measurement of their existence; instead, these troubles become characterizations of experiences and experiments that are self-aware and self-valuing in themselves. Only through the convergence of past heritage with present circumstances can creative possibilities come into existence.

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¹ The present essay emerges as a brief complement to my MA dissertation entitled "'Experimental Lives': Systems of Domination and Artistic Divergence in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*" (FLUP, 2022). Consequently, themes such as systems of domination and opposition, creation and creativity, and fluidity, among others, are shared, albeit approached through different lenses.

² Another character who may be considered to have a connection to water, and, thus, an African identity is Plum, Eva's son and Sula's uncle, who "*floated* in a constant swaddle of love and affection, until 1917 when he went to war" (Morrison 45, emphasis added). His addiction to drugs - a consequence of what can be understood as post-traumatic stress disorder from his military experience - led to Eva deciding to burn him, but his presence in the novel revolves around water. As Eva is rocking him as one would a baby, she reminisces about giving Plum a bath when he was a child and how he "dripped water" on her, and the impulse that led the mother to burn her child was her drinking what she thought would be "strawberry crush", only to discover it to be "blood-tainted water" (47, emphasis added). As Eva drenches Plum in kerosene, he feels as if he were undergoing "[s]ome kind of baptism, some kind of blessing" in an assuring "wet light" - "[i]t wound itself-this wet light-all about him, *splashing* and *running* into his skin" (47, emphasis added), just before being *engulfed* in flames. The "1921" chapter comes to an end by displaying that the only possibility of saving Plum would be through "water" (48), but such an attempt is frustrated

by Eva's flaming destruction, a reflection of American expectation. Despite Plum's deviance from expectations being self-destructive, the fact that fluidity is a central aspect of his character further cements the dichotomous reading of a harsh American soil against African water.

³ While it is not clear whether the use of the plural in "Bottoms" is intentional or a mere error in the article, the idea of the Bottom of Medallion's systems and dynamics being indefinitely reproduced through African American communities in what becomes an infinity of Medallions is relevant to this and many other studies.

“When you know your name, you should hang on to it”: The Power of Names in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*

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Abstract

Names and the act of naming are an important part of Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Characters’ names are filled with meaning and are a crucial part of the characters’ personal and collective identity. The plot of the novel, spanning several decades, is largely told through flashbacks thus providing the story of many generations of the Dead family. This allows for the understanding of how names influence several generations of the same family as they can be representative of tradition and heritage but also trauma. This paper is divided in two parts: first, the origin of some names will be detailed with an explanation of its symbolism; then I will delve into the power that each name has within the plot and the narrative of the novel.

Keywords: American Literature; Toni Morrison; African American Traditions; Identity; Names

Resumo

Os nomes e o ato de nomear são uma parte importante do romance *Song of Solomon*, de Toni Morrison. Os nomes das personagens estão repletos de significado e são uma parte crucial da identidade pessoal e coletiva de cada personagem. O enredo do romance, que abrange várias décadas, é em grande parte contado através de flashbacks, fornecendo assim a história de muitas gerações da família Dead. Isto permite a compreensão de como os nomes influenciam várias gerações da mesma família, representando tradição e património, mas também trauma. Este artigo surge dividido em duas partes: primeiro detalha-se a origem de uma seleção de nomes, explicando o simbolismo que cada um contém e, em seguida, analisa-se o poder que os nomes das personagens detêm sobre o enredo e a narrativa do romance.

Palavras-chave: Literatura americana; Toni Morrison; Tradições Afro-Americanas; Identidade; Nomes

Introduction

“I slip my mother’s name on like a glove
and wonder if I will become like her
absolutely.
Years number the times I have worn her pain
as a child, as a teenager, as a woman—my
second skin—
or screamed her screams
as she sat, silver head bowed silent
hedging the storm.

. . .

I slip my mother’s name on
with wonder
and become like her
absolutely.”

-Irma Pearl McClaurin, *The Power Of Names*
in *Pearl’s Song* (1988)

“When you know your name, you should hang
on to it, for unless it is noted down and
remembered, it will die when you do.”

-Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)

In the epilogue to her novel *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison writes that “The fathers may soar/And the children may know their names”, a reference to the theme of heritage and history that carries through the novel, drawing attention to another important motif: the allegory of names. Indeed, characters in Morrison’s work often have unusual names that are at first glance jarring to the readers. However, as the plot progresses, the names start to make sense and in fact possess a deep meaning and weight to the characters and the story. Furthermore, through the characters’ storytelling and flashbacks, the reader is able to learn about several generations of the same family and their respective names, thus recognising their origin and power.

Names are usually given to new-borns by their parents and, although many aspects of ourselves can be used as identification - gender, race, nationality - our names become the most basic form of identification. Names indicate our connection to our families, our lineage, our tradition. Names are an essential part of our identity and often carry ties to a person’s culture and family, giving them a sense belonging.

In a 2015 interview, journalist Teri Gross asked Morrison about the importance of names in her fiction. Morrison responded as follows:

Well, there's a whole history, I think, in naming. In the beginning of black people being in this country, they lost their names, and they were given names by their masters. . . . You know, it's a very personal identification, trying to move away maybe from the history of having no name and then personalizing it on the one hand, to give you a name that's embarrassing in order to make you confront it, deal with it, now. And then later on, more charming names, moving away from humiliating names like Satchmo. (Gross, Morrison)

Characters in Morrison's fiction often present unusual names that easily distinguish them within their community. As Morrison mentions, names function as a basic form of identification and often have connection to culture and history. In her fiction, characters' names are reflective of their past, their family's history and of who they are. Milkman, Pilate, Macon Dead, all have past family stories associated with their names.

In his paper "Names, Identity, and Self", Kenneth L. Dion writes of the "notion that close connection exists between an individual's name and her/his personal identity and sense of self" (245), by trying to present direct evidence that relate names to personal identity:

Since the distinctiveness of names can be easily indexed in terms of their frequency relative to various reference groups, names are an obviously pertinent and potentially interesting dimension for advocates of the distinctiveness theory of self-perception. . . . [which] implies that our names are salient to ourselves and to others, especially when they are relatively infrequent and therefore distinctive in the context of groups of which we are members. (248-9)

Likewise, characters in Morrison's novels often have unusual and distinctive names. In *Song of Solomon*, it is evident that the names are not just peculiar to the reader. The other characters in the novel are also taken aback with the characters' names making them stand out in their community. But as the reader is given the details of these characters' lives, it becomes clear that the unusual names are tied to important moments in their lives.

I. The origin and symbolism of names: Milkman, Pilate and Macon Dead

The main character of the novel is named Macon Dead, just like his father and grandfather, but known in his community as Milkman. Both names, as is explored in the novel, are connected to Milkman's life and ancestry. Milkman's real name, Macon Dead, was passed on from his father but, as made clear by his father in Chapter 2, it was not always a family name. Macon Dead (the second) explains to his son (Macon Dead, the third) how his father, Milkman's grandfather (the first Macon Dead), ended up with that name.

In 1869, a young man, and recently freed slave, named Jake (which Milkman, and the reader, find out in the last chapters of the novel, is Macon Dead's real name) went to register himself with the Freedmen's Bureau. As Macon explains: "When freedom came. All the colored people in the state had to register with the Freedmen's Bureau" (Morrison 66). The men registering Jake was inebriated and wrote down his information in the wrong spaces, *Macon* actually being the city where he was born and *Dead*, his father's situation. Since Jake was illiterate, he was unaware of the mistake and was then registered as Macon Dead, only realising the mistake when he meets his future wife Sing who can read and who finally reads him his name.

Despite the inaccurate registration, Macon embraces the name, choosing to pass on this name to his first-born male, adopting the name and creating a family tradition. Macon tells Milkman that his father kept the name because his wife Sing, Macon's mother, liked it. She said that the name "was new and would wipe out the past" (Morrison 66). However, as the poem "The Power of Names", by Irma Pearl McClaurin, touches upon, names can carry a burden (12-3). By passing on a rather strange name to his son, who later passes on to his son, Macon Dead hands to a son the burden of such a name, which also carried the weight of his story and the reality of the oppression that African Americans faced even after the end of slavery. Milkman even asks his father: "He didn't have to keep the name, did he? He could have used his real name, couldn't he?" (Morrison 66). Since he adopted the name Macon Dead and abandoned the name Jake, his original name is unknown not only to the reader, but also to his family throughout most of the novel.

A few years after Macon Dead II is born, Sing dies giving birth to a baby girl. Illiterate and bereaved with the death of his wife, Macon chooses the name for his daughter by looking at the Bible, picking a name by the way the letters looked on the paper. Indeed, Macon "thumbed through the Bible, and since he could not read a word, chose a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome; saw in them

a large figure that looked like a tree hanging in some princely but protective way over a row of smaller trees” (Morrison 22), landing on the name Pilate.

In the Bible, Pilate is a Roman governor who presided at the trial of Jesus and gave the order for his crucifixion. The midwives who helped deliver Pilate were horrified with the choice of name, but Macon was determined to give his daughter the name Pilate:

“Pilate. You wrote down Pilate.”

“Like a riverboat pilot?”

“No. Not like no riverboat pilot. Like a Christ-killing Pilate. You can’t get much worse than that for a name. And a baby girl at that.” . . .

“. . . Baby name Pilate.”

“Jesus, have mercy.” (Morrison 22)

The name, or its connotation, do not fit the character as Pilate is a caring and thoughtful person who, throughout the novel, provides comfort and guidance to the different characters. Nevertheless, the name can also be seen as a homonym for “pilot”, which would seem more fitting for the character. As an influence for Milkman, she guides, or “pilots”, his journey through the south, where he follows his aunt’s “tracks” (Morrison 322). Furthermore, an important theme in the novel is the theme of flight. At the end of the novel, Milkman says of his aunt: “Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly” (Morrison 419). Interestingly, there are other allusions to flight in characters’ names. Pilate and Macon’s family on their maternal side are all named Byrd - Sing Byrd, Heddy Byrd, Crowell Byrd and Susan Byrd. Susan Byrd tells Milkman: “Sing’s name was Singing Bird. And my father’s name was Crow at first. Later he changed it to Crowell Byrd” (Morrison 401).

In the novel, the act of naming a child is sacred. Macon, besides starting the tradition of naming his son after himself, also named his daughter by choosing a name from the bible. Years later, when his children, Macon and Pilate, have a family of their own, they continue the tradition of naming the oldest male Macon Dead and the females of the family after biblical figures. “[Macon] had cooperated as a young father with the blind selection of names from the Bible for every child other than the first male. And abided by whatever the finger pointed to, for he knew every configuration of the naming of his sister” (Morrison 22). By continuing the tradition, Macon and Pilate are honouring their father but they also pass on the burden of unusual names to their children. Not only do they have *Dead* as their last name, they also all have names that are out of the ordinary and therefore stand out in their community.

Pilate's daughter Reba (short for Rebecca) is likely after Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and the mother of Esau and Jacob. Reba names her daughter Hagar, also the name of a biblical woman. There are some similarities between biblical Hagar and the Hagar in the novel. In the Bible, Hagar was an Egyptian slave of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Hagar became Abraham's concubine, giving birth to his son Ismael. After the birth of Ismael, tensions arose between Sarah and Hagar and so Hagar and her son were thrown out. This way, Hagar becomes a symbol of the oppressed and the women abused by those with more power:

Hagar has long represented the plight of a foreigner, a slave, and a sexually abused woman. She has been the focal point for oppressed peoples. Her story resonates with sexual abuse survivors, the poor and vulnerable, and in the past half century with African American women. While race is not a meaningful term for the biblical period, Hagar's identity as an Egyptian woman has led some interpreters to see Hagar as African and dark-skinned. Some readers see in the relationship between Sarai and Hagar the story of the white female oppressor and the black slave woman. (Frymer-Kensky)

Just as Hagar in the bible was used and then discarded, Hagar in the novel was used by Macon (the third) and then abandoned when he felt he did not need her anymore. Framing her story and her characters with references to the Bible, the author allows for a more profound interpretation and understanding of the names chosen for the characters.

Just like Reba and Hagar, Macon's daughters are also named after Biblical women. First Corinthians is likely named after the First Epistle to the Corinthians, an epistle addressed by St. Paul the Apostle to the Christian community. Magdalene called Lena is named after Mary Magdalene, a woman who travelled with Jesus as one of his followers and was a witness to his crucifixion and resurrection.

If the story of the third Macon Dead's birth name stems from his father, the story of his nickname - Milkman - can be traced to his relationship with his mother, Ruth. Milkman's nickname originates from an incident when Freddie, one of Macon's employees, witnesses Ruth breastfeeding her son already as a grown child. Freddie coins the nickname Milkman and throughout the novel, only his family calls him Macon. Milkman's nickname derives from his mother's emotional problems and her inappropriate relationship with her son. Macon, unaware of the origin of the nickname, notes that: "He knew that wherever the name came from, it had something to do with his wife and was, like the emotion he always felt when thinking of her,

coated with disgust” (Morrison 19). Still, it is possibly true that Ruth feels more shame when hearing the name than her son, especially since he was not always aware of the origin of the name. When Milkman does recall the origin of his name, in Chapter III, he is horrified when he finally remembers what his mother used to make him do.

Thinking of his family’s names, their abnormality and the peculiarity of their origin, Macon believes that, surely,

he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name His own parents, in some mood of perverseness or resignation, had agreed to abide by a naming done to them by somebody who couldn’t have cared less. Agreed to take and pass on to all their issue this heavy name scrawled in perfect thoughtlessness by a drunken Yankee in the Union Army. (Morrison 21)

Still, by keeping his name, Macon honours his father. Having witnessed his father lose everything he had worked hard for; he becomes relentless in his quest to become a successful businessman that black men fear and revere and white men respect. Macon believes that the way to pay tribute to his father is to accumulate what was taken from him (property). And so, there is at least one Macon Dead that became the proprietor of vast amounts of land and the owner of a vast amount of money.

On the other hand, Pilate honours her father by extending the love and affection that was given to her by her father and brother to her own family. Pilate embraces her name and the individuality of their family name and holds on to the piece of paper where her father wrote down her name, because it is a connection to someone she loved and lost. She understands the importance of heritage and values her family above all.

II. The Power of Names

By accidentally being given a new name, Macon Dead I was able to start anew and create his own family tradition, leaving behind a name that connected him to a past of slavery. Similarly, many enslaved people “adopted their own last names before emancipation in order to evade capture or to establish their own family connections independent of their enslavers” (Craven). With his new name and married to Sing, he acquires land and hopes to start a new family and a prosperous harvest and business. For Macon a new name was a fresh start and an escape from his past as a slave and he was not alone in his quest for a new identity:

[Herbert Gutman, writer of *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925*] denies that slavery completely shattered the “Negro” family, arguing instead that despite the oppressive nature of slavery and discrimination, enslaved and freed Africans sought ways to preserve and establish a culture among themselves; and one of the ways in which they did so, was through naming. . . . It is this resiliency that enabled the enslaved population to survive and create a life and culture of their own, despite the oppressive and restrictive conditions prescribed for them under slavery. (Fitzpatrick 7)

In *Song of Solomon*, names hold power and importance and have a key role in the concluding chapters. Once the significance and the origin of the names are understood, the readers are able to understand the control and influence names hold over the characters’ lives and, ultimately, how they contribute to the ending of the novel. Names hold the power of history and heritage and allow for the possibility of discovery. Names function as the record of the past and the lack of knowledge of these names leads to misunderstandings throughout the novel and hinder Milkman’s journey in the south. As Milkman pieces together the truth about his family, he finally understands the power of history and the importance of knowing someone’s name.

When Milkman first arrives in the south looking for Pilate’s gold, he is helped by men and women who knew his father and grandfather. They help Milkman on his quest upon learning of his kinship to the great Macon Dead. Discovering that for the people of Danville, the name Macon Dead was regarded with awe and admiration, Milkman is less ashamed of his name, as it connects him to his grandfather, Macon Dead Senior, “the farmer they wanted to be” (Morrison 293), a man who had nothing and who built himself a prosperous business, a man Milkman is proud to be related to.

All throughout his life, Milkman had been embarrassed of his name and had never found any comfort in the history of the family name. Still, visiting the town where his father grew up and interacting with the men and women who knew his family, Milkman feels a sense of pride. By mentioning Macon Dead Senior, Macon Dead and Pilate, Milkman receives a warm welcome. He is treated kindly by Reverend Cooper, who provides him with the information he wants and tells stories of his grandfather and Macon and Pilate, and he meets Circe who embraces him seeing his resemblance to his father. The men in the town “remembered both Macon Deads as extraordinary men” (Morrison 292) and for the first time in the novel, thinking about his family, Milkman “grew fierce with pride” (Morrison 294). These moments in the novel mark a change in Milkman. Discovering and connecting with the town where his

father grew up, where his grandfather was a hero and where his father was once happy, Milkman feels a new affection for his family:

Milkman's search for identity does involve racial conflict, social transitions, and community values. However, on the most basic level, his search for identity is intertwined with family and domestic values. . . . [H]e begins his journey towards a self knowledge that will be earned through an understanding of family, relationships and his heritage. (Cooper 145-6)

What Milkman finds in the south is not the gold that he was so desperately looking for but a closer connection with his family and his ancestors. Simply by mentioning the names of his relatives he is welcomed and taken care of by strangers. Not even in his hometown was he treated with such kindness and helpfulness. "In Danville, he had felt like a hero, for he had heard marvelous stories about his family, and he had survived his solo adventure" (Cooper 153). Milkman feels connected to people he had never met before and to a place he had never visited previously:

He was curious about these people. He didn't feel close to them, but he did feel connected, as though there was some cord or pulse or information they shared. Back home he had never felt that way, as though he belonged to anyplace or anybody. . . . But there was something he felt now—here in Shalimar, and earlier in Danville—that reminded him of how he used to feel in Pilate's house. (Morrison 365)

Deciding to follow Pilate's "tracks" (Morrison 322) he leaves behind his materialistic, greedy self and begins his spiritual journey, following Pilate physically but also spiritually. In Shalimar, Milkman meets Susan Byrd, a woman "who looked to be about his mother's age" (Morrison 358). Milkman learns from her stories that they are likely related through Milkman's grandmother's side. Miss Byrd's father was the brother of Milkman's grandmother Sing. Susan's grandmother Heddy Byrd is Milkman's great-grandmother. Curious about Milkman's inquiries, she asks him: "It's important to you, is it, to find your people?"; to which Milkman replies: "No. Not really. I was just passing through, and it was just—just an idea. It's not important" (Morrison 364). But later Milkman proclaims: "It wasn't true what he'd said to Susan Byrd: that it wasn't important to find his people. Ever since Danville, his interest in his own people, not just the ones he met, had been growing" (Morrison 365).

The fact that Milkman is unaware of his ancestors' real names complicates his search. Pilate did not even know her mother's name or that the song that she sings is

about her family. As soon as Milkman starts discovering his family's real names and the information that was unknown to his family, he can start to shape the real story of his family. From speaking to Circe, he discovers that his grandfather's name was Jake and, from speaking to Susan Byrd, he discovers that his grandmother's name is Singing Byrd. This information is key as it connects to something Pilate had told Milkman. In Pilate's visions of her father, he tells her "Sing", which she takes as an instruction to continue to sing. In fact, he was calling for his wife:

And why did the ghost tell Pilate to sing? Milkman chuckled to himself. That wasn't what he was telling her at all; maybe the ghost was just repeating his wife's name, Sing, and Pilate didn't know it because she never knew her mother's name. After she died Macon Dead wouldn't let anybody say it aloud. That was funny. He wouldn't speak it after she died, and after he died that's all he ever said—her name. (Morrison 366)

Milkman's ultimate triumph occurs when he listens to a group of children in Shalimar sing a familiar song; "his spirit is renewed" (Cooper 154-5) when he realises the song is about his own family:

Jake the only son of Solomon . . .
Whirled about and touched the sun . . .
Left that baby in a white man's house . . .
Heddy took him to a red man's house . . .
Black lady fell down on the ground . . .
Threw her body all around . . .
Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut
Yaruba Medina Muhammet too.
Nestor Kalina Saraka cake.
Twenty-one children, the last one Jake!
O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Buckra's arms to yoke me
Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home. (Morrison 378)

Piecing together the information he has learned from his father, Pilate, Reverend Cooper, Circe and Susan Byrd, Milkman is able to understand that the song the children sing in Shalimar, the song that Pilate had been singing, was "a story about his

own people!” (Morrison 379). The song is about Solomon’s flight to Africa, leaving his wife and children behind. Jake is his grandfather, Solomon his great-grandfather, Ryna his great-grandmother, and her twenty-one children:

When Pilate sings the old blues song “Sugarman, Don’t Leave Me Here,” she sings with an understanding of loss and sorrow, separation and love. No matter where she has travelled or where she sets up her household, Pilate carries the family’s heritage with her. She keeps the name her father gave her in a brass earring and the story of her family in her heart. (Cooper 147)

Milkman searches for his family’s history and for any more potential relatives. The young man who was so desperate to find gold and free himself from his family understands the importance of storytelling, developing an enthusiasm for the value of family.

Conclusion

The names of Toni Morrison’s protagonists, perhaps jarring to its readers, allow for the creation of memorable characters. From the biblical connections to a morbid last name, to an unfortunate nickname, names in the novel are powerful within themselves. By understanding the significance of names, we are able to understand the influence that names have on the characters that hold them as well. All in all, names have the power to oppress but also to liberate and most importantly, names hold history, tell stories, and connect us to our families. Remembering the names, passing them on to the following generations and sharing the stories of a family enable continuous remembering of our loved ones even after they are gone.

In the final chapter of *Song of Solomon*, after making his discoveries about his ancestors, Milkman reflects on what he has learnt and thinks about the power of names: how names already forgotten represented men and women who were also forgotten; how names recorded incorrectly, like his grandfather’s, hid the real names of people and places; how a forgotten or mistaken name meant erasing the history and the past of a culture. In fact, the biggest obstacle to Milkman’s quest where the unknown and forgotten names of his relatives. Milkman realised how important it was to remember “[n]ames that had meaning. No wonder Pilate put hers in her ear. When you know your name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do” (Morrison 410).

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“In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters”: Identity and Otherness in Sandra Cisneros’ Writings

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Abstract

Born into a Mexican family, American writer Sandra Cisneros has repeatedly given voice to characters marginalized not only for being female but also for being Chicanas. Though apparently simple in their narrative modes, Cisneros’ texts present the readers with many complex layers of meaning in their endeavour to represent female expectations, anxieties and concerns in a world that is still very much challenging for women. One core concern is certainly language, reflecting the author’s divide between Spanish, her family’s mother tongue, and English, her own native language, and the language in which she writes. This paper will focus on two works by Cisneros: her 1984 novel *The House on Mango Street* and her 2021 dual-language text *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish*. The purpose of this paper is to address the importance of linguistic choices in representing female identities and experiences of otherness in a largely patriarchal society. The title is inspired by a passage in *The House on Mango Street* in which Esperanza, the young protagonist and narrator of the novel, reveals some discomfort about her own name and specially the way it is constantly mispronounced by English speakers, including her teachers at school. Echoing Virginia Woolf, in Cisneros’ coming-of-age 1984 novel, female identity is dependent not only on getting a house of her own (away from the barrio), but also her own name, one that could be “la simple carte photographique d’identité”, as Proust would put it in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (754).

Keywords: Identity; Otherness; Sense of Belonging; Language; Female protagonists

Resumo

Nascida no seio de uma família mexicana, a escritora americana Sandra Cisneros tem vindo a dar voz a diferentes personagens marginalizadas não apenas por serem do sexo feminino, mas

também por serem “Chicanas” (pertencentes à comunidade mexicana dos EUA). Aparentemente simples nas suas narrativas, os textos de Cisneros confrontam os leitores com diferentes e complexas camadas de sentido no intuito de representar as expectativas, ansiedades e preocupações femininas num contexto que se apresenta ainda extremamente desafiante para as mulheres. Uma preocupação central é seguramente a escolha de uma língua, refletindo o sentimento de divisão da autora entre o espanhol, língua materna da sua família, e o inglês, a sua própria língua materna e também a língua em que escreve. O presente artigo centrar-se-á em dois trabalhos de Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street*, romance publicado em 1984, e *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish*, texto dual publicado em 2021. O objetivo deste artigo é refletir sobre a importância das escolhas linguísticas na representação de identidades femininas e de experiências de alteridade numa sociedade ainda eminentemente patriarcal. O título deste artigo tem como inspiração uma declaração de Esperanza, jovem protagonista e narradora de *The House on Mango Street*, que revela assim o seu desconforto com o seu nome e especialmente com o facto de este ser constantemente mal pronunciado por falantes de língua inglesa, incluindo os seus professores em contexto escolar. Lembrando Virginia Woolf, no romance formativo de Cisneros, a identidade feminina parece estar dependente não apenas da obtenção de uma casa própria (fora do bairro), mas também de um nome de sua autoria que pudesse ser “la simple carte photographique d’identité”, como Proust diria em *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (754).

Palavras-chave: Identidade; Alteridade; Sentido de pertença; Linguagem; Protagonistas do sexo feminino

Forced to deal with “a hyphenated identity” (Betz 20), American writer Sandra Cisneros (1954-), born to a Mexican family, once insisted that she was American-Mexican and not the other way round - Mexican-American (cf. Betz 29) -, as if her identity was primarily shaped by her American experience which included the use of the English language as a privileged channel for communication and personal affirmation, to the detriment of her family’s mother tongue: Spanish. With the publication of her first novel, *The House on Mango Street*, in 1984, Cisneros initiates a journey in which a series of marginalized female characters, mostly Chicanas, are given a voice to echo the expectations, anxieties and concerns of all the real women who lack that voice and representation, a comprehensive lot to whom Cisneros felt indebted:

My intent was to write stories that don’t get told - my mother’s stories, my students’ stories, the stories of women in the neighborhood, the stories of all those people who don’t have the ability to document their lives. **One of the reasons I dedicated the book to women was that there were so many people to whom I was indebted because I stole their stories.** That’s how I put the book together. It’s a young girl’s diary in a sense. All the stories are told from the point of view of a woman-girl who is

in that nebulous age between childhood and adulthood. Some days she's a child and for a few days she might be an adult. That always struck me as a kind of mysterious time, so I chose her as the persona for these stories. (Satz and Cisneros 166, emphasis added)

Cisneros' coming-of-age novel has been read and studied abundantly since its publication in 1984, not only by university scholars but also in schools, by younger students, particularly in the United States of America. In the 1990s, papers on Cisneros' *House* included, for example, Jacqueline Doyle's "More Room of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" (1994) and Maria Karafilis' "Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the 'Bildungsroman' in Sandra Cisneros's 'The House on Mango Street' and Jamaica Kincaid's 'Annie John'" (1998). Already in the twenty-first century, texts like Karen Martin's "The House (of Memory) on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Counter-Poetics of Space" (2008); Lorna Pérez' "Haunting the House on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Radical Revisions" (2011); or Regina Betz' "Chicana 'Belonging' in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*" (2012) offer important insights on Cisneros' debut novel and valuable theoretical tools to which I will return later in this paper. More recently, in 2020, Lidiane Santos published, in the Brazilian journal *Revista (Entre Parênteses)*, an article titled "Identidade Chicana em *The House on Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros", addressing identity and gender issues in Cisneros' novel.

Work on Cisneros is not as prolific in Portugal, though. The catalogue of the National Library of Portugal (BNP), for example, includes only one study of Cisneros, an MA dissertation from 1997.¹ And both nationally and internationally, there is still much to be said when comparing Cisneros' first texts and her more recent ones. This paper aims thus to bridge this gap by targeting two works by Cisneros - *The House on Mango Street* and her 2021 dual-language text *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish* -, and investigating the importance of linguistic choices in representing female identities and the experience of otherness in Cisneros' writings.²

The title of this paper³ is inspired by a passage in *The House on Mango Street* in which Esperanza, the main protagonist of the novel, and, more importantly, its narrator, reveals some uneasiness regarding her own name and specially the fact that it is constantly mispronounced by English speakers, including her teachers: "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth" (*House* 11). Ironically, this is something that happened not in fiction but in real life to another major American female writer who also had to deal with a

hyphenated identity: Toni Morrison (1931-2019) whose birth name was actually Chloe Anthony Wofford. As the celebrated African American writer and Nobel prize winner reveals in the 2019 documentary by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*, she felt the need to change her own name to avoid hearing it mispronounced over and over, particularly by her teachers (00:23:40'-00:24:26'). It is rather surprising that teachers, who are supposed to favour accuracy at all levels, would be the first to neglect the importance of getting a student's name rightly pronounced. As Proust puts it, in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, a person's name is not a minor thing. It is an integral part of one's identity or, in Proust's own words, "la simple carte photographique d'identité" (754).

The fact is that Esperanza's English-speaking teachers couldn't or simply didn't bother getting her name right. When pronounced by Spanish speakers the name acquired "a softer something" (*House* 11) but even so it remained problematic for Esperanza: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting" (*House* 10). Thus, it is not only the sounds, the pronunciation, that cause the name to be sad, but the world of memories and female experiences that it evokes, particularly in connection to her great-grandmother whose name she inherited but whose fate she utterly rejects: "She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse - which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female - but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (*House* 10).⁴ Since Esperanza's great-grandmother refused to get married, Esperanza's great-grandfather literally forced her by throwing "a sack over her head" and taking her away as if she were a disposable thing, or "a fancy chandelier", as Esperanza puts it in *House* (11):

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. **I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.**

. . .

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. **Something like Zeze the X will do.** (*House* 11, emphasis added)

For Cisneros, Zeze the X is an "exotic and wild" name (Satz and Cisneros 172) inspired by her passionate reading of *Autobiography of Malcolm X*: "I loved the X in Malcolm X

and the idea of his choosing that as a name” (Satz and Cisneros 171). Malcolm X (1925-1965), the well-known African American social rights activist, is, without a doubt, a powerful inspirational figure against oppressive heritages and the letter X, often used in maths to indicate an unknown quantity or value, can be understood as a clear interrogation of the future, leaving it open to all sorts of exciting developments, not a previously written inescapable life script.

Furthermore, while the Spanish word “Esperanza” brings back a universe of eventless sadness, the English word “Hope” clearly connects to the promises of the American Dream and the possibility of a life not framed by male windows. In 2006, Barack Obama published a book in which he urges all Americans to reclaim the American Dream. He named it *The Audacity of Hope* and this powerful phrase could easily be applied to Esperanza’s attitude. By searching a reinvention of the self and claiming her rightful connection to the English language, she audaciously reaffirmed her hope to be an independent woman and an American writer, much like Cisneros herself (Betz 18).

Additionally, as Regina Betz points out, if, in *The House on Mango Street*, English was, for women, “an avenue to their future outside of poverty and male-dominated households” (Betz 26), for men, it could be a sign of progress and openness. Men who cannot speak English are seen, by Esperanza, as “disappointments” (Betz 22), an assessment that, to some extent, applies to her own father (Betz 25). The inability to speak fluent English becomes like an impairment as it reinforces a tendency to look inwards instead of creating bridges with the larger anglophone community. It simultaneously reveals and perpetuates an innate mistrust of the Mexican community towards everybody and every place that is not contained by the limits of their own community. As Betz further explains: “Cisneros is certain to portray the community’s fear to leave its boundaries, and this is due to feeling threatened and insecure” (21).

However, this vision clearly contrasts with Esperanza’s feelings. Her goal is to surpass those elusive boundaries between communities as soon as possible as she longs for an American identity and a fulfilled life of her own away from the constraints and the traps of the barrio. Unlike Mexican males, it is within the barrio that Esperanza truly feels threatened and insecure. In this respect, through Esperanza’s eyes, Cisneros counterpoints the optimistic depiction that Chicano writers often make of their neighbourhoods:

I have lived in the barrio, but I discovered later on in looking at works by my [male] contemporaries that they write about the barrio as a colorful, Sesame Street-like,

funky neighborhood. To me the barrio was a repressive community. I found it frightening and very terrifying for women. The future for women in the barrio is not a wonderful one. You don't wander around "these mean streets." You stay at home. If you have to go somewhere, you take your life in your hands. So I wanted to counter those colorful viewpoints, which I'm sure are true to some extent but were not true for me. (Satz and Cisneros 168-9)

What is particularly interesting about Cisneros is that she is able to demonstrate, through her writing and characters, that one can experience a feeling of estrangement and otherness⁵ towards multiple groups. Her vision of the barrio clearly differed from that of her Mexican American male contemporaries, but her vision of life in general was also very much different from her non-Mexican female and male colleagues at the University of Iowa, for example:

I went to school at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and everyone was writing about the sun shining and beautiful gardens, but those things weren't in my life. I think it was important for me to have the cultural shock I experienced at Iowa, for me to experience my otherness, in order for me to choose my subject intentionally. (Satz and Cisneros 167)

Well, theirs [her university colleagues' style] was a very distilled writing, I suppose it was a true voice for my classmates, but my attempt to imitate an esoteric style of writing was untrue to my experiences. I think everyone has to stumble around to find her voice. Coming from a working class background, an ethnic community, an urban community, a family that did not have books in the house, I just didn't have the same frames of reference as my classmates. It wasn't until I realized and accepted that fact that I came upon the subjects I wanted to write about. (Satz and Cisneros 169)

Cisneros eventually found "the street child's voice" (Satz and Cisneros 169) of Esperanza and through one *woman-girl's* vision of Mango Street (Satz and Cisneros 166), Cisneros meant to represent the plights of all the other girls and women living in the barrio, including herself and her mother. Awful things can happen to women in the barrio: confinement, sexual harassment, physical assault, teenage pregnancies, neglect, rape. Women are constantly under surveillance and accusation, and most of the times their only crime is simply being "too beautiful" (*House* 79, 81) or eager to enjoy life. Sometimes, though, being underestimated for being just a girl can actually pay off. That was precisely what happened to Cisneros:

I think in a way it's fortunate that I was a girl because my father thought it was all right that I was interested in writing and literature. He thought I was only a girl and therefore what harm could come of it? I would eventually get married and if I wanted to go to college and major in creative writing or literature, that was okay because I'd get married anyway. So he ignored it, whereas my mother, I think, lived through me vicariously, and she has supported me and is supporting me now. She is very happy about the choices I've made. (Satz and Cisneros 168)

The importance, influence, and presence of her mother's voice in her writings (and in her decision to write) is repeatedly acknowledged by Cisneros in her interviews (Satz and Cisneros 170-1) and public talks. I have extensively quoted from one of them, her interview to Martha Satz dating back to 1997, which is quite revealing of Cisneros' inspirational sources, but the writer revisits the topic on many other occasions. Cisneros' mother insisted on taking her to libraries and borrowing books so that, although they could not afford to buy books, they could still be surrounded by them (Satz and Cisneros 167). As to Cisneros' father, it took more than a decade for him to celebrate her achievements as a writer:

[M]y father never acknowledged my success until very recently Because he is from Mexico City, he reads in Spanish. Last summer I read at the Colegio de Mexico and several of my pieces, especially pieces from *House on Mango Street*, had been translated. It was the first time he read anything I wrote. He had a funny response. He kind of looked at it and said "mmm," and in Spanish he said, "Who wrote this?" I said, "I did." And he looked at it and said "Mmm, who helped you?" I think he's secretly been very pleased to see my name on books. And I'm very proud of it because I'm the only daughter of a family of six sons - very traditional sons at that - who always made me feel as if I was not a Cisneros because I was a girl and would forfeit my name at marriage. **I'm very pleased to see that I'm the one who put the name on that book cover.** (Satz and Cisneros 168, my emphasis)

Cisneros' final confession (the pleasure she obtained from immortalising the name of the Cisneros family through her literary works) demonstrates the instrumental power of writing when it comes to women's affirmation.

Echoing, but also questioning, Virginia Woolf and her famous *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in Cisneros' *Bildungsroman*, *The House on Mango Street*, female identity is not exactly dependent on getting a room but a whole house (cf. Pérez 92 and 94), away from the barrio and, consequently, away from the Spanish language. As Lorna Pérez points out, Woolf's "class and race biases" (91) were something that Cisneros

could not overlook despite her importance as a female precursor. And indeed, one may ask if there would be room in Woolf's *Room* for a working-class Chicana like Esperanza (or Cisneros)? Pérez labels Cisneros' attitude towards the Woolfian text as a "Radical Revision" (80), and this revisionary impetus goes beyond Woolf to encompass other central names of "the Western literary and theoretical canon" such as: "Sherwood Anderson, Gaston Bachelard, . . . and tangentially Emily Dickinson" (80). Particularly interesting is Cisneros' revisitation of Bachelard's idealization of houses in *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Esperanza's house on Mango Street, though being the family's property, which is an important achievement, is far from being a felicitous place to house memories. It does not even correspond to the family's most basic wishes, but it is better than their previous flat on Loomis which even granted her the scorn of a nun from her school:

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

There. . . . You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing.

There. I lived *there*. I nodded.

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The House on Mango Street isn't it. (*House 5*)

What are the requirements for Esperanza's ideal house then?

A House of My Own

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after.

Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.

108 Sandra Cisneros

This section of *House* perfectly illustrates the way form and content complement each other in Cisneros' text to produce meaning. The title of the section is presented in a shape that clearly evokes a multistorey house, with letter A resembling a pointy roof and the rest of the words organised as floors, almost like a castle from a fairy tale. Esperanza's house, "not a flat", is to be a haven for herself and those who wish to write their own story (or their own poems), but cannot escape the vicious cycles of places like Mango Street (*House* 84-5); all those would like to live in a nice house on the hills, but cannot afford it (*House* 86-7); all those who are able to envision an alternative way of life and are brave enough to follow it without scorning those who simply dare not. It is a comfortable house among the privileged people but without their tendency to overlook those who are not fortunate enough to "sleep close to the stars" (*House* 86). As Karen Martin points out:

Cisneros's rejection of the idealized bourgeois home is paralleled by the non-traditional narrative structure she chose for her debut work of fiction. Rather than adhering to the generic norms favored by male-centered literary traditions, and correspondingly by commercial interests, her text is structured as a series of titled vignettes inhabited by a gallery of marginalized, primarily female characters. These narrative fragments are uncharacterizable as short stories, novella or novel, yet anchored and given internal cohesion and narrative kinesthesia by the presence of the adolescent narrator, Esperanza. (Martin 58)

Almost three decades after her debut with *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros presents the readers with another interesting but bewildering text: *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish* (2021). The readers meet another woman, Corina, who, like Esperanza, wanted to become a writer (*Martita* 7) and she does not allow the barrio boundaries nor her father's demands to keep her from trying. On the contrary, she mimics the steps of many renowned American writers in coming to Europe, and specially Paris, to fulfil that dream, but, despite her efforts, she does not succeed (*Martita* 14). We encounter her at a point in her life in which she is leading a conventional life, in Chicago, a city she abhorred (*Martita* 14), as a wife and working mother of two. Once again, the narrative is strikingly short and a house lies at the centre of the story too, as Corina is in the process of renovating her house, a painful and slow labour conducted after work, on weekdays, or on Saturdays (*Martita* 49), when she should instead be resting:

Most Saturdays you can find me in the dining room with my scraper and blowtorch, once the kitchen is clean and the girls are at the library. . . .

The varnish peels off in stubborn ribbons, a practice in patience. I've got no right to complain. It was my idea to strip the wood instead of paint. (*Martita* 3)

Much like *House*, *Martita* is an unconventional text: it is quite short (51-pages long) and the thoughts and memories of Corina, the narrator, are interspersed by letters exchanged with her two old friends - Martita and Paola -, women she lost touch with as she became a different person from the one she wished to be. For a long time, Corina saw her life as Esperanza saw her house on Mango Street - not worthy of pointing to, not worthy of being shared - and, consequently, she ceased all communication with her friends:

I should've answered your letter. Some things that happened to me were wonderful, and some parts were only good because they passed. When things were bad, I kept thinking better was just around the corner, and by the time I had the energy to raise my head and take a look at my life, years and years had passed. Forgive me. I didn't want to admit to myself this was all I had to tell you, this life of mine. At the time, it didn't seem enough, not what I expected, not what I had ordered, not what I wanted to share. Do you understand? (*Martita* 45)

Corina, Martita and Paola were best friends just like Esperanza, Rachel and Lucy in *House*. Multilanguage allies in a male world, they walk the streets of Paris "arm-in-arm, the way women walk together in Latin America to tell men [they] are good girls", to be left alone and unharmed (*Martita* 45). Martita speaks the "Spanish of Argentines" while Paola "speaks Spanish and English and Italian all at the same time" (*Martita* 11) and she believes that being proficient in many languages is a clear asset: "I can defend myself in three languages and am working on a fourth. . . . When others drown, I float" (*Martita* 41). When they go their separate ways, they maintain communication for a while, but not everything happens according to the plan for Corina, and she ceases all contact.

We don't know what happened to Esperanza and her dreams of acquiring that one house and fulfilling her literary plans, but we sense that Corina is a sibling soul and could well be her older self. Their way of looking at a very unequal and unfair world completely matches as their uneasiness of being looked down by others also matches: "I work for the gas company on Michigan Avenue. . . . Because I was so tired of being poor, so frightened of it. Going to work with clothes that always give you away" (*Martita* 48). Corina's confession is similar to Esperanza's when she is forced to wear her "old saddle shoes" (*House* 47) at a baptism party or when she is

mocked by that nun on account of her house. They also use almost the same words to express their disapproval of privilege and privileged people:

The city is beautiful if you can get to the lakefront every day. You have to be rich to do that without exhausting yourself. Any city is beautiful if you're rich.

I think it's curious how the rich always have more light and sky and pretty lawn. How when you're just trying to get by, there isn't time to take care of those little things that make for such big happinesses, is there? (*Martita* 49)

In the end, Corina comes to terms with her own life and respective twists (unsuccessful writing aspirations, a miscarriage and a failed first marriage with the love of her life). She has a job and a husband she can depend on (*Martita* 48), two daughters she loves and simple pleasures to enjoy - a book, coffee, and a square of light of her own:

This morning, rereading your letters and drinking my coffee in the kitchen and sitting under a little square of sunlight that comes through the lace curtain in a graceful pattern, just sitting here and looking at the walls and not thinking anything special. Just to be able to sit, nice and warm in this lovely square of sunlight, and to not have to go to work today, and no one calling me, and the house very quiet for once, my Richard and our lovely girls all safe and snug at the library. And far away the sound of the expressway whooshing like the ocean, and to realize suddenly... happiness. (*Martita* 50)

Cisneros' 2021 text, Corina's confession to her Spanish-speaking friend Martita, presents itself as a dual text in English and Spanish lending the two languages the very same status and avoiding precedence, but without totally blending them. It is as if Cisneros as a mature writer no longer feels the need to use English as a means to support her identity or to embody her "feminisms", as Betz suggests, referring to *The House on Mango Street* (19). The idea of offering the readers the two versions simultaneously shows that Cisneros was indeed able to accommodate her Mexican origins with her American self-defining experiences. As Cisneros explains, "growing up Mexican and feminist is almost a contradiction in terms", but, just as it happened with other writers, she was able to redefine her "Mexicanness" to reconcile it with her American culture (Satz and Cisneros 170).⁶ In other words, she eventually found a way to reconcile two conflicting identities, languages and set of expectations: "When she thinks in her father's language, she knows sons and daughters don't leave their parents' house until they marry. When she thinks in English, she knows she should've

been on her own since she was eighteen” (Cisneros, *A House of My Own* 272). Thus, language ceased to be an issue, a problem, and unlike to what happened to the teenage narrator Esperanza, the mature narrator Corina, mimicking Cisneros’ development process, was able to reach, since the very first day of publication, a huge audience of English and Spanish readers.

It is worth remembering that, after living in many corners of the world, and different places in the USA, Cisneros is currently living in Mexico, thus completing a full circle in her life. As the author explains in the “Epilogue” section of *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*, she felt it was time to explore her other half: “I’ve been living in the Fatherland for a long time. Now it’s time to explore the Motherland. . .” (370). The Motherland is another word for Mexico, which could be surprising, at first, since Cisneros usually associates the country and its traditions with her father. As to the writer’s official website (<https://www.sandrakisneros.com/>), it is almost entirely bilingual (English and Spanish), although English is the predominant idiom in some sections.

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² The word "writings" was intently chosen here because classifying Cisneros' texts is hard work as their style and readership are quite varied. Cisneros describes her first book as follows: "[*The House on Mango Street*] seems to be marketed as a young people's book, but my readers range anywhere from second

graders to university students to housewives. I like the fact that it has such a range. It's written, I suppose, with the intent that it can be read as single stories or as a novel. It does have one general theme" (Satz and Cisneros 166).

³ This paper stems from a broader post-doctoral research project titled "A Consciousness of One's Own: Mapping English Modernist Legacies in the 21st Century Writings of Two American Female Writers - Sandra Cisneros and Lucy Ellmann", initiated in October 2022, at Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto.

⁴ A decade after the publication of *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros' poem "Dulzura" seems to contradict this discomfort with Spanish by associating the language with the realm of intimate relationships: "Make love to me in Spanish./ Not with that other tongue./ . . . / Say my name. Say it./ The way it's supposed to be said" (Cisneros n. pag.).

⁵ On the concept of "otherness" and the process of "othering" in Cisneros' novel see Vichiensing's "Investigating 'Othering' in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" (2018).

⁶ Cisneros' full quote reads as follows: "I think that growing up Mexican and feminist is almost a contradiction in terms. For a long time - and it's true for many writers and women like myself who have grown up in a patriarchal culture, like the Mexican culture - I felt great guilt betraying that culture. Your culture tells you that if you step out of line, if you break these norms, you are becoming anglicized, you're becoming the malinche - influenced and contaminated by these foreign influences and ideas. But I'm very pleased to be alive among the current generation of women. Many writers are redefining our Mexicanness and it's important if we're going to come to terms with our Mexican culture and our American one as well" (Satz and Cisneros 170). Cisneros' divide echoes Eduardo Manet's experience with the Spanish language as he recounted a meeting with Samuel Beckett in Paris: "One day, I told him that I had decided not to go back to Cuba again. I wanted to write in another language, but abandoning Spanish was letting behind a literature nourished by great works. Thus, by taking this decision, I felt that I was committing an act of treason. Beckett reflected for a while before telling me: 'I've started to write in French because writing in the language of James Joyce was too heavy a burden to carry. . . . Then he added that I would eventually return to my native language, that languages were actually not that important as the important thing was the world created by the writer. Our homeland is the language in which we express ourselves'" (Manet qtd. in Tãm Van Thi 13-4, my translation).

Swede Levov: O Herói Trágico Americano de *American Pastoral*

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Abstract

This essay aims to analyse the character of Seymour "Swede" Levov in the novel *American Pastoral*, written by Philip Roth and published in 1997, as the first book of Roth's American Trilogy. For such, we start with an overview of the trilogy and provide background to the following works: *I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000). Then we move on to an analysis of the protagonist of *American Pastoral*. The study of the character is divided in three sections: the first section studies the character in itself and his conception of the American Dream, whereas the second section looks into his relationship with his wife, in order to reflect upon the female condition in the 1960's, as well as the role of the husband, from a feminist perspective. The third and fourth sections concern Swede's daughter, Merry, in order to focus on their relationship, study the consequences of generation gap, and address how this father/daughter relationship may illustrate the Electra Complex, as proposed by Carl Jung. The fourth sections combined will contribute to understand what originated the tragedy of Swede Levov, a central theme in the novel.

Keywords: Philip Roth; American Trilogy; Feminism; American Dream; Carl Jung

Resumo

Este ensaio tem como objetivo central analisar a personagem de Seymour "Swede" Levov no romance *American Pastoral*, escrito por Philip Roth e publicado em 1997, como o primeiro livro da Trilogia Americana. Para tal, partimos de uma visão geral da trilogia e fornecemos um pano de fundo para as restantes obras: *I Married a Communist* (1998) e *The Human Stain* (2000). Em seguida, passamos para a análise do protagonista de *American Pastoral*. O estudo da personagem está dividido em três partes: a primeira parte aborda a personagem e a sua conceção do Sonho Americano, enquanto a segunda parte se concentra na relação de Swede com a esposa, a fim de refletir sobre a condição feminina na década de 1960, bem como o papel do marido, segundo uma perspetiva feminista. A terceira e a quarta partes incidem sobre a filha de Swede, Merry, focando o relacionamento dos dois, as consequências do conflito entre gerações, e o modo como a esta relação entre pai e filha poderá constituir-se como exemplo do

Complexo de Electra, tal como descrito por Carl Jung. As quatro partes permitirão compreender melhor a tragédia de Swede Levov, um dos temas centrais do romance.

Palavras-chave: Philip Roth; Trilogia Americana; Feminismo; Sonho Americano; Carl Jung

Introdução: *American Pastoral* e a Trilogia Americana

Em 1997, Philip Roth publica o primeiro volume da que viria a ser conhecida como a Trilogia Americana, composta por três romances: *American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998) e *The Human Stain* (2000), narradas pelo já conhecido Nathan Zuckerman, que, após passar a barreira dos sessenta anos de idade, opta por uma vida de seclusão, devotando-se essencialmente à sua escrita.

O presente artigo centra-se em *American Pastoral*, e mais concretamente no seu protagonista masculino, Seymour “Swede” Levov, para a partir de tal observação considerar os papéis de género refletidos na sua relação com a esposa, Dawn Levov, e com a filha, Merry Levov. Artigos como “Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*” (2000), de Marshall Bruce Gentry, e “Roth and gender” (2007), de Debra Shostak, já afloraram esta questão, mas o presente artigo diferencia-se dos demais porque aplica na sua análise ferramentas conceptuais decorrentes da leitura de *The Feminine Mystique*, de Betty Friedan, e *The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, de Carl Jung, o que não acontece com Gentry; e toma como objeto de estudo *American Pastoral*, ao contrário de Shostak que se foca essencialmente nos romances *Portnoy’s Complaint* e *Sabbath’s Theater*.

Tal como é analisado no quinto capítulo do livro *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth*, de Elaine B. Safer, Roth escreve a sua trilogia para documentar os três grandes acontecimentos da segunda metade do século XX na América que talharam a sua geração: a Guerra no Vietname e a contracultura dos anos 1960 (*American Pastoral*), o Macarthismo na década de 1950 (*I Married a Communist*) e a histeria do politicamente correto, culminando no escândalo do final dos anos 90 com Bill Clinton como protagonista (*The Human Stain*). Ou seja, começando em 1997 e acabando em 2000, numa soma total que ultrapassa as mil páginas, Roth, pela voz de Zuckerman, escreve, em jeito de tragédia, uma longa crónica das inquietações americanas desde os anos 1940 até ao final do século.

No entanto, a estratégia de Roth não passa por fazer dos seus romances documentos históricos. Durante a década de 1960, Roth confessou que o país estava a um ritmo que não conseguia acompanhar (Alexander 183). Como explica Edward

Alexander: “life was becoming so fantastic that it was outstripping the capacity of the novelist’s imagination” (183). Roth foi assim aprimorando o que chama de “fake autobiography, false history . . . a half-imaginary existence out of the actual drama of my life” (Alexander 183). Embora a Trilogia Americana não seja exatamente “false history”, o autor, recorrendo à ficção, consegue entrelaçar o privado com o público, ou seja, desenhar a experiência americana partindo do plano pessoal, cotidiano e familiar, assim como é defendido por Mark Shcechner, referindo-se a *American Pastoral*: “the sixties Cultural Revolution is merely backstory, Zeitgeist, a bridge to get from insurrection in the street to mutinity in the family room. Roth is otherwise preoccupied: he is vexed mainly by fatherhood” (143).

A Trilogia Americana de Roth dá-nos a conhecer Seymour Levov, em *American Pastoral*, Ira “Iron Rinn” Ringold, em *I Married a Communist*, e Coleman “Silky” Silk, em *The Human Stain*. A jornada destas três personagens é antecedida por outras figuras masculinas, que agem como mentores dos protagonistas: Swede é instruído pelo pai, Lou Levov, na arte da industrialização de luvas, herdando a poderosa fábrica Newark Maid; enquanto Iron Rinn (que depois passa o que aprendeu para o narrador Zuckerman, quando este é adolescente) é doutrinado por Johnny O’ Day, que lhe ensinou tudo o que sabia sobre a ideologia Comunista durante o seu tempo no exército; e, por fim, Coleman Silk, é educado pelo pai, Clarence Silk, sobre como usar a língua de Shakespeare, aprendendo as principais tragédias do dramaturgo. (Relativamente a Silk, é importante também mencionar a influência dos seus treinadores no seu desenvolvimento. Num capítulo intitulado “Slipping the Punch”, o primeiro treinador de Silk descreve-o como um “counterpuncher” (*The Human Stain* 90), ou seja, um boxista que ataca apenas em retaliação. Esta descrição de Silk é adequada, uma vez que a personagem, um afro-americano, passa por judeu, a partir do final da sua adolescência até ao final da sua vida. Silk não ataca, mas consegue retaliar com as opções que lhe são dadas. Todavia, o seu grande mentor viria a ser Doc Chizner: “You look like you look. . . . He’s going to think you’re Jewish” (*The Human Stain* 99).

Nos três romances, os protagonistas tentam seguir o caminho dos seus mentores, mas falham miseravelmente, sendo que as suas vidas resultam numa história trágica. Swede gere o negócio de família, herdado pelo pai, mas não consegue ter a família estável pela qual lutou, tal como o seu antecessor conseguiu; Rinn dedica-se à luta de classes do proletariado, mas é exposto em praça pública pela mulher enquanto um comunista; e Silk é demitido da universidade onde leciona um curso sobre literatura clássica por causa de um comentário que é interpretado como

tendo conotações racistas. Das três tragédias, a de Swede é provavelmente a mais complexa e a mais complicada de entender, visto que, no caso de Iron Rinn e de Coleman Silk, as suas quedas decorrem de factos públicos e profissionais, embora tenham em comum com Swede tensões familiares subjacentes.

Para entendermos melhor a personagem de Swede Levov devemos considerar dois aspetos: como a personagem lida com a sua própria ideia de inocência e como lida com a mulher e a filha. Tal como Schechner defende, a vida familiar de Swede é importante para o romance, mas não só, é fulcral para perceber a personagem.

Swede Levov no Jardim do Éden

Numa primeira leitura, a tragédia de *American Pastoral* é a “queda” de Swede, provocada pelo atentado terrorista cometido pela sua filha, Merry. A figura que Swede idolatra, um mito americano com o nome de Johnny Appleseed, pode ser visto como o primeiro passo em direção ao abismo. Swede tenta incansavelmente tornar-se nesta figura, pois, no seu entender: “Johnny Appleseed, that’s the man for me. Wasn’t a Jew, wasn’t an Irish Catholic, wasn’t a protestant Christian, . . . Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American, . . . Johnny Appleseed out there planting apple trees” (*American Pastoral* 316). Erradamente, Swede estende esta fantasia à sua família: “‘Who is his wife?’ ‘Dawn. Dawn Appleseed’ . . . ‘Sure he has a child . . . Merry Appleseed’” (*American Pastoral* 316). Swede começa assim a sua caminhada, passando de olhar para si enquanto judeu para a sua conceção do que é ser americano. Outro momento marcante desta transformação seria um dos seus discursos para Dawn: “We own a piece of America, Dawn. I couldn’t be happier if I tried. I did it, darling, I did it - I did what I set out to do!” (*American Pastoral* 316). No entanto, como percebemos com o decorrer do romance, Swede vive enrolado num mito e não na realidade. Um bom exemplo disto é a perceção errada do sítio onde decidiu construir a sua casa, Old Rimrock. Até ser informado pelo pai, Swede desconhecia o passado da zona onde desde cedo sonhou viver: “The Klan thrived out here in the twenties. Did you know that? The Ku Klux Klan. People had crosses burned on their property out here” (*American Pastoral* 309); e o seu irmão, Jerry, quem estabelece a ligação entre a filha, o mito do Sonho Americano e a causa da sua queda:

You longed to belong like everybody else to the United States of America? Well, you do now, big boy, thanks to your daughter. The reality of this place is right up in your kisser now. With the help of your daughter you’re as deep in the shit as a man can

get, the real American crazy shit. America amok! America amuck! (*American Pastoral* 277).

Tal como argumenta Elaine Safer, vemos aqui Roth a fazer uma justaposição entre a inocência e a realidade, na qual a ação do romance se justapõe à vivência concreta da sociedade americana, “engaged in the controversial Vietnam War” (84). Para além disso, vemos também a ironia de Roth a trabalhar, no sentido em que a visão pastoral de ser um Johnny Appleseed em Old Rimrock é permitida devido ao trabalho industrial produzido em Newark Maid, originando uma fusão com uma classe burguesa, a classe contra a qual Merry luta. É com a ruína da fábrica, nas instâncias finais do romance, que a visão de Swede começa a deteriorar-se: “The deterioration of the factory is part of the tragic loss of the old Downtown It connects to the personal tragedy of the Swede, and it symbolizes the catastrophic destruction of the nation’s American Dream” (Safer 86).

A deterioração do Sonho Americano, simbolizado pela fábrica, estabelece um elo de ligação com a destruição da figura quasi deusa de Swede, tal como é exemplificado por Marshall Bruce Gentry em “Newark Maid Feminism”: “When Swede remembers trying to save the factory from rioters, he momentarily reveals to the reader that he has not sufficiently appreciated his workers - here in the person of a black worker named Vicky” (78). Gentry sublinha um excerto de *American Pastoral* no qual Vicky confronta Swede em relação à fábrica: “This is mine too. You just own it” (*American Pastoral* 162). Assim, conseguimos perceber o fim da figura mitológica endeusada por Zuckerman no início do romance, pois Swede é forçada a abrir mão do seu feito heroico de salvar a fábrica.

O romance fecha com uma série de frases que acabam por ser das mais importantes e provocadoras de *American Pastoral*: “All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life! And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?” (413). Nada na vida dos Levov é imediatamente repreensível, mas estas vozes de fora, mencionadas por Zuckerman, incluindo a voz dos leitores, percebem que a visão de Swede é contraditória e, por consequência, inexequível. Poderíamos até trocar na citação anterior “life of Levovs” por “American Dream”. O que é menos repreensível que o sucesso de Swede, conquistado com trabalho árduo da sua parte e das gerações que o antecederam, que o levou a atingir o seu tão cobiçado American Dream? A resposta é dada por Marshall Bruce Gentry: “Roth has written a feminist novel about how Swede and the culture, the politics, the economic system he represents, have at least indirectly produced the nightmares they suffer” (78).

Swede acaba por se autodestruir, ao invés de ser destruído, quando começa a executar um plano de vida assente num mito e ignorando a afirmação da identidade feminina dos restantes elementos da família. Em retrospectiva, conseguimos perceber que o atentado terrorista de Merry é o bode expiatório para justificar a tragédia de Swede Levov. Esta apreciação da personagem de Swede traz uma nova força a uma outra frase emblemática de *American Pastoral*: “It’s getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again” (35).

Uma casa dividida: a relação de Swede com Dawn e Merry Levov

Em 1997, Philip Roth reconheceu que a matéria que compreende a sua obra é a vida masculina: “the circus of being a man . . . and the ringleader is the phallus” (Shostak 111). Para quem está minimamente familiarizado com a sua obra, esta afirmação não surpreende, uma vez que os três grandes narradores do cânone de Roth são masculinos, Zuckerman, Kepesh e Roth, assim como os protagonistas das restantes obras, ou seja, Portnoy, Sabbath ou Dixon. Proporcionalmente, também não é surpresa nenhuma que os protagonistas da Trilogia Americana, composta por *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* e *The Human Stain*, narrada por Nathan Zuckerman, sejam homens. Deste modo, adjacente às temáticas debatidas nestes três livros de Roth, a questão masculina e o papel do homem ocupam um lugar importante, mas insuficiente para se perceber a tragédia de Swede.

No início do romance, Zuckerman comenta que a vida da mãe de Swede encaixava nas normas sociais americanas do pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial: “one of the many women of that era who never dreamed of being free of the great domestic enterprise centered on the children” (*American Pastoral* 10). Em *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Alex descreve a mãe em situações semelhantes, elogiando a sua capacidade de gerir uma casa:

she grated her own horseradish rather than buy the *pischachs* they sold in a bottle, . . . she would telephone all the other women in the building drying clothes on the back lines . . . to tell them . . . a drop of rain had fallen on our windowpane . . . For mistakes she checked my sums; for holes, my socks; for dirt my nails. (14)

A longa descrição das atividades da sua mãe mostra as qualidades esperadas de uma mulher: o cuidado com a alimentação da família, a limpeza da casa, a roupa, a higiene e saúde da família, assim como o apoio escolar aos filhos. Esta longa descrição é

semelhante ao caso que é descrito por Betty Friedan, em *The Feminine Mystique*, evocando “Occupation: Housewife”, publicado pela revista *Ladies’ Home Journal* e escrito por Dorothy Thompson, uma colunista que direcionava os seus textos às donas de casa americanas. Com “Occupation: Housewife” a revista tentava passar a ideia de que uma dona de casa tinha várias carreiras, pondo-as em prática todos os dias:

The trouble with you, she scolds, is you don’t realize you are expert in a dozen careers, simultaneously. “You might write: business manager, cook, nurse, chauffeur, dressmaker, interior decorator, accountant, caterer, teacher, private secretary—or just put down philanthropist. . . . All your life you have been giving away your energies, your skills, your talents, your services, for love.” But still, the housewife complains, I’m nearly fifty and I’ve never done what I hoped to do in my youth—music—I’ve wasted my college education. (Friedan 68-9)

Talvez a mãe de Portnoy, ou a mãe de Swede, não se identifiquem com a última frase do excerto aqui citado, mas decerto que Dawn, a esposa de Swede, se revê nela.

Sabemos que Dawn frequentou o ensino superior, quando Zuckerman aborda o seu tempo como Miss New Jersey, mas o que resultou desse investimento na prática? O leitor percebe que Dawn foi forçada a levar uma vida semelhante à de Mrs Portnoy e Mrs Levov. No discurso de Swede sobre ter conquistado um pedaço dos Estados Unidos da América, ficam evidentes as múltiplas facetas da sua existência: “I’m with you, I’m with the baby, I’m at the factory during the day, the rest of the time I’m out here” (*American Pastoral* 315). Já a existência de Dawn é condicionada pelas ambições de Swede, ou seja, ele tem o direito ao trabalho, à tomada de decisões, enquanto a mulher e a família são meramente sítios de passagem no seu trajeto. Swede revive os tempos da geração do seu pai com a sua própria família, lembrando o comentário de *Gatsby* sobre reescrever o passado (Fitzgerald 106).

Outro aspeto da vida dos Levov que demonstra o papel passivo de Dawn é a sua opinião sobre a casa de Old Rimrock:

When he overheard her telling the architect, their neighbour Bill Orcutt, that she had always hated their house, the Swede was as stunned as if she were telling Orcutt she had always hated her husband. He went for a long walk, needed to walk almost the five miles down into the village to keep reminding himself that it was the house she said she’d always hated. (*American Pastoral* 189)

É curioso, no entanto, perceber que Dawn forja um caminho quase semelhante ao de Swede para estabelecer a sua independência: começa com uma casa nova e tem um

caso com alguém fora da sua “tribo”, tornando o comentário de Swede ainda mais peculiar: “If she could marry a Jew, she could surely be a friendly neighbor to a Protestant—sure as hell could if her husband could” (*American Pastoral* 311). Com isto também conseguimos perceber que as amigas de Dawn eram forçadas pela parte de Swede, ou seja, se ele consegue fazer, então a esposa tem, obrigatoriamente, de executar as mesmas ações. De igual modo, Swede também controla a liberdade financeira de Dawn, sendo ele a financiar o seu negócio de gado.

Existe ainda outra camada no casamento de Swede e de Dawn que merece atenção, tal como é explicitado por Gentry: “Swede considers marrying Catholic Dawn Dwyer to be an act of rebellion against his father” (79). Esta ideia é corroborada por um comentário que já havia sido feito em *Portnoy’s Complaint*: “I don’t seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their background - as though through fucking I will discover America. *Conquer America*” (214). Debra Shostak, em “Roth and gender”, valida esta teoria explicando que:

The *shiksa* . . . is for the Jewish man the highly eroticized image of cultural difference . . . to disobey the rules that identify his body as Jewish and hence neither a “man” or fully “American”, . . . to reverse the implied hierarchy in the opposition by penetrating gentile America. (217)

Por conseguinte, O casamento com Dawn liberta Swede da opressão do seu pai e ajuda-o a alcançar o que a personagem entende como sendo a América. Dominar Dawn, no seu entender, é dominar a imagem que Swede projetou como a sua versão pessoal do Sonho Americano. O seu próprio irmão, Jerry Levov, partilha um comentário ilustrativo sobre a relação de Swede com a filha e a esposa: “you loved her as fucking thing. The way you love your wife” (*American Pastoral* 274).

Merry Appleseed: a semente de Swede Levov

Tal como acontece com Dawn, Swede também se mostra incapaz de aceitar as decisões da filha quando estas não se alinham com a sua visão. Um exemplo disto são as conversas sobre as viagens de Merry a Nova Iorque:

“What do you do when you go to New York? Who do you see in New York?” “What do I do? I go see New York. That’s what I do.” . . . “You’re involved with political people in New York.” . . . “Yes or no?” “They’re people, yes. They’re people with ideas, and some of them don’t b-b-b-believe in the war. Most of them don’t b-b-b-believe in the war.” . . . “You come home with all this Communist material. You come home with

all these books and pamphlets and magazines.” “I’m trying to *learn*. You taught me to *learn*, didn’t you? Not just to study, but to *learn*.” (*American Pastoral* 104)

Jerry comenta com Zuckerman a educação doméstica de Merry: “Just a liberal sweetheart of a father. The philosopher-king of ordinary life. Brought her up with all the modern ideas of being rational with your children. Everything permissible, everything forgivable, and she hated it” (*American Pastoral* 69); mas até que ponto é Swede verdadeiramente liberal, quando tudo o que foge à sua norma deixa de ser permitido? Tal como Merry lhe diz, “All you can think about, all you can talk about, all you c-c-care about is the well-being of this f-fucking l-l-little f-f-family!” (*American Pastoral* 107), dando a entender que o bem-estar da família depende dos seus critérios de avaliação e que o resto da sociedade fica excluída deste cuidado. Devido à falta de liberdade financeira, por exemplo, só com a aprovação de Swede é que Dawn teve meios para fazer uma cirurgia plástica.

Por outro lado, a gaguez de Merry pode ser vista como um sintoma do seu desconforto no seio da sua família, desaparecendo apenas quando esta começa a produzir bombas: “Assembling bombs had become her specialty . . . That’s when the stuttering first began to disappear. She never stuttered when she was with the dynamite” (*American Pastoral* 259). O mesmo acontece quando Merry se converte ao jainismo. Embora seja óbvia a razão pela qual Swede se opõe ao fabrico de bombas caseiras, o mesmo não acontece no que toca à escolha religiosa. No final do romance, percebemos, por fim, porque é que Swede não aprova as escolhas de Merry. Na verdade, sente vergonha do caminho que a filha tomou:

The Swede understood instantaneously what was happening. Merry had appeared in her veil! And told her grandfather that the death toll was four! She’d taken the train up from Newark and walked the five miles from the village. She’d come on her own! Now everyone knew! (*American Pastoral* 419)

Curiosamente, o tio, Jerry, embora manifestando-se sempre crítico face ao comportamento da sobrinha, confessa a Swede que teria tomado as mesmas decisões, caso fosse forçado a tamanho controlo: “I would have thrown a bomb. I would become a Jain and live in Newark. That Wasp bullshit! I didn’t know just how entirely muffled you were internally” (*American Pastoral* 280).

Por fim, o leitor apercebe-se da gravidade da personalidade controladora de Swede durante o seu diálogo com Sheila Salzman, quando lhe revela que sabe que a sua filha esteve escondida na casa da antiga terapeuta da fala. Nesta cena, o leitor

percebe que os problemas familiares dos Levov eram perceptíveis pela comunidade que os rodeava, quando Sheila diz: “She was upset and I didn’t know why. I thought something had happened at home” (*American Pastoral* 375). Ao receber esta informação, Swede explode, pois não consegue coexistir com outra visão que não a sua. Para além disso, o leitor também recebe uma nova perspetiva sobre a situação de Merry, dada por Sheila: “She’s not an animal. She’s not like a cat or a bird that you can keep in a cage. She was going to do whatever she was going to do” (*American Pastoral* 375). Schechner argumenta que Merry é o retorno da consciência judia do seu pai, a parte que foi reprimida por Swede (47); mas, como podemos ver no romance, a personagem também é o retorno da personalidade feminista de Dawn, reprimida ao longo dos anos. Em suma, Merry é filha dos seus pais, a semente que Applesseed Levov plantou: a materialização de tudo o que estava reprimido.

A batalha de Electra em *American Pastoral*

Swede falhou ao tentar controlar Dawn, mas teve uma taxa de insucesso ainda maior com Merry. Por outro lado, os conflitos entre Merry e Dawn também são muitos e começam devido à gaguez da filha, sendo que a mãe adota uma postura mais rígida na abordagem ao problema e Swede mostra-se sempre mais flexível:

He was the parent she could always rely on not to jump all over her every time she opened her mouth. “Cool it,” he would tell Dawn, “relax, lay off her,” but Dawn could not help herself. Merry began to stutter badly and Dawn’s hands were clasped at her waist and her eyes fixed on the child’s lips, eyes that said, “I know you can do it!” while saying, “I know that you can’t!” Merry’s stuttering just killed her mother, and that killed Merry. “I’m not the problem—Mother is!” (*American Pastoral* 90)

Para além disso, Zuckerman revela que era a Swede que Merry, em confiança, falava sobre os problemas que tinha com a mãe:

He was the one she could talk to. “Daddy, let’s have a conversation.” More often than not, the conversations were about Mother. She would tell him that Mother had too much say about her clothes, too much say about her hair. Mother wanted to dress her more adultlike than the other kids. Merry wanted long hair like Patti, and Mother wanted it cut. (*American Pastoral* 226)

Esta posição antagónica perante a mãe lembra a descrição do Complexo de Electra, tal como surge em *The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, de Carl Jung:

in the daughter, the typical affection for the father develops, with a correspondingly jealous attitude toward the mother. We call this complex, the Electra-complex Electra took revenge on her mother for the murder of her husband, because that mother had robbed her of her father. (69)

Embora Dawn não tenha tentado assassinar o marido, os ciúmes por parte de Merry são visíveis, sendo que o culminar destes sentimentos está presente num dos mais importantes momentos do romance:

“Daddy, kiss me the way you k-k-kiss umummother.” Sun-drank himself . . . he had looked down to see that one of the shoulder straps of her swimsuit had dropped over her arm, and there was her nipple, the hard red bee bite that was her nipple . . . , and kissed her stammering mouth with the passion that she had been asking him for all month long. (*American Pastoral* 89-90)

Conseguimos perceber, aqui, que houve a possibilidade de um romance incestuoso entre Swede e Merry, decorrente da ingenuidade dos dois. Do mesmo modo, percebemos que Swede não conseguiu controlar Merry, pois esta é quem controla o pai, ao colocar em questão o seu autocontrolo e equilíbrio:

Never in his entire life, not as a son, a husband, a father, even as an employer, had he given way to anything so alien to the emotional rules by which he was governed, and later he wondered if this strange parental misstep was not the lapse from responsibility for which he paid for the rest of his life. (*American Pastoral* 91)

Depois deste beijo, Swede interroga-se se foi este o momento-chave que desencadeou a tragédia. Embora Swede consiga fazer uma avaliação crítica dos seus erros, continua a olhar para a situação do lado errado do telescópio: a tragédia continua a ser medida numa escala de quem controla quem.

Por fim, a relação incestuosa acaba por se consumir, de forma indireta, através do contacto entre Swede e Rita Cohen. Começando pela personagem de Cohen, Swede projeta nela os seus pensamentos mais perversos sobre Merry, como defende Gentry. Proporcionalmente, é com Rita Cohen que as suas fantasias sexuais com Merry sobem à tona: “All locked up like that. Let’s fuck, D-d-d-daddy” (*American Pastoral* 144). Conseguimos perceber que há uma correlação entre Merry e Cohen quando ambas tratam Swede pelo mesmo termo, “daddy”. Ainda sobre a relação incestuosa entre os dois, Gentry (81) sublinha que quando Swede descobre que Merry

foi violada, imagina-se enquanto um dos violadores, não como alguém que a poderá tirar daquela situação, ignorando também tudo o resto que a filha lhe disse: “Only the rape was imaginable. Imagine the rape and the rest is blocked out” (*American Pastoral* 266).

Em suma, a relação de controlador-controlado de Merry e Swede, respetivamente, não difere da relação que este tem com a sua esposa, Dawn. A ingenuidade de Swede leva-o a tentar controlar a sua filha do mesmo modo que controla a sua mulher, através de estímulos sexuais. A tragédia do romance não provém da tentativa falhada de educar a sua filha, mas sim de não ter a maturidade e a capacidade de perceber Merry enquanto pessoa independente separada do pai. É Swede que quer voltar ao momento em que beijou Merry, não o contrário, para reverter a cadeia de controlo que perdeu.

Conclusão

A receção crítica de *American Pastoral* é bem documentada pelos investigadores que trabalharam a obra. Gentry recupera algumas críticas escritas aquando da publicação do romance, tais como a de Louis Menad, para a revista *New Yorker*, que afirma que Roth deu um passado em direção à “cultural right” (Gentry 77) e acrescenta que alguns leitores caem no erro de olhar para Swede enquanto vítima: “a good man punished for his virtues” (Gentry 74). Percebemos que a tragédia de Swede advém das suas ações e comportamentos durante a sua vida adulta, tais como tentar emular os comportamentos do pai, replicar o ambiente em que cresceu com a sua esposa, assim como ceder à sua filha, devido à sua própria ingenuidade.

No final do romance, Swede confesse a Zuckerman que sofreu com um cancro da próstata, a personagem parece ter, finalmente, vingado na vida. O narrador informa o leitor que Swede voltou a casa e é pai de dois filhos. Ou seja, Swede teve uma segunda oportunidade para ser um patriarca, deixando o leitor a adivinhar se a personagem criou os dois rapazes do mesmo modo que ele e o irmão foram criados, e se conseguiu um casamento equilibrado, coisa que não teve com Dawn. Mesmo no final de *Pastoral*, o sucesso de Swede é medido pela única coisa que sempre lhe interessou: a sua aparência. Se Swede consegue passar a imagem que quer, então teve uma vida de sucesso. Se Swede consegue controlar a sua família, então foi bem-sucedido nos objetivos que se propôs alcançar.

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The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man and *The Human Stain*: A Comparative Study on Two Passing Novels

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Abstract

The main objective of this essay is to analyse and compare two novels about passing, published in the USA in different periods: James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* (2000). Thus, one of the main aims of the essay is to show how the passing motif is constructed by the main characters, therefore revealing what the reasons that led them to perform the passing phenomenon are. The essay includes an introductory part in which the passing theme is presented, and in which the main objectives are outlined. The following two sections are devoted to the analysis of the two novels. The main purpose is to describe the passing phenomenon in each novel, delving into the reasons that induce the protagonists to undertake another life, sidelining, in this way, their African American heritage. Subsequently, a concluding part will follow, in which final considerations will be drawn, and points of difference and similarities between the two characters will be underlined. This essay represents another contribution to the passing trope in literature, while also reconsidering the American ideal of freedom.

Keywords: Passing trope; American ideals; American literature; Afro-Americans

Resumo

O objetivo deste ensaio é analisar e comparar duas obras sobre o fenómeno do *passing*, publicadas em diferentes períodos nos Estados Unidos da América. As obras em análise são *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) de James Weldon Johnson e *The Human Stain* (2000) de Philip Roth. O artigo debruça-se sobre como o *passing* é construído pelas personagens principais, mostrando as razões que os levaram a fazê-lo. Na introdução o tema do *passing* é exposto bem como os objetivos principais do estudo. As seguintes secções focam-se na análise

das duas obras, tendo como propósito descrever a existência desse leitmotiv nas mesmas, investigando os motivos que provocam a mudança de vida dos protagonistas, deixando assim de lado a herança afro-americana. Posteriormente, seguir-se-á uma parte conclusiva, em que considerações finais serão expostas, assim como pontos em comum e principais diferenças entre as duas obras. Este ensaio representa mais uma contribuição sobre o tropo do *passing* na literatura, reconsiderando também o ideal americano de liberdade.

Palavras-chave: Tropo do *passing*; Ideais americanos; Literatura americana; Afro-americanos

Introduction

During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, there was a great proliferation of passing novels. Passing is a literary trope, but also a real practice. African Americans with light skin could pass as White, therefore claiming another identity, and neglecting their Black heritage. The long and suffered history of racial discrimination, mainly in terms of equal opportunities, led to this widespread phenomenon. Belonging to the White community meant having access to more opportunities. As Patrice D. Rankine argues in “Passing as Tragedy: Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*, the Oedipus Myth, and the Self-Made Man” (2005):

Passing is a strong trope, both a historical reality and one of America’s most abiding literary motifs. Passing is the possibility of race change, the individual’s potential escape from what at times amounts to a deterministic, social blight. It might be said to allow the individual to succeed despite the odds against him or her racially. (101)

The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912) by James Weldon Johnson and *The Human Stain* (2000) by Philip Roth were written in two different periods, but both address the passing theme. The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which James Weldon Johnson and Philip Roth construct the passing narrative in these two novels, by analysing the reasons that made the two protagonists decide to pass as White and the ways in which they deal with the past life they have left behind. Thus, the research questions that guide this article are: Which are the reasons of their passing? How do the protagonists construct the lie? How do they live in their “passing life”? Do they ever look at their past life? This paper will try to answer these questions and it will show that these two stories present two different ways of passing and two different attitudes represented by the respective protagonists.

Literature on passing narratives is extensive and tries to investigate the reasons that led the main characters to enact the passing phenomenon. *Passing: Identity and*

Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion (2001) edited by María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg is a relevant contribution inasmuch as it provides general lines on how the passing phenomenon works, stressing also its heterogenous character. Schlossberg states in the introduction: “If passing wreaks havoc with accepted systems of social recognition and cultural intelligibility, it also blurs the carefully marked lines of race, gender, and class, calling attention to the ways in which identity categories intersect, overlap, construct, and deconstruct one another” (2). Passing narratives are interesting ways to unravel assumptions regarding identity, and, in general terms, they undermine and disrupt the so praised American ideal of freedom.

The main theories used for the development of this essay focus on the analysis of the passing trope in American novels, including Johnson’s and Roth’s works. Regarding James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, the leading studies are Richard Kostelanetz’s “The Politics of Passing: The Fiction of James Weldon Johnson” (1969); Salim Washington’s “Of Black Bards, Known and Unknown: Music as Racial Metaphor in James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*” (2002); and Steven Wandler’s “‘A Negro’s Chance’: Ontological Luck in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*” (2008). Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* presents a wider range of studies such as: Sander Gilman’s “Review: Dangerous Liaisons: Black Jews, Jewish Blacks, and the vagaries of racial definition” (1994); Ellen Gerstle’s “Reviewed Work: *The Human Stain: An American Tragedy* by Philip Roth” (2001); Dean J. Franco’s “Being Black, Being Jewish, and Knowing the Difference: Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*; Or, It Depends on What the Meaning of ‘Clinton’ is” (2004); Adam Meyer’s “Not Entirely Strange, but Not Entirely Friendly Either: Images of Jews in African American Passing Novels through the Harlem Renaissance” (2004); Patricia D. Rankine’s “Passing as Tragedy: Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*, the Oedipus Myth, and the Self-Made Man” (2005); or Michele Elam’s “Passing in the Post-Race Era: Danzy Senna, Philip Roth and Colson Whitehead” (2007). A comparative study on Johnson and Roth already exists, with the title “Racial Passing in James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*” (2011) written by Maria Luiza Cardoso de Aguiar. My proposed essay is a complementary contribution to Cardoso’s. There is one aspect that Cardoso did not mention in her analysis, which is the Jewish identity embraced by the protagonist of Roth’s novel. Bringing also into question the American ideal of freedom, my work corroborates the already existing conversation on the passing trope in Johnson’s and Roth’s novels, by adding further layers of discussion.

I. Passing in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

“And this is the dwarfing, warping, distorting influence which operates upon each colored man in the United States. He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, nor even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a colored man.”

- James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography*, 9

The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man was written by James Weldon Johnson and was first published in 1912 as an anonymous novel. Despite the title, the novel is not Johnson's autobiography, but a fictional novel based on the lives of people Johnson knew. As Kostelanetz points out: “. . . the book is an achieved example of a totally fictional memoir whose first-person narrator is so intimate and honest with his readers that they would, unless warned otherwise, accept his words as an authentic autobiography” (22). In *The Autobiography's* preface, the following is reported:

In these pages it is as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, is initiated into the “freemasonry”, as it were, of the race. These pages also reveal the unsuspected fact that prejudice against the Negro is exerting a pressure which, in New York and other large cities where the opportunity is open, is actually and constantly forcing an unascertainable number of fair-complexioned colored people over into the white race. (Johnson vii)

From this utterance, it is clear that the novel's plot is about a coloured man who passes as White, and this is even more highlighted in the first lines of chapter one, when the Ex-Colored Man states:

I know that in writing the following pages I am divulging the great secret of my life, the secret which for some years I have guarded far more carefully than any of my earthly possessions; and it is a curious study to me to analyze the motives which prompt me to do it. (Johnson 1)

The reader is, thus, informed, from the very beginning, that *The Autobiography* is a story of revelation, in which the narrator's “great secret” will be unveiled. Moreover, the narrator's feelings regarding his great secret are already present in the novel's first lines. Regret seems to pervade the narrator, as visible from the following quote: “And, too, I suffer a vague feeling of dissatisfaction, of regret, of almost remorse,

from which I am seeking relief, and of which I shall speak in the last paragraph of this account” (Johnson 1).

The Ex-Colored Man was born in Georgia, son of a Black woman and a White man belonging to the Southern aristocracy. The narrator’s father has been absent from the narrator’s life, though he has been financially supportive. This allowed them to have a wealthier life than other Black families could have at that time. The narrator lived his first nine years thinking of himself as a White kid, therefore, not knowing that he was African American. However, one day at school, he realizes the truth:

. . . but now, for the first time, I became conscious of it and recognized it. I noticed the ivory whiteness of my skin, the beauty of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, and how the long, black lashes that fringed and shaded them produced an effect that was strangely fascinating even to me. I noticed the softness and glossiness of my dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making my forehead appear whiter than it really was. How long I stood there gazing at my image I do not know. (Johnson 8)

This is the first time the protagonist becomes aware of his real identity. He, then, asks his mother if he is a “nigger” and his mother replies that he is not, that he is the son of a Black woman and of a White man, attempting to reassure him. At school, there are other Black kids, and he is not subject to discrimination. However, after knowing the truth, something changed within him:

. . . I had learned what their status was, and now I learned that theirs was mine. I had had no particular like or dislike for these black and brown boys and girls; in fact, with the exception of “Shiny”, they had occupied very little of my thought; but I do know that when the blow fell, I had a very strong aversion to being classed with them. So I became something of a solitary. (Johnson 10)

The narrator does not want to belong to the Black community, for he knows this group is subjected to discrimination. As Steven Wandler stresses in “A Negro’s Chance: ‘Ontological Luck’ in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*” (2008): “The real problem is that he no longer has the freedom to see himself, or to be seen by others, as an individual, but instead only as a member of a certain community” (580). Furthermore, he is aware that, from then onwards, he has to consider himself “not from a viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a *colored* man” (Johnson 9). The more he grows, the more he wants to fully understand what his position in the world is. Therefore, he begins to study the

Civil war, and to read newspapers. Also, he reads Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and this novel provides him with a clear representation of the way Black people were treated. Nevertheless, the Ex-Colored Man decides to honour his race:

I felt leap within me pride that I was colored; and I began to form wild dreams of bringing glory and honor to the Negro race. For days I could talk of nothing else with my mother except my ambitions to be a great man, a great colored man, to reflect credit on the race and gain fame for myself. (Johnson 21)

The Ex-Colored Man swings in different contexts, and he travels to different cities. It is in Jacksonville that he meets “the best class of colored people This was really my entrance into the race” (Johnson 34). There, he works as a cigar maker, and then, after the closing of the cigar factory, he moves to New York where he becomes a successful gambler and rag-music player. He always joins the “Club”, at that time one of the most famous spots in New York, frequented both by Black and White people.

The first time he performs a passing is involuntarily, and it happens when he travels to Europe. There, he is in a White milieu, with a White millionaire, so he unconsciously performs a passing, but it is not the definite one. However, while still in Europe, he remains convinced to honour his race, thus, he takes the decision to go back to the American South and become a Negro composer:

Finally, I settled the question on purely selfish grounds, in accordance with my millionaire's philosophy. I argued that music offered me a better future than anything else I had any knowledge of, and, in opposition to my friend's opinion, that I should have greater chances of attracting attention as a colored composer than as a white one. But I must own that I also felt stirred by an unselfish desire to voice all the joys and sorrows, the hopes and ambitions, of the American Negro, in classic musical form. (Johnson 69)

When he returns to the United States, he is often taken for a White man. From Nashville to Atlanta, he manages to travel by Pullman, a means of transport forbidden to Black people. The narrator, being light skin enough to pass as a White man, manages to travel on it. In the smoking-compartment, he listens to a conversation on the Negro issue; the Texan's opinion about black people is particularly loathsome: “You want us to treat niggers as equals. Do you want to see ‘em sitting around in our parlors? Do you want to see a mulatto South? To bring it right home to you, would you let your daughter marry a nigger?” (Johnson 76). Despite these harsh comments, the

Ex-Colored Man does not lose faith, and he continues his travels. However, the more he travels the more he realizes how reality really is:

. . . I was sometimes amused on arriving at some little railroad-station town to be taken for and treated as a white man, and six hours later, when it was learned that I was stopping at the house of the colored preacher or school teacher, to note the attitude of the whole town change. (Johnson 81)

The Ex-Colored man shifts between Blackness and Whiteness; he claims his Black identity, but, at the same time, he does not reject his White one: he takes advantage of the opportunities provided by his skin colour.

After witnessing a lynching in Macon, the Ex-Colored Man chooses to make a decisive leap:

. . . A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with; and shame for my country, that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should be the only civilized, if not the only state on earth, where a human being would be burned alive. My heart turned bitter within me

All along the journey I was occupied in debating with myself the step which I had decided to take. . . . I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead. (Johnson 88, 90)

He is ashamed of belonging to a race which is treated in this way, and he is ashamed to live in a country that allows this kind of atrocities. His decision to pass as White is also linked to a possibility of a better life that can provide him with a wide range of opportunities. He wants to be a successful man, but this is not feasible if he does not erase his Black identity. Therefore, he chooses to be labelled as a White man: “I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro, I would avail myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man’s success; and that, if it can be summed up in any one word, means “money” (Johnson 91). The last paragraphs of *The Autobiography* are full of bitterness and regret; the Ex-Colored Man reflects upon his position in the world and upon his passing as a White man. He states:

It is difficult for me to analyze my feelings concerning my present position in the world. Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people.

Several years ago I attended a great meeting in the interest of Hampton Institute at Carnegie Hall. . . . but the greatest interest of the audience was centered in Booker T. Washington . . . because of what he represented with so much earnestness and faith. . . . Beside them I feel small and selfish. I am an ordinarily successful white man who has made a little money. They are men who are making history and a race. I, too, might have taken part in a work so glorious. (Johnson 99)

Thus, the Ex-Colored Man feels like he betrayed his race. He feels like a coward, because he chose the easiest way out; he did not fight for his rights and for his race, like other Black men did. As he says, he has reached a successful life, but also an ordinary one. He is leading a life similar to every White man:

. . . and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. (Johnson 100)

He has foregone his dreams and his heritage for a “mess of pottage”, for nothing special. He has chosen the opportunistic side, losing, in this way, his “birthright”. In the end, he is not completely at ease with his life. The Ex-Colored Man thought that passing would have been the only way to be successful and to live a better life. As Patrice D. Rankine affirms: “Passing is an act of defiance that should result in economic and social benefits, but it is not a triumph for Johnson's protagonist. . . . The Ex-Colored Man carries the guilt resulting from a crime similar to murder: his race change is effectively suicide; he has blotted out his entire life” (Johnson 102).

In conclusion, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* presents another different way of passing. In front of the lynching, the Ex-Colored Man is ashamed of his country and of what his race must endure. In addition, his passing is also triggered by fear: fear of suffering a lynching, fear of being excluded and of not having the possibilities to succeed. However, his passing is more of a burden, a burden of regrets, than a freedom from suffering. His passing is tragic.

II. Passing in *The Human Stain*

“I sat on the grass, astonished, unable to account for what I was thinking: he has a secret. This man constructed along the most convincing, believable emotional lines, this force with a history as a force, this benignly wily, smoothly charming, seeming totality of a manly man nonetheless has a gigantic secret.”

-Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*, 213

Philip Roth's novel *The Human Stain* was published in 2000 and it recounts the story of Coleman Silk, a 71-year-old Jewish American professor of classics at Athena College, in New England. All the accounts are told by a third person narrator, Coleman's friend Nathan Zuckerman. From the very beginning, Coleman's real identity is not revealed. The entire first chapter, entitled “Everyone Knows”, is focused on Coleman's life at Athena College, and it does not deal with his personal secret. In “Everyone Knows”, the narrator conveys some information about Coleman's life, and, particularly, about what happened to him at Athena College:

It was about midway into his second semester back as a full-time professor that Coleman spoke the self-incriminating word that would cause him voluntarily to sever all ties to the college . . . and the word that, as Coleman understood things, directly led to his wife's death.

. . .

As there were still two names that failed to elicit a response by the fifth week into the semester, Coleman, in the sixth week, opened the session by asking, “Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?”. (Roth 6)

Coleman's colleagues accuse him of being a racist as he used the term “spooks” to refer to two of his students who were not attending his classes. In its original meaning, the term “spooks” means “ghost”, but it has a second meaning which is offensive towards Black people. Coleman did not even know that the two students were Afro-Americans, thus he did not use it in a racist way. He is accused of racism, nevertheless, and he takes the decision to leave the college. Shortly after, Iris, Coleman's wife, dies suddenly of a heart attack. After Iris' death, Coleman starts having an affair with a thirty-four-year-old woman, Faunia Farley. Then, it seems to be clear who Coleman Silk is. The first chapter's title “Everyone Knows” is not casual. Everyone thinks to know Coleman Silk, but “Nobody Knows” that he has been wearing a mask throughout almost his entire life:

“Everyone knows” is the invocation of the cliché and the beginning of the banalization of experience, and it’s the solemnity and the sense of authority that people have in voicing the cliché that’s so insufferable. What we know is that, in an unclichéd way, nobody knows anything. You *can’t* know anything. The things you *know* you don’t know. . . . All that we don’t know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing. (Roth 209)

In the second chapter “Slipping The Punch”, Zuckerman tells the story of the young Coleman Silk: “Silky. Silky Silk. The name by which he had not been known for over fifty years . . .” (Roth 85). In this part, the reader knows more about him and about his past. Coleman is the third son of “a model Negro family” (Roth 86), he is Afro-American. Coleman is a brilliant student, and he has a secret passion for boxing. As Michele Elam explains in “Passing in the Post-Race Era” (2007): “. . . the first time Silk performs a “pass”, he is in a ring at a public boxing competition” (Roth 755). He is just sixteen years old when he passes as White, as a white Jewish and he passes because his Jewish boxing coach, Doc Chizner, encourages him to do it:

Now, it wasn’t that on the way up Doc told him to tell the Pitt coach that he was white. He just told Coleman not to mention that he was colored.

“If nothing comes up,” Doc said, “you don’t bring it up. You’re neither one thing or the other. You’re Silky Silk. That’s enough. That’s the deal.” . . .

“You look like you look, you’re with me, and so he’s going to think that you’re one of Doc’s boys. He is going to think that you’re Jewish.” (Roth 98, 99)

Doc’s words are like a prophecy of what Coleman’s decision will be. His permanent choice of erasing his Black identity and assuming a White Jewish identity happens after Coleman’s father death. In “Being Black, Being Jewish, and Knowing the Difference: Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*; Or, It Depends on What the Meaning of ‘Clinton’ Is” (2004), Franco states: “The “deal” . . . appeals to Coleman as the prototype of his future decision to pass as Jewish. . . . Being with Jews turns into being Jewish, and being black is what being Jewish hides” (Roth 92).

Following his father’s will, Coleman goes to Howard University, the historical Black college. One day, he is called “nigger” for the first time: “But ‘nigger’ - directed at *him*? That infuriated him” (Roth 105). In East Orange, he had already experienced some forms of exclusion, and he knew why people “were repelled by him” (Roth 104). He could not stand that the word “nigger” was directed at him, he could not stand to be classified by that word:

At Howard he'd discovered that he wasn't just a nigger to Washington D.C. - as if that shock weren't strong enough, he discovered at Howard that he was a Negro as well. A Howard Negro at that. Overnight the raw I was part of a we with all of the we's overbearing solidity, and he didn't want anything to do with it or with the next oppressive we that came along either. You finally leave home, the Ur of we, and you find *another* we? Another place that's just like that, the *substitute* for that? Growing up in East Orange, he was of course a Negro, very much of their small community of five thousand or so, but boxing, running, studying, at everything he did concentrating and succeeding, roaming around on his own all over the Oranges and, with or without Doc Chizner, down across the Newark line, he was, without thinking about it, everything else as well. He was Coleman, the greatest of the great *pioneers* of the I. (Roth 108)

Coleman does not tolerate to be included and classified in a "we". He feels oppressed by this "we", which, in the end, represents his family, and, in general, the community to which he belongs. When his father dies and his brother goes to war in Italy, Coleman clearly sees the possibility of being completely free: "Free instead on the big stage. Free to go ahead and be stupendous. Free to enact the boundless, self-defining drama of the pronouns we, they and I" (Roth 109).

After quitting college, he decides to join the Navy; it is at that moment that he is conscious that "he could lie about his race as well. He could play his skin however he wanted, color himself just as he chose" (Roth 109). After coming out of the service, he decides to live on his own, in Greenwich Village, and there, he meets Steena Palsson, a White girl from Minnesota. With her, he passes as White, not telling her that he is Afro-American. However, after been introduced to his family, Steela decides to split up with Coleman, due to his identity.

When Coleman meets the Jewish-American Iris Gittelman, his future wife, he permanently chooses to pass as White, completely erasing his past and his family, and committing the "great crime of his life"; "he spent years dreaming up and elaborating the disguise on his own" (Roth 131). His final disguise is not just to pass as a White man, but also to pass as a Jewish man: "Coleman had been allowing that he was Jewish for several years now - or letting people think so if they chose to - since coming to realize that at NYU as in his café hangouts, many people he knew seemed to have been assuming he was a Jew all along" (Roth 131). Even the narrator Nathan Zuckerman considers Coleman Silk a Jewish:

All in all, he remained a neat, attractive package of a man even at his age, the small-nosed Jewish type with the facial heft in the jaw, one of those crimped-haired Jews of a light yellowish skin pigmentation who possess something of the ambiguous aura of the pale blacks who are sometimes taken for white. (Roth 15,16)

Through Zuckerman's words, Coleman is Jewish, though there is also something Black in him. There was the belief that Jewish were similar to Blacks. In fact, Sander Gilman explains that "the so-called Jewish nose, had been understood as a version of the African nose; it was the stereotype of the nose which related the image of the Jew to the image of the Black" (45). Furthermore, not only the nose was considered as a communal characteristic, but also skin colour and hair texture. Despite those similarities, there is something that distinguishes Jewish from Blacks. As Adam Meyer claims:

Jews challenge the myth of the color line in much the same way that mixed race people do: by seeming to stand on top of it rather than to one side or the other. Throughout the nineteenth century, Jews were thought to occupy some physical space between Black and White. (Meyer 443)

It is exactly this "space between Black and White" that draws Coleman to embrace the Jewish identity. Jewish are neither Blacks nor Whites and as Zuckerman explains:

All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white - just on his own and free. . . . The objective was for his fate to be determined not by the ignorant, hate-filled intentions of a hostile world but, to whatever degree humanly possible, by his own resolve. Why accept a life on any other terms? (Roth 121)

Coleman views the Jewish identity as the embodiment of freedom, the freedom that he is seeking. For instance, he considers Iris' parents in the following terms: "they called themselves what they called themselves freely . . ." (Roth 127). Coleman wishes to be free, just like Iris' parents are. According to Elam:

But Jews are nonetheless appealing to Silk because they embody the American spirit self-invention. . . . And, of course, the ability to script one's own self is precisely what Silk aims to do through passing. But passing as Jewish also gives Silk an even more particular thrill. . . . His decision not to pursue a "Negro girl" (136) is revelatory

here. Silk rejects her not because she is black but because she identifies rightly the hubris motivating his passing. (Elam 760)

Ellie is the “Negro girl”, and she knows that Coleman is passing as a White man. She informs him that other Afro-Americans are passing as White, just like he is doing. This comparison annoys Coleman, given the fact that he does not want to be associated with a group. He wants to be unique, the self-invented Coleman Silk. “Along comes Iris and he’s back in the ring” (Roth 135), thus meeting Iris means, for Coleman, fully enacting the passing. Specifically, when he decides to marry Iris, he also makes the drastic decision: to freeze his family and his past completely. He “murders” his mother by telling her that he will live his life as a White Jewish man, without them:

Murdering her on behalf of his exhilaration notion of freedom! It would have been much easier without her. But only through this test can he be the man he has chosen to be, unalterably separated from what he was handed at birth To get that from life, the alternate destiny, on one’s own terms, he must do what must be done. Don’t most people want to walk out of the fucking lives they’ve been handed? But they don’t, and that’s what makes them them, and this was what making him him. Throw the punch, do the damage, and forever lock the door. . . . This is the major act of his life, and vividly, consciously, he feels its immensity. (Roth 139)

Coleman creates a whole new life with Iris, and with his four children. Neither one of them knows the real truth about their origins, only vaguely that they come from Russia. Coleman deprives his family to know the truth, and he succeeds in not being discovered, all in the name of his untouchable freedom. As Gerstle underlines:

What make Roth’s stories of assimilation stand out is that they do not emphasize the desire of his characters to blend in but rather to be different. His protagonists are all proponents of that quintessential American value - freedom. They want to be free to form their own identity without being manacled to any pre-conceived notions from the past. (Gerstle 96)

This is Coleman’s case; he passes as White because he wants to be different from the others, and because he wants to be free from any kind of classification. Coleman’s historical and social obstacles are represented by the fact that in his youth years he knew racial issues were determinant in America; he knew that he would have always been classified as a Negro. He wanted to avoid the social classification and he was willing to cut off his familiar ties to be free from any type of classification.

Throughout the novel, there are no hints of regret regarding Coleman's decision of passing as a White man, and, therefore, erasing his real identity. Coleman's sister, Ernestine, defines him in the following terms: "he was never fighting for anything other than himself. Silky Silk. That's who he fought as, who he fought for In it for himself, Walt used to say. In it always for Coleman alone. All he ever wanted was out" (Roth 324), and she also adds that "Being a Negro was just never an issue with him" (Roth 325). Coleman's passing is, thus, something that transcends colour and race issues, but it is more linked to his personal desire for freedom and for being unique. As his mother says: "There was always something about our family, and I don't mean color - there was something about us that impeded you" (Roth 139).

Conclusion

This paper analysed how two different novels deal with the passing phenomenon. The reasons that led the main characters to pass as White are quite different. On the one hand, Coleman Silk wants to be free from any kind of classification, he wishes to be "the greatest of the great *pioneers* of the I" (Roth 108). His passing has more to do with something intrinsic in his personality than with colour issues. On the other hand, the Ex-Colored Man's decision to perform the passing is more caused by fear and shame. Besides, he is also very much aware of the fact that being Afro-American means unequal opportunities. This reality clashed with the Ex-Colored Man's desire to be a successful man. Unlike Coleman Silk, the Ex-Colored Man carries the burden of regret, and he does not completely fit in his White identity. He is displaced, in the sense that he has constructed his life as a White man, but the link with his Black heritage has not vanished. Coleman Silk, instead, has entirely erased his Afro-American identity, and he has fully embraced his new Jewish identity.

But, despite their differences, both the protagonists share something: the desire for freedom. They are willing to disguise the truth about their identity in the name of freedom. However, their attempt to be utterly free is not quite possible. Coleman Silk wants to be free from any classification, but, in the end, he chooses to be classified as a Jewish man. Therefore, he is classified, and not completely free from the so detested "we". In the end, he moves from one community to another; if before, he was subjected to certain claims because of his Black identity, in the Athena college, he does not escape other kind of claims. On the other side, the Ex-Colored Man is not free from regret, the regret from having sold his birth right for a "mess of pottage" (Johnson 100).

Through the passing motif, both novels challenge and deconstruct the American ideal of freedom. Johnson's novel is a story of revelation that brings bitterness, for it shows that equality and freedom in America are very much linked to skin colour.

Roth's intent in demystifying American myths is more explicit, and, mainly, the idea of America as a pastoral place is called into question. *The Human Stain* is part of Roth's "American Trilogy", which includes two other novels: *American Pastoral* (1997) and *I Married a Communist* (1998). The trilogy covers different American historical periods, in which American individuals and American identities, in general, are at stake, debunking the common notion of America as the land of the individual and of freedom. As critic David Brauner states about Roth's trilogy:

In all three cases, their [the protagonists] attempts to recreate themselves are represented ambivalently: on the one hand as heroic feats of liberation, epitomizing the quintessentially American ideal of the self-made man and the immigrant dream of successful assimilation; on the other hand as futile fantasies of escape, illustrating the limitations of American social mobility and the impossibility of transcending historical circumstances. (151)

The above quotation can also be applied to Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* reality. American social mobility is not designed for everyone, turning into a kind of illusion, specifically, as this study has shown, for African Americans. Thus, both novels represent a contribution to the deconstruction of American myths.

Coleman Silk and the *Ex-Colored Man* manage to pass as White and to have another life, though, in one way or another, their true identity and story come out. It was inescapable as we read in Roth:

The human stain. . . . It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. Without the sign it is there. The stain so intrinsic it doesn't require a mark. The stain that precedes disobedience, that encompasses disobedience and perplexes all explanation and understanding. . . . All she was saying about the stain was that it's inescapable. (Roth 242)

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Harlem Lives: The Significance of the City in Colson Whitehead's *Harlem Shuffle*

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Abstract

This essay intends to analyse the depiction of the fictionalized neighbourhood of Harlem in the late 50s and early 60s in Colson Whitehead's novel *Harlem Shuffle* (2021) and the significance of the theme of the city in this work of fiction. In order to do so, I will be analysing the novel's plot in relation to the presented social scale and its implication for an analysis of the increasingly capitalist society of that time, while also making reference to the concept of American Dream and an enquiry of the concept throughout the years, whilst exploring its meaning to the African American community as well. I will be also mentioning the meaning of the city for that community, considering it as both a space for oppression and for resistance and how that affects the construction of a collective cultural identity. For that I will also be making use of concepts of "postracial" capitalism, as coined by Maria Bose.

Keywords: Colson Whitehead; *Harlem Shuffle*; City; Cultural Memory; Racial Capitalism

Resumo

Este ensaio tenciona analisar a representação do bairro ficcionalizado de Harlem durante o fim dos anos 50 e o início dos anos 60 no romance *Harlem Shuffle* (2021) de Colson Whitehead e o seu significado para o tema da cidade nesta obra de ficção. Para isso, analisarei a ação do romance em relação à escala social apresentada e o que isso implica numa análise à sociedade cada vez mais capitalista desse espaço de tempo, fazendo também referência ao conceito de American Dream e a um questionamento do mesmo ao longo dos anos, bem como o seu significado para a comunidade Afro-Americana. Farei também referência ao significado da cidade para essa comunidade, considerando-a enquanto um espaço de opressão e resistência e como isso afeta a construção de uma identidade cultural coletiva. Para isso, usarei o conceito de capitalismo "pós racial", conceito cunhado por Maria Bose.

Palavras-chave: Colson Whitehead; *Harlem Shuffle*; Cidade; Memória cultural; Capitalismo racial

Introduction

Set in the late 50s and early 60s in the neighbourhood of Harlem, New York City, Colson Whitehead's *Harlem Shuffle* is a narrative depicting of Ray Carney, a furniture salesman who, at first, starts his illegal activities by reselling stolen goods but progressively gets involved in bigger crimes and starts showing signs of his "crooked" (Whitehead 56) heritage that his dad, a considerable name in the inner circle of Harlem criminals, left him. Thus, Whitehead presents the readers with a *bildungsroman* that shows the transformation of an honest family man in Ray Carney into a big reference for criminals in Harlem. This will be the focus of this essay: analysing a work of fiction that portrays the social scale of African Americans living in Harlem in the time period leading to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement (1959-1964) and a detailed topographic description of the erupting neighbourhood, leading to the 1964 race riots in Harlem.

The constant topographic description of Harlem that accompanies the novel's narrative throughout is something seen in city novels of the past, such as Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* or Ellison's *The Invisible Man* - a book which, as I will try to expose, serves as a reference for this novel. It's part of the American culture to depict the American city as mighty and powerful, the ex libris of American progress, at least since the rebuilding of Chicago after the Great Fire. It's not the first time Whitehead has given such importance to the motif of the city; another great example of it is his non-fiction work *The Colossus of New York*. But to fictionalize the neighbourhood where the author grew up in such a detailed topographic manner is not only a love letter to Harlem, but a declaration of the weight of the cultural memory that there resides for the African American community; the place where a dream that has been deferred for so long finally gathered the strength to explode in 1964, after the murder of an innocent black boy by a white police officer.

There are certain aspects about the author that must be acknowledged in order to conduct this analysis. As Linda Selzer puts it, Whitehead reworks "literary traditions that range from folklore, the slave narrative, literary modernism, postmodernism and black urban fiction, to detective *noir*, magical realism, image fiction and post-soul literature" (393). Almost all of these elements (literary postmodernism, black urban fiction and, to a certain extent, detective *noir*) are present in Whitehead's novel, but other elements, especially the ones of slave

narrative which are related to the author's most acclaimed novels, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, are still, in a way, present in *Harlem Shuffle* in the form of an African American cultural heritage that is ever present in Whitehead's most recent titles. Also worth noting, is the way in which "Whitehead frequently challenges notions of American identity and privilege . . . determined by race, class and/or education" (Fain xv) which requires knowledge of themes of cultural and political contexts in order to understand "Whitehead's genre-bending works that are not clearly defined like the diverse cultural heritage of many people who inhabit America" (Fain xv). One last aspect worth mentioning that will be discussed in greater detail further on, is the concept of "postracialism", which, recurring to Kimberly Fain again, is a "theoretical literary movement that challenges racial assumptions of readers by oftentimes neglecting opportunities to mention his protagonists' cultural heritage" (Fain xvii) and, thus, must be tackled in the context of the cultural heritage present not only in Whitehead's characters, but in the significance of Harlem for the African American community.

I. The city as a space for oppression and resistance and its tradition in African American culture

Blyden Jackson wrote in *The Waiting Years: Essays on Negro Literature* that "The Negro Novel is a city novel. It almost always has been" (80). Yoshinobu Hakutani and Rober Butler write in their introduction to their book *The City in African American Literature* that one of the main reasons that justify this affirmation is that: "From the very outset, black people were denied imaginative access to a pre-urban homeland in Africa because the institution of slavery did everything possible to stamp out the memory of that world" (11). So, it's only logical that African American novels are almost always novels/narratives within the urban space. Of course, there were slave stories written by African American slaves which must be taken into consideration, especially when tackling issues of cultural heritage, like the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, but I would argue that only after the beginning of the Great Migration and the blooming of the Harlem Renaissance could the African American community state that they had a cultural identity which was inevitably linked to an urban consciousness, as various authors argue:

Claude Brown . . . is careful to point out that black people in the city are "better off" than their counterparts in the rural South because the city, for all its corruptions and violence, has the vitality and educational possibilities necessary for the "better life"

Brown himself achieved. Amiri Baraka . . . argues that, from the Harlem Renaissance onward, black literature has been “urban shaped,” producing a uniquely “black urban consciousness.” (Hakutani and Butler, 10)

Whitehead’s *Harlem Shuffle* follows a lineage of urban fictions written by African American authors and by Whitehead himself. There’s an aspect to the novel’s Harlem that can be compared, for example, to urban spaces seen in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, as Butler writes that “Ellison’s hero sees his ingenious subterranean ‘home’ (5) as a place of ‘hibernation’ (11) providing him with the kind of new life which traditional American heroes have found in the West” (Butler 124). This could be linked to the idea of borders or city limits because if, for the generality of white Americans, crossing the established borders of the United States in the XIX century and going west was what gave them the opportunity for prosperity, for African Americans, that same land of prosperity had to be found inside the limits of a city, for they rejected pastoral places and could only find a sense of belonging after migrating to the cities in the north: “it remains generally true that African American fiction is largely urban and even anti-pastoral in nature, mainly because rural life has been so strongly linked in the black imagination with slavery and post-Civil War segregation and sharecropping” (Butler 71). In the case of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, that land was the underground of New York City. For Ray Carney, there is also an Ellisonian home in Harlem, the other side of the neighbourhood, the face of Harlem that only crooks knew how to navigate. This other side of Harlem is present for example when Carney helps Pepper, a war veteran turned criminal, find where another crook was hiding: “After that was a barbershop . . . and another pool room Carney had never noticed before. Places in Pepper’s city that were nowhere on his own map” (Whitehead 81). The fact that there were two sides of the same Harlem implies the existence of two sides of Ray Carney, and the transformative aspects of the city are recognized in the novel’s protagonist:

Everyone had secret corners and alleys that no one else saw—what mattered were your major streets and boulevards, the stuff that showed up on other people’s maps of you. The thing inside him that gave a yell or tug or shout now and again was not the same thing his father had. That sickness drawing every moment into its service. (Whitehead 31)

The city’s transformative aspect is one of the heritages of African American writing that Whitehead presents in this novel. However, *Harlem Shuffle* presents itself as a celebration of the city, and like Ellison’s Harlem, it has the power to emancipate

African Americans inside the city limits. Despite this celebration, Whitehead recognizes the flaws of the American city and what it represents.

In the already mentioned *Colossus of New York*, written in 2003, after the terrorist attacks in New York, Whitehead offers a much more nihilistic view of the neoliberal American city, while at the same time depicting anxieties related to the fragility of the city felt after the attacks, as noted by Robert Butler:

Colson's *The Colossus of New York* . . . portrays the dark underside of the American myth of self-creation in the city. Colson's city, unlike . . . the existential city of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which envision the urban world as a protean setting inviting personal transformation, is . . . a firmly nihilistic world. (75)

This could be seen as the other side of Whitehead's perspective on the American city. If, on the one hand, XX century Harlem could be seen as a celebration of African American cultural heritage and an identity that the minority found in the American city; on the other hand, when one steps out of the neighbourhood's limits, a more nihilistic vision of American myths may be the vision one encounters. This negative perspective of the city is also presented in *Harlem Shuffle*, in moments where, as noted, the narrative steps out of Harlem, for example, when the narrator refers to the process of building Central Park:

Then someone came up with the idea for a grand park in the middle of Manhattan, an oasis inside the newly teeming metropolis. Various locations were proposed, rejected, reconsidered, until the white leaders decided on a vast, rectangular patch in the heart of the island. People already lived there; no matter. The colored citizens of Seneca were property owners, they voted, they had a voice. Not enough of one. The City of New York seized the land, razed the village, and that was that. The villagers dispersed to different neighborhoods, to different cities where they might start again, and the city got its Central Park. You'll find the bones. Dig under the playgrounds and meadows and silent groves, Carney supposed, you'll find the bones. (Whitehead 66)

This passage shows various aspects opposed to the individually transformative Harlem that was mentioned initially. It shows a social critic by the author of the "white leaders" who took down housing from coloured citizens in order to build Central Park, which not only debunks the myths of self-creation in the city, but also that the American Dream for African Americans has been long denied by white oppressors, as was the case in this passage. Both myths may work for white Americans, but the erasing of coloured people's houses shows not only an attack on cultural memory and

heritage, but also that the canonical American myths are only attainable to certain white people. Therefore, it is safe to say that “. . . Whitehead's New York . . . [is a] vulnerable monument to American blindness, materialism, racism, and egoism” (Butler 85).

One last passage worth noting regarding the city in Whitehead's text comes from the novel's last moments:

Then it was off to meet Elizabeth. There was an open house for a place on Strivers' Row and he wanted to take a look. Distress sale. Riverside Drive was nice, but it was hard to turn down a chance at Strivers' Row. If you could swing it. It was such a pretty block and on certain nights when it was cool and quiet it was as if you didn't live in the city at all. (Whitehead 318)

This passage suggests that Carney wants to leave the city. A testament for the toll it has taken on him, all the memories of it, the topographic descriptions always present in his day-to-day life. The best sign of cultural memory one could associate the novel to is that Harlem was part of the individuals who lived in it, and it transformed them. Thus, Whitehead's work presents the contemporary reader with a double vision on the American city and its significance for African Americans: on the one hand, the aspects of self-creation and cultural emancipation that Harlem gave to the African American community, a space for resistance; on the other hand, the ever-expanding neoliberal America that erases and oppresses the cultural memory of this said community in order to raise monuments to myths only attainable by some, like the American Dream.

II. The significance of the American Dream for African Americans

As noted above, Whitehead's rendering of the American city has various layers to it, and one of the layers is the debunking of American myths, namely the myth of the American Dream. In this second part, I will address the reasons that make the American Dream unattainable for African Americans, as part of the analysis of the significance of the city in Whitehead's works and for the community they represent.

Going back to Robert Butler's analysis of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, he also tackles the correlation between Harlem and the significance of the American city for African Americans and the American dream:

Significantly, he moves to Harlem which is a kind of underground, a “city within a city” (122). His free movements in Harlem repeatedly result in increased self-awareness as he discovers as the falsity of an American Dream which promises

freedom for all but creates an immense ghetto depriving enormous masses of their political, social, and economic rights. (Butler 128)

Just like the hero of *Invisible Man*, Ray Carney increasingly discovers the falsity of the American Dream through living in Harlem, a city within a city, and by living in that crooked side of the city, inside that border, he is able to succeed, not by the standardized process of the American Dream, but by becoming self-aware and increasingly crooked. As satirically argued by James W. Loewen, “many young African Americans concluded that reaching the American Dream by the usual (white) methods excluded them. Instead, they turned to less realistic means of achieving it, such as crime or winning the lottery” (69). This is also the case in *Harlem Shuffle*, in which the African American protagonist is unable to provide for his family and buy a better house in the neighbourhood, so in addition to his daytime job of selling furniture, he starts taking on jobs from criminals and bribing police officers in order to keep them away from his illicit activities. And the novel’s narrative shows Carney’s anxieties towards achieving the (white) American Dream: “Riverside, where restless Manhattan found itself finally spent, its greedy hands unable to reach past the park and the holy Hudson. One day he’d live on Riverside Drive, on this quiet, inclined stretch. . . . One day, when he had the money” (Whitehead 22).

However, the narrator acknowledges not only the unattainability of the American Dream for African Americans, but criticizes the system behind the oppression felt by the community, for example when talking about Wilfried Duke, the most well-known crooked banker in Harlem:

Duke could do what he wanted because he held the money. Foreclose on your property, sit on your business loan, take your envelope and tell you to go fuck yourself. . . . That’s how the whole damn country worked, but they had to change the pitch for the Harlem market, and that’s how Duke came to be. The little man was the white system hidden behind a black mask. Humiliation was his currency. . . .” (Whitehead 197)

Here, Carney acknowledges that the United States is ran by those who have the money and the power, either white people or black people operating according to the white system of oppression, thus depicting the unattainability of the American Dream for African Americans who are either poor or lack the power to be a cog in the white machine of oppression.

James W. Loewen wrote a chapter in the book *The American Dream in the 21st century* intitled “Dreaming in Black and White”, which tackles the historical context behind the oppression of the African American community in its journey to achieve the American Dream so that the WASP community could remain the only one to get it. Some of the arguments he states are:

Maybe the antiracist ideology of the Reconstruction era could not have lasted past 1890, having derived in large part from the social events and intellectual developments of the Civil War. Certainly the ideology of imperialism, wafting into the United States on winds from England and Europe, played an important role. . . . The rise of eugenics as a “science” was hardly coincidental. Perhaps most important was our national acquiescence, also beginning in 1890, as Mississippi passed its new state constitution removing African Americans from citizenship. Since the United States did nothing, all other Southern states and states as distant as Oklahoma followed suit by 1907. (Loewen 64)

Again, there’s a direct blaming of the rising capitalist system - imperialism is obligatorily dependant on the capitalist system - in relation to the propagating of an antiracist ideology, like the one mentioned of denying African Americans of citizenship in the American South. The suppositions of the growing capitalist system and its necessary oppressions, like eugenics as a “science”, which was one of the arguments for the rise of fascist regimes, mainly the one in Germany, are put into question when analysing causes for the denying (deferring) of the American Dream for African Americans. As is known, such acts like the one mentioned of a removal of citizenship write a long history of discriminatory and segregational laws imposed on the community, from the Black Codes to Jim Crow laws, which, of course, are a factor in the incapability to achieve the Dream. Since the period of reconstruction until today, some habitational areas in the United States actively discriminate and even advertise themselves as prohibited for black Americans - Loewen takes notice of an article from 1980 called *The Real Polk Country* that makes reference to the fact that: “It is not an uncommon experience in Polk County to hear a newcomer remark that he chose to move here because of ‘low taxes and no niggers’” (Loewen 64). It is safe to say, then, that for the white American Dream to prosper, the black American Dream must cease to exist.

Kimberly Fain claims that

When Whitehead’s words fluctuate between past, present and future tense, he is stressing the ever presence of personal and collective history of the city’s inhabitants.

. . . the city's fable is exposed as both an untenable promise land and a splintered symbol of the American Dream. (87)

And one of the ways that Whitehead depicts the city as this “splintered symbol” is present in the third and last part of the novel, set during the 1964 race riots in Harlem. When meeting with the mobster Chink Montague, Chink says:

“Know what I think? I think they shouldn't have stopped. All these angry niggers up here. Everywhere. They should have burned the whole neighborhood down and then kept going. Midtown, downtown, Park Avenue.” The mobster mimed an explosion with his hands. “Torch all that shit.” (Whitehead 228)

This passage shows the heritage of frustrations felt by African Americans towards an oppressive white capitalist society in one of the moments when, after the murder of an innocent black boy by a white police officer, the people of Harlem gathered the strength to manifest and riot against the oppressive system - in reference to Langston Hughes's iconic poem *Harlem*, the dream that had been deferred for so long, finally gathered the strength to explode.

In the last moments of the novel, after the riots have ended, Ray Carney has an introspective moment when looking at the expanding city, away from the aftermath of the riots:

The neighborhood was gone, razed. Everything four blocks south of the New York Telephone Building and four blocks east of the miserable West Side Highway had been demolished and erased for the World Trade Center site, down to the street signs and traffic lights. This was the aftermath of a ruinous battle. . . . The buildings of the old city loomed over the broken spot, this wound in itself. It was unreal to have your city turned inside and out. He felt unreal those days of the riots when his streets were made strange by violence. Despite what America saw on the news, only a fraction of the community had picked up bricks and bats and kerosene. The devastation had been nothing compared to what lay before him now, but if you bottled the rage and hope and fury of all the people of Harlem and made it into a bomb, the results would look something like this. (Whitehead 317)

These last moments are perhaps the ones which make better allusion to the angst felt by the people of Harlem towards the white oppression - if all the people in Harlem would've rioted, the deferred Dream's explosion would have been much bigger. Big enough to build the World Trade Centre on top of the destruction. Of

course, the razing of the city depicted by Carney serves as an acknowledgement that the white oppressive system had won again (and would continue to win) and ultimately an acknowledgement of what was to come of New York City through the rise of neoliberalist politics and economics, the one present in Whitehead's existentialist portrayal of it in *The Colossus of New York*.

III. The African American Social Scale and “Postracial” Capitalism

Lastly, I would like to refer the concept of “postracial” capitalism and how that can be applied to an analysis of the social scale presented in *Harlem Shuffle* and how it interferes in the representation of the contemporary American city.

The first point worth noticing is Colson Whitehead's article in *The New York Times*, published in 2009, called “The Year of Living Postracially”, which is a satire directed to those who, after the election of Barack Obama, stated that racism was no longer an existing problem in the United States, hence the phrase “living postracially”, which is directly related to the concept of “postracial” capitalism. In the fourth paragraph, Whitehead ironically states that, if “sociologists say that racism is a construct”, calling African Americans “colored” people is a “branding problem” and continues his ironic discourse by saying that the branding problem consists in “attempts to reduce a wildly diverse community to an ineffectual blanket term” (n. pag.). This is an example of “postracial” capitalism: the oppressive forces coining a different term to an oppressed minority in order for the oppressive force to seem more accepting of the minority and thus being able to continue the capitalist oppression.

Still on Whitehead's article, the author is satirizing those who after the election of Obama said that racism doesn't exist anymore and there should no longer be any sensibilization towards that structural problem, and those who still do it, should tone it down, because they are now living in a postracial world. Toni Morrison criticised this kind of thought with her novel *Paradise*, where a community of African Americans live isolated from the rest of the world, and therefore they think they can't suffer from racism anymore; that would be an example of a community that supposedly lives postracially, in a society with only one race. Of course, that isn't the case as the narrative unfolds and that isn't the kind of society that the author has been known for supporting.

At the end of his article, Whitehead claims that “As the secretary of postracial affairs, I want to . . . get in people's homes and faces. Eat their food”. In the final moments of the satire, Whitehead alerts the readers for the dangers of such extremisms like this one, an all-consuming mentality which gets into people's minds

and alter their perception of things in their favour - he was alerting for a danger that materialized for example in 2016, with the election of Donald Trump, who used populist propaganda to help him in his electoral campaign.

In her 2019 article intitled “Allegories of “Postracial” Capitalism: Colson Whitehead and the Materials of Twenty-First-Century Black Cultural Authorship”, Maria Bose claims that:

“postraciality” names not the end of race but rather the perpetuation of regimes of racial domination by state policies and institutions no longer permitted to invoke racial criteria explicitly. . . . For Whitehead and his critical interlocutors, then, “postracial” ideology enacts itself chiefly at the level of language: concerned with how not to represent race as a relation of economic domination realized through racialized wage differentials and reinforced by the operations of the carceral and national security state, “postraciality” instead defines race through the idiom of cultural difference and particularity - as a dimension of one’s identity that is chosen voluntarily, not ascribed. (420)

As noted before, “postraciality” refers not to the end of race discrimination, but rather the perpetuation by capitalist oppressors of an indirect discrimination that allows for the machine to keep on running, not by directly discriminating, like the Jim Crow laws of segregation, because they can no longer do so, but by applying the same discrimination, like seen in the War on Drugs, without ever referring to the targeted minorities as such. It is then a question of language and directly naming or not naming minorities. This is also something that is seen nowadays in populist politics: the directed discrimination, without ever referring the names of the targeted minorities.

Bose argues that Whitehead shows in his novels a concern for collective identity erasing, which is the equivalent of saying the erasure of cultural memory/identity, because if both the racial caste system and the racializing mechanisms are starting to operate through being increasingly “invisible”, so will the collective identities of the racialized minorities be lost in the “invisible” machine that works towards their oppression, and thus aims to reach their definitions of a “postracial” society, a society with only one race:

the seemingly “invisible” racializing and disciplinary mechanisms that underwrite contemporary digital post-Fordism, a global mode of production for which the management of a predominantly nonwhite labor force will seem to operate beyond the scope of visibility (Bose 420)

It's safe to say, then, that cultural identity changes in accordance with the needs of capitalism, that now emphasizes "individual preference" and therefore perpetuates the "invisible" racial segmentation mechanisms. The conceptualization of a construction of cultural identity nowadays has to be linked with notions of "race reconceptualization", that is, "creating" race in accordance with the globalized market, making and unmaking racial values "in service of capital accumulation" and giving them to the people that the oppressive system desires to give. This is one of the aspects that Whitehead appeals to in most of his novels, including *Harlem Shuffle*, for example when he refers to Pepper disguised as a waiter:

On a job, wearing the clothes of a waiter or porter gave Pepper free passage among white people. Same way a white man in an official-looking uniform in a Negro neighborhood can get into a lot of places, no sweat. A cop uniform sends one message, a utility man's another. . . . (Whitehead 296)

Lastly, Bose argues that through the allegories of his novel, Whitehead tries to materialize/formalize the literary and economic determinations of a race, which is one way of contradicting the abstraction - the "invisibility" - of racial segmentation under "neoliberal multiculturalism and digital post-Fordism" (Bose 423). Whitehead is, for this effect, "seeking literary forbears" that allow him to formalize these determinations through "'authentic' modes of social and historical reference" (Bose 423), which include values that are commonly associated with the creation of a collective identity, such as nationality and culture, meaning that Whitehead is aware of the cultural erasing that "postracial" capitalism tries to enforce on minorities, including African Americans, and through the literary allegories of the novel, tries to find ways of contradicting the proposed "postracial" world. One passage in which this could be seen is when Carney is talking about his wife's job at Black Star, scheduling trips and vacations:

With the summer travel season winding down, Black Star was in the midst of fall and winter travel, booking a lot of conventions. American Association of Negro Funeral Directors, National Association of Negro Dentists. Puerto Rico was big this year, thanks to the few brochures, followed by Miami. Some of the groups they'd handled last year, the Negro Lawyers, the Negro Accountants, had told their friends. . . . There are some new hotels going after the Negro market. (Whitehead 156)

This passage has two aspects to it. First, the recognition that in Harlem's social scale the capitalist economic system was still working in an African American only basis.

Second, the fact that there is a functioning social scale consisting only of African Americans - “Negro” dentists, lawyers and accountants - shows that the community has resisted the racial segmentation that “postraciality” has tried to impose on them and instead the community took over the economic system and established one of their own. Of course, as noted before, Whitehead is critic of the capitalist system in which today’s society is based upon, but still, the fact that those who were/are oppressed by that system are still able to adapt to it and survive its attempts at cultural erasing, is still something worth noticing.

Conclusion

It is safe to say, then, that there are various layers when analysing Colson Whitehead’s depictions of the American city throughout various time periods of the history of the United States. Being that Whitehead is a contemporary author, there are certain concepts that, even if very recent, are still relevant to a pertinent analysis of the author, as, for example, “postracial” capitalism. This, of course, doesn’t wipe away the need for socio-political and historical context in order to analyse problems intrinsic to the city, especially structural ones, like the deferring of the American Dream for African Americans.

With all this in mind, it becomes clear that Colson Whitehead is one of the most relevant authors of the XXI century and perhaps the main heir to African American literary tradition and thus an analysis of his work becomes very pertinent, particularly in times where the rise of populism and other socially oppressive forces are making themselves noticed.

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Black Women's Journey in America and the Need for Intersectionality: A Comparative Reading of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", Lucille Clifton's "won't you celebrate with me" and June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights"

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Abstract

Through a comparative reading of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", Lucille Clifton's "won't you celebrate with me" and June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights", this essay aims to analyse the black women's journey in America, by considering their identity and the adversities they faced during their path under the light of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality".

Keywords: Intersectionality; Identity; Race; Gender; Poetry

Resumo

Através da leitura comparada dos poemas "Still I Rise" de Maya Angelou, "won't you celebrate with me" de Lucille Clifton e "Poem About My Rights" de June Jordan, este ensaio procura analisar a jornada das mulheres negras na América, considerando a sua identidade e as adversidades que enfrentaram no seu percurso através do conceito de "interseccionalidade", introduzido por Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Palavras-chave: Interseccionalidade; Identidade; Raça; Género; Poesia

In 1991, Kimberlé Crenshaw, leading scholar of critical race theory, published a ground-breaking essay titled “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, in which she thoroughly explained how different layers of discrimination can juxtapose and further marginalize particular groups like African American women or “women of color” as she names them:

The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. Moreover, ignoring difference *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups, another problem of identity politics that bears on efforts to politicize violence against women. Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. . . . Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (1243-44)

More than thirty years later, the problem persists: there is a movement against racism, there is a movement against gender discrimination, but the fight for people who belong to the minorities of both race and gender is the strongest of them all and the one where less has been achieved.

This clearly sets the need for intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw herself in 1989, in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, to be further discussed. The term originates from the observation that the connection of social categories such as class, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, immigration status, among others, intersect and overlap, thus creating unique and distinct forms of discrimination and disadvantage in society. In the

mentioned article, Crenshaw, using three legal cases as examples, analyses the way courts dealt with situations which involved both racism and sexism, observing that justice often refused to recognise when black women affirmed they were victims of discrimination not only because they were black or female, but for being both things combined. Instead, the only forms of discrimination which were thought of by the legal system were either of one category or the other, as if all women suffered the same oppression and all black people went through the same discriminating situations, ignoring that the intersection of both race and gender created another sphere of violence.

Having this in mind, it is imperative to give black women the opportunity to make their voices heard and having their stories told, after being silenced for so long. Accordingly, Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, and June Jordan, three black female writers, felt the need to speak about their journey, identity and experience while writing in America. My aim with this work is to analyse three of their poems - “Still I Rise”, “won’t you celebrate with me” and “Poem About My Rights”, respectively - and do a comparative reading of the texts to see how they describe black women’s journey regarding their personal life and their creative work, having in consideration the adversities they suffered by living in a racist and patriarchal society.

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory concerning intersectionality influenced various authors to reflect about the specific spheres of oppression generated by the intersection of social categories. Most of the texts which evoke the concept coined by Crenshaw were written with the aim to reflect upon the complexity of intersectionality and the way intersectionality could be studied and adapted within the disciplines, as Leslie McCall theorised in “The Complexity of Intersectionality” in 2005 and in “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis”, in 2013, along with Sumi Cho and Kimberlé Crenshaw herself. Other articles expand and transcend Crenshaw’s theory, as Jennifer C. Nash in “Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality”, in 2011, and Devon W. Carbado in “Colorblind Intersectionality”, published in 2013. On the one hand, Nash’s work, which sets Crenshaw’s theory as its starting point for reflection, is focused on black feminism and the dialogue between love and identity politics. On the other hand, Carbado’s text aimed at deconstructing the narrow theoretical frame in which intersectionality was being considered, while appealing for its theoretical boundaries to be pushed rather than disciplined. More recently, in 2018, Angela Harris and Zeus Leonardo published “Intersectionality, Race-Gender Subordination, and Education”, in which they remembered Crenshaw’s thinking while they reflected on the unjustified

violence and murder of black people, considering the Black Lives Matter movement. Moreover, Harris and Leonardo's article reinforced the existing subordination and oppression caused by race and gender inequality, and explored how the racist and patriarchal prejudice was being approached in education.

The referred studies, which departed from Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional theory, are of the uttermost importance given the unique spheres of oppression generated by the overlap of social categories. However, this article aims at providing an innovative perspective on intersectionality by presenting a comparative reading of three poems which have not yet been considered together while analysed through an intersectional approach.

"Still I Rise" is a poem written in 1978. Its authorship belongs to Maya Angelou, an American poet whose personal life served as inspiration for several of her own works, always with the focus of exploring themes of racial, gender and sexual oppression. She was part of the Harlem Writers Guild, was recurrently associated with the Black Arts Movement and one of the most characteristic traits of her poems is to resemble the structure of sermons by aiming at calling to action. From the beginning of her poem, the word "you" is referred multiple times, and it is, in fact, to whom the poem is addressed. This "you" is representative of the oppressor, and, although white people and slave-owners are referenced, the significance should not be restrained to this, but should be extended to a universal receiver. It is important to note that the speaker recognizes that this "you" has power, this being revealed by the anaphoric expression "you may" in the verses "You may write me down in history/ . . . You may trod me in the very dirt/ . . . You may shoot me with yours words,/ You may cut me with your eyes,/ You may kill me with your hatefulness" (vv. 1, 3, 21-3). However, the speaker has a power too, the power to rise. And the similarity in the sound of the words "lies" and "rise" in "With your bitter, twisted lies, . . . But still, like dust, I'll rise." (vv. 2, 4) shows that her power to rise through and above all that is stronger than all those lies. The use of the word "dust" (v. 4) is also significant, since it can be connected to the Bible - "All come from dust, and all return to dust" (Ecclesiastes 3:20) - emphasizing that, despite the differences, all humans are the same, come from the same place and will end the same way.

In another part of the poem, the focus is on black female empowerment, which can be associated with the slogan "Black is beautiful", popularized due to an embrace and pride of black culture and identity in the 1960s and 1970s in America. Moreover, the space of the female black body in the public space is also present with the verses "Does my sassiness upset you? / . . . Does my haughtiness offend you? / . . . Does my

sexiness upset you?” (vv. 5, 17, 25). Further in the text, the American history and legacy is present when diamonds, oil wells and gold mines are evoked in close relation to the female speaker: “‘Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells/ Pumping in my living room/ . . . ‘Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines/ Diggin’ in my own backyard./ . . . That I dance like I’ve got diamonds/ At the meeting of my thighs?” (vv. 7-8, 19-20, 27-8). All these three references represent forms of wealth and economic empowerment of the United States and, by placing them in her private spaces, both the body and the house, this black woman is proclaiming her own place and part in the American dream.

The historical mentions continue with “I am the dream and the hope of the slave” (v. 40), summoning the time of slavery in America and, specifically with the word “dream”, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech concerning the end of racism and the fight for civil rights of black people. On a final note, it is important to reflect on “Out of the huts of history’s shame/ I rise/ Up from a past that’s rooted in pain/ I rise/ I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide” (vv. 29-33): this black female speaker will rise above the past of a country who shamefully abused her ancestors and caused pain and trauma in every member of the black female community; she will rise, as well as all the other victims of that oppression, who are angry for what was done to them.

The second poem to be considered is “won’t you celebrate with me”, published in 1993 by Lucille Clifton, a poet and professor whose literary talent was discovered when her work was included in Langston Hughes’ anthology *The Poetry of the Negro*. In “won’t you celebrate with me”, the speaker is once again female and black, and is describing her personal journey regarding her identity and the obstacles she had to face to become her true self. She affirms “I had no model” (v. 3) and this absence of an example is both on a personal and creative level, since the canon was restricted to mainly male and white writers; this way, there was not an official legacy for black female writers in America, and this made her focus on herself. This is relevant enough for Fahamisha Patricia Brown to believe, like claimed in the article “In the Light: The Poetry of Lucille Clifton”, that the verse “what did i see to be except myself?” (v. 6) became a mantra for Clifton’s poetry (Brown 15). Still linked to this idea, vocabulary such as “shaped” (v. 2), “model” (v. 3) and “clay” (v. 9) introduce the idea of the speaker being like a piece of clay which can be shaped into whatever form she wants to take, thus revealing her freedom of identity and of the self. This becomes clearer when particular attention is paid to the active form present in “what i have shaped into/ a kind of life” (vv. 2-3) which indicates that she was responsible for her self-creation.

The poem opens with a call to action addressed to the reader: “won’t you celebrate with me” (v. 1). And the reason for this celebration is her self-creation while remaining truthful to her identity, despite the oppression and lack of privilege: she reveals being born “both nonwhite and woman” (v. 5). It is not explicitly said she was born black, and this is significant: what is stated is the opposition between white and everything which is not white, so, again, there is a universal meaning, just like in Maya Angelou’s poem. There is a broad category that serves to allocate in it everyone who is not white, everyone who is not given such privileges, despite their race. This speaker, by identifying herself as “nonwhite”, is siding with all those who see their identity reduced to the Other. And, of course, the fact that she is a woman takes this lack of privilege and presence of prejudice even further - the intersection of the categories of race and gender creating an even more violent oppression to this speaker, complying with the theory presented in the beginning by evoking Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory.

In fact, there is a technique used by Clifton, not only in this poem but in a great majority of her work, which can be perceived as a demonstration of this difference between oppressor and oppressed: the lack of capital letters. While it may also be an act of non-conformity concerning tradition and grammar, it can be a representation of the oppressed, namely of black female writers in the American literary canon, who have always seen their voices and their experience in America being diminished - as if they are always a lower case when standing next to the capital letter white male writers. While still inviting the reader to celebrate with her, the speaker’s act of holding her own hand tight shows that, as a black female writer, the place she has conquered in society is not to be taken for granted. Moreover, by holding her own hand, she emphasizes her autonomy and strength to survive and thrive on her own, despite all the harm and injustice she has suffered. This seems to be the reason why every time something or someone tries to hurt or minimize her identity, they fail: “my one hand holding tight/ my other hand; come celebrate/ with me that everyday/ something has tried to kill me/ and has failed” (vv. 10-4).

The final literary object in analysis, “Poem About My Rights”, is a poem written by June Jordan, an American poet and activist who, similar to Maya Angelou and Lucille Clifton, focused her work on writing about issues of gender, race and representation. She was involved in the Black Arts Movement and gave a great emphasis to the use of African American English, also known as Black English, in her poetry, supporting the importance of its usage as an expression of black culture. This poem has its basis on the experience of a black woman who states “. . . I can’t do

what I want/ to do with my own body because I am the wrong/ sex the wrong age the wrong skin” (vv.7-9). She revisits her trauma as a survivor of rape who is angry at the world and its politics which protect the ones who should be locked away. This is evident in an example she gives of a case of sexual abuse which took place in France:

and in France they say if the guy penetrates
but does not ejaculate then he did not rape me
and if after stabbing him if after screams if
after begging the bastard and if even after smashing
a hammer to his head if even after that if he
and his buddies fuck me after that
then I consented and there was
no rape because finally you understand finally
they fucked me over because I was wrong I was
wrong again to be me being me where I was
wrong to be who I am
(Jordan vv. 23-33)

This evokes a real case in France, back in 1978, when two Belgian women were raped by a group of three men. It was the first situation of sexual abuse in the legal history of the country in which the victims were heard by the *Cours d’Assises*, the criminal court which is responsible for the judgement of serious crimes. This was worthy of public attention in *The New York Times*, and it was there revealed that local men incurred in violent acts during the trial, threatening women lawyers and journalists, and the violence was mainly directed towards the victims and their lawyer, who had previously won the case which led to the legalization of abortion in the country. Every reference of the poem is accurate to what truly happened, since the victims said no, screamed, one of them struck one of the of rapists with a hammer, and still, the three criminals repeatedly abused the two women for hours.

The speaker of the poem has also been a victim of sexual abuse, affirming this has happened because “. . . I have been wrong the wrong sex the wrong age/ the wrong skin the wrong nose the wrong hair the/ wrong need the wrong dream the wrong geographic” (vv. 93-6), as if all parts of her identity were a justification for the crime committed against her.

Moreover, the political sphere also has its place in the text in another section, in the verses “which is exactly like South Africa/ penetrating into Namibia penetrating into/ Angola” (vv. 34-6): these are a possible reference to the South-African Border War, a conflict in Namibia, Angola and Zambia which lasted for more than twenty-

three years and only ended with the Tripartite Accord, a peace treaty in which the republics of Angola, Cuba and South Africa agreed to allow Namibia to be independent from South Africa and to end the direct involvement of foreign troops in the Angolan Civil War. In addition to this, the poem also refers the case of Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba: “back in 1966 the C.I.A. decided that they had this problem/ and the problem was a man named Nkrumah so they/ killed him and before that it was Patrice Lumumba” (vv. 49-51). The first is a reference to the *coup d'état* of February 1966 which overthrew Nkrumah's government in Ghana and the U.S., namely through the C.I.A., were seen as having not only supported but also contributed to this; the latter is a reference to the assassination of Lumumba, an independence leader and Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo, whose government was also overthrown by a *coup d'état* in 1960. When trying to escape, Lumumba was captured and murdered some weeks after, and the assassination had the participation of the U.S. and Belgium. Through the evocation of these deaths, the personal and the political are linked and the speaker exposes not only the American past and its role on racism, slavery and oppression, but also the American participation in political international conflicts and consequential assassinations, comparing these to the sexual abuse theme which dominates the poem.

Peter Erickson, in his 1986 article “The Love Poetry of June Jordan”, claims Jordan's poem “presents a strenuous drive toward self-definition [with a tone which is] serious, urgent, menacing [and which] spends most of its energy fending and sloughing off false terms . . . [being a] rejection of destructive labels” (221). This is explicitly conveyed when the speaker claims, in the last stanza: “*I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name/ My name is my own my own my own/ . . . I can tell you that from now on my resistance/ my simple and daily self-determination/ may very well cost you your life*” (vv. 110-5). By stepping forward and denying the label of “wrong” associated with every characteristic of her body and of her identity, this black female speaker is creating a definition of herself according to her traits and particularities and embracing them.

Along with this act, she will also resist anyone who tries to diminish her, threatening those oppressors, who will face the consequences of their actions and who will fail in those attempts - a resolve that is similar to the message that ends Lucile Clifton's poem, in which everyone who tried to destroy her also failed and would continue to do so. Moreover, both black female speakers of these two poems are proud of their journey, just as Maya Angelou's “Still I Rise” speaker, who can rise despite all the lies and prejudice she is forced to deal with.

In conclusion, even though each of the analysed poems has its own specific approach - Maya Angelou's text focusing on black female empowerment, the space of the female black body in the public space and the inclusion of the black female in the American dream and legacy; Lucille Clifton's referencing the power of self-creation and black female voices' minimization in the American canon; and June Jordan's remembering the topic of sexual violence and the rejection of a wrong attributed social identity - they all present the idea that, as much as the oppressor tries to destroy them, these black females who are writing in America will never allow it. Their strength, beauty, and power, which derive from their identities, give them the capacity to overcome all forms of prejudice they are susceptible to, enabling them to share their journey and experience with the courage.

However, despite their personal courage and tenacity, their narratives expose a worrying world of oppression and violence that surrounds not only their private environment but also their creative and working world as they attempt to establish their place in the literary canon of America. This difficulty comes with their skin colour and cultural heritage, but it also comes with their gender and the sum of both parts, each of them being already a minority in terms of power, makes the discrimination they're exposed to more brutal and distinct from the one which a black male or a white female are forced to deal with.

Therefore, it is not enough to have a movement which only fights against racism or one which only gives voice to women as if the oppression was equal and the same to every member of that category. With the rise of the different social movements, it becomes imperative to recognise that the struggle black women deal with daily comes from the overlapping of their gender and race. For this, intersectionality is fundamental, as Kimberlé Crenshaw defended and theorised in the articles quoted in this paper. No social movement is enough if it does not include intersectionality, and, in the specific case of women, there is no real fight for feminism unless it is an intersectional feminism.

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Pecking at *Rebecca*: Character(istics)s of Manderley as Symbolised in Hitchcock's Hollywood Practices in *Rebecca*

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Abstract

The current paper begins with an examination of the relationship between the producer David O. Selznick and the director Alfred Hitchcock, making the case that there are parallels between their relationship and the unnamed protagonist and other characters in Hitchcock's first Hollywood feature, *Rebecca* (1940). It then explores some of the Freudian and Lacanian symbols within the film and how these can allude to character traits of the main protagonists.

Keywords: Hitchcock; Freud; Selznick; Symbolism; *Rebecca*

Resumo

O presente artigo começa com uma análise do relacionamento entre o produtor David O. Selznick, e o realizador Alfred Hitchcock, a fim de identificar os paralelos entre o seu relacionamento e a personagem anónima, bem como outras personagens, da primeira produção de Hollywood feita por Hitchcock, *Rebecca* (1940). O artigo explora também alguns dos símbolos Freudianos e Lacanianos presentes no filme e como estes fazem referência a traços das personalidades dos protagonistas.

Palavras-chave: Hitchcock; Freud; Selznick; Simbolismo; *Rebecca*

As there is such a prevalence of material on the filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock and his 53 feature films, the question has to be asked: "Is it possible to explore any new angles or offer new insights in films when there is a 'conspicuously large volume of criticism'?"

(Roberts 182)?” I believe it is, for a number of reasons. Also, almost from the beginning of his career, he was both a popular and, consequently, a high-profile director. That is to say, his name alone was enough to attract a cinema audience as well as critical and, later, academic attention.

However, quantity, longevity and popularity are not reasons enough to make Hitchcock still a filmmaker whose work merits prolonged attention. Yet, such is the quantity of material that has been produced about Hitchcock and his films that there is, as Slavoj Žižek calls it, an “acceptance that Hitchcock is a ‘serious artist’” (*Everything you Wanted to Know about Lacan but Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock* 10). If he were not a serious artist, a status about which he might have demurred, then his work would long ago have ceased to be of interest to academics and audiences alike. It is in the context of treating Hitchcock as a serious artist that the present article is written.

Maxim: I’m asking you to marry me, you little fool. (*Rebecca*)

It is necessary to consider Hitchcock’s first film in Hollywood, not just from the perspective of inherent symbolism, but from the way his move to Hollywood initially affected his working practices. *Rebecca* was Hitchcock’s first film under contract to David O. Selznick and the relationship between the two men was complicated. With this in mind, I would contend that we could consider the positions occupied by both men as being concomitant with *Rebecca*’s unnamed and unknown protagonist, a newcomer to an established household, and Mrs. Danvers, the controlling element of that household. To describe the 40-year-old Hitchcock as an unknown ingénue and the 38-year-old Selznick as a jealous, controlling individual might be considered inappropriate. Yet there are certain similarities that can be explored.

The first is the building that Selznick used for his productions: Selznick International, which Leff describes as follows: “Separated from Washington Boulevard by an expanse of verdant lawn and manicured hedge, Selznick International’s colonnaded administration building resembled a wealthy Southern planter’s home” (4). Thus, this elegant building, which is shown before the credits of films produced by Selznick, can be said to be a stand in for Manderley. I would suggest that part of the purpose for such a custom-built edifice¹ would be to impress and intimidate, just as the female protagonist is impressed and intimidated by Manderley. Truffaut refers to this when questioning Hitchcock about the making of *Rebecca*:

Truffaut: Anyway, this was your first American project and I imagine you must have felt a little intimidated at the idea of undertaking it.

Hitchcock: Well, not exactly, because in fact it's a completely British picture: the story, the actors and the director were all English. (Truffaut 128)

While Hitchcock brushes a valid question aside with his usual aplomb, his answer is disingenuous. It is true that the story, most of the actors, and Hitchcock were English, but this only reveals part of the story. Firstly, the crew, equipment and production methods were American, and this was a system he was entirely unfamiliar with. Furthermore, in Selznick, he had a producer who unlike Michael Balcon, for example, took a great and interventive interest in every aspect of the filmmaking process. Leff confirms this: "At Selznick International, however, David Selznick influenced everything that he touched, and he touched almost everything" (4). Thus, Selznick can be seen as an equivalent to Mrs. Danvers who ran every aspect of *Manderley*. Considering this, Spoto's comments on Hitchcock's usual approach to scriptwriting are relevant:

This was how he had prepared his English films, and he foresaw no reason to alter his carefully thought out, economical, and visually arresting approach. Balcon, Black, and even Maxwell had not much interfered with this method, and Hitchcock did not expect interference from Selznick. This was his biggest and most unfortunate presumption. (Spoto 212-3)

At this nascent stage in his Hollywood career, Hitchcock was ingenuous in the assumptions he made. Furthermore, it suggests a lack of preparedness in his knowledge of Selznick and his working practices and contradicts what he wrote in 1937: "But it is being realised today that there must be one man at the helm. That man should be the producer. He should see the picture through from beginning to end. He must know all sides of the business and be a complete technician" (Gottlieb 183). It is somewhat ironic that only two years later, Hitchcock would be working for a man who precisely complies with his description and, eventually, causes Hitchcock much resentment.

Another point which suggests, if not naivety, then desperation on Hitchcock's part is the very contract he signed to work for Selznick. Leff describes aspects of the contract in the following three quotations:

Examining this revised contract some time later, Hitchcock's business advisor called it "replete with provisions unfavourable to Hitchcock and advantageous to Selznick";

the director himself would later come to regard it as a collar that rubbed and choked. In March 1939, however, with no pending offers from Zanuck or his peers, Hitchcock eagerly signed the amended contract. (35)

By contract, Hitchcock had agreed to render his services “pursuant to Producer’s directions, instructions and control.” (51)

His contract, after all, negated his claims of authorship. (56)

These quotations reveal certain interesting points. To the modern day reader, it might seem surprising that there were no other offers for Hitchcock’s services from America in the late 1930s. However, the filmmaking world was very different then and while Hitchcock was the premiere British filmmaker, his reputation was very much a national one, with his films, in America, enjoying only limited audiences, and thus, more importantly, revenue. Leff states: “Selznick International and the other companies knew that Hitchcock had a small but loyal audience” (21).

The signing of a foreign director with limited box office draw in America would be considered a great risk in an industry that was focused on making money rather than artistic statements. It is therefore not surprising that Hitchcock gratefully signed a contract which restricted his artistic freedom. However, in retrospect, Hitchcock resented the contract and this resulting resentment we can interpret as being the result of an initial naivety when he signed it. This naivety also extends to the working practices in American studios. Leff notes:

As he blocked the scene contrary to Selznick’s design, Hitchcock received a memorandum in which Selznick criticised him for not following directions. Hitchcock felt ambushed “You’re supposed to working with me, for me,” he told Lydia Schiller, who had reported his deviation to her employer. . . . The response shows . . . his naiveté: every American studio maintained what Preston Sturges called a “News Gathering Service”. (Leff 68-9)

Selznick’s reputation for what could positively be interpreted as “creative input” or negatively interpreted as “meddling” is well documented. However, it is not surprising that, in a system where the producer and not the director was considered the main creative force and, most importantly the financing force, producers would view their directors as assets that needed to be controlled.

This, in particular, would apply to a first-time director in the Hollywood system and thus one who had not proved himself within that system. McGilligan confirms this:

He moved to Hollywood, he said later, fully realising he was “a minor figure in a vast film industry made up of entrepreneurs who headed the studios.” It was a system dominated by producers, not directors, and by the stars under studio contract who reigned at the box office. (233)

Hitchcock’s comments resonate with the benefit of hindsight of a successful man. I would suggest, however, that Hitchcock, like his female protagonist, was underprepared for the Manderley of Hollywood he was walking into, particularly the controlling influence of Mrs. Danvers, otherwise known as David O. Selznick.

“I”: Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. (*Rebecca*)

Rebecca tells the story of a woman with a body but no name attempting to understand and replace a woman with a name but no body. It is also the story of a living woman without a voice who tries to find her voice by competing against the memory of a dead woman with a voice who needs to be silenced. Within this battle lies the first problem that needs to be discussed. How should the character with a body but no name or voice, as in the sense of personality, be addressed?

The lack of a name makes her difficult to write about, since we cannot follow the normal conventions of stating the character’s name followed by, in brackets, the actor playing them. If the title, the second Mrs. De Winter, is used then the character is reduced to the level of property. Whereas, if we use the name “Joan Fontaine”, each time this central character is mentioned, then it imbues too much of the actress Joan Fontaine into the character she is playing.

This article will be using the form of address “I” to refer to her as a character in the film. This is being done for three reasons. In the screenplay, after originally using the name Daphne, which Selznick disapproved of, for obvious reasons given the name of the author of the source material, the name “I” was used. Secondly, and related to the concerns of this article, the name “I” clearly positions the character as the psychoanalytic concept of the ego. Finally, the opening voiceover includes nine first person subject pronouns and five uses of the first person object pronoun² suggesting that the film is primarily concerned with the ego of one individual.

The last line of the opening monologue is also interesting since it is explicitly positioning the film which follows it to being a representation of a dream. The film should be considered then as a depiction of a dream and “I”’s absence of a name is, therefore, a symbolic depiction in the dream of the crisis in “I”’s fragile ego. Freud supports this: “It has been my experience - and to this I have found no exception - that

every dream treats of oneself. Dreams are absolutely egoistic” (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 206). Thus, “I” is the dreamer of the film and we should seek representations of her Id and Superego in *Rebecca*. These can be easily found, and some examples will be examined below.

In fact, a first-time viewer who is unfamiliar with the book the film is based on would logically make the assumption that the bodiless voice heard is Rebecca herself. Equally logically they would carry this interpretation into the first scene of the film when “I” is seen for the first time. It is only when Mrs. Van Hopper³ informs her (and us) that Maxim had married Rebecca that we divorce ourselves from this notion. As a result, this situation causes discomfort. Since the woman is denied the most basic unit of identity, which a child identifies with before gender, race, class or religion, she becomes a blank canvas to be filled in by those around her, a mere cipher. She becomes the ingénue in search of a personality. The events of the film depict the discovery of that personality.

The opening voiceover serves two other purposes, which reveal the sense of discomfort to be false. Firstly, it reveals that “I” will survive the events of the film as, at this stage in Hollywood history, voiceovers convey factual elements. Furthermore, the content, in contrast to “I”’s personality in the film, is the voice of an assured, eloquent woman, thus suggesting that “I” learns from the events of the film. As such, the opening monologue defuses any suspense which may have been achieved in the film.

Mrs. Danvers: It’s not only in this room. It’s in all the rooms of the house. (*Rebecca*)

Hitchcock noted of *Rebecca* in his extended interview with François Truffaut that: “In a sense the picture is the story of a house. The house was one of three key characters of the picture” (Truffaut 131). This leads to two questions, the first of which is, are there only three key characters in the film? The simple answer is “no”. There are five: “I”, the creator of the previously referred to dream; Rebecca, a symbol shifting effortlessly between the Id, Superego and Real; Manderley, the Superego constructed to exemplify duty; Mrs. Danvers, the male Superego, and Maxim, the female Superego. The interaction of “I” and the other four characters will now be discussed, with the first one being the character Hitchcock identified in the aforementioned quote.

Manderley is certainly a clear representation of the Superego, since it is the construct within which orders are given. Freud states:

The super-ego is, however, not merely a deposit left by the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against these choices. Its relation is not exhausted by the precept, “You ought to be such and such (like your father).”

It also comprises the prohibition, “You must not be such and such (like your father); that is, you may not do all that he does; many things are his prerogative.” (*The Ego and The Id* 39)

On her first morning at Manderley, “I” is instructed of her duties by her husband, Frith and Mrs. Danvers. These duties involve nothing more taxing than moving between certain rooms in Manderley at specific times of the day so that the order of the Other is maintained. Thus, letters are written in the morning room after breakfast and the fire is lit in the library after lunch and orders are dispatched to the unseen gardener of a garden that is never shown. “I” complies with these demands of the Superego, not through an understanding of them but because her ego is overpowered by them. As Freud notes: “We see this same ego as a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego” (*The Ego and The Id* 81). This description precisely describes “I” in *Rebecca* with, as will be seen, the Superego and Id being externalised in this dream world.

However, Freud’s description of the Superego, while referring to the father, can also be said to be a description of Rebecca herself, who is a shifting signifier. “I” is perpetually reminded in what ways she is not like her and in what ways she ought to be like her. Thus, Rebecca is also a mother figure to “I” and, because she is an absent mother, is as terrifying as the absent mother in *Psycho* since both the viewer and “I” imagine her to be everything “I” is not, in terms of compliance with the demands of the Superego. It is only when Maxim reveals the true nature of her character that we and “I” realise that she truly is everything “I” is not. In fact, what Rebecca is shown to be is a Symbolic depiction of rampant Id. An Id that is concerned only with servicing its own pleasures which are so heinous that Maxim “will never tell another living soul” (*Rebecca*) what they are.

The fact that Maxim will never tell another living soul, thus refusing to give Rebecca Symbolic representation beyond her name, also leaves her firmly in the realm of the Real. Samuels suggests that:

Lacan argues that we negate the Real by representing it and that this act of Symbolic destruction or murder is at the root of all our unconscious guilt. In Hitchcock's films, we find a clear illustration of this connection between our acts and our killing off of the Real. (1)

Thus "I", who herself contains elements of the Real, since she has no Symbolic name from the Other, reacts to Rebecca as if she was a physical presence, receiving diverse opinions about her to build up a mental construction of the person who is not there. The audience does the same, but each and every construction will be completely different. Thus, the Real of Rebecca escapes capture. Or as Žižek puts it in his book *Event*: "As such, the Real can only be discerned in its traces, effects or aftershocks" (120). It is, therefore, with the derelict Manderley that we are confronted with at the beginning of the film that we experience the traces, effects and aftershocks of the Symbolic remains of the Real Rebecca represents. It is only with the destruction of Manderley that Rebecca and her alter-ego Mrs Danvers are destroyed and reduced to traces and effects.

Mrs. Danvers and Maxim are interesting characters in that they are inverted versions of traditional depictions of the requirements of the Superego. It is Maxim, upon his marriage to Rebecca who states that he was, "tremendously conscious of the family honour" (*Rebecca*). I would suggest that, within the strictures of upper-class family being depicted, this consciousness is a feminine requisite. Traditionally, the errant male's behaviour is tolerated, expected, and then covered up. This indicates that Rebecca is the embodiment of this male behaviour, as Maxim does all three in his relationship with Rebecca. Furthermore, Maxim, when he says, "But I never had a moment's happiness with her. She was incapable of love or tenderness or decency", he is voicing typically female worries about male behaviour.

In addition, his constant chiding of "I"'s behaviour, whether it be to tell her to stop biting her nails or to eat up like a good girl or to wear a mackintosh because, "You can't be too careful with the children" (*Rebecca*) are commands that depict the Superego. However, these are commands that can be considered as ones which the traditional mother figure would make, since the father would be concerned with other issues.

On the other hand, Mrs. Danvers' concerns are masculine. She is the character that "I" fears, not because she represents the Superego from a female perspective, but because she offers the perspective of "wait till your father gets home" (*Rebecca*), with the threat of punishment traditionally dispensed by the father. She is, initially, the ultimate masculine voice of the Other as a controlling force in the film.

This can be seen in the scene where the discovery that the statuette has been broken. “I” pleads with Maxim, as the mother, to confess her misdemeanour to Mrs. Danvers, as the father, and so act as a mediating force in the face of the Other. It should also be remembered that, within the context of the film, Maxim’s responsibilities are unseen as they take place outside of the field of battle: Manderley. This makes them unimportant and, perhaps, traditionally female in their nature.

Maxim: You would like a bridal veil. Or at least. . . (Rebecca)

The line above is spoken immediately after Maxim and “I”’s marriage. Upon realising that their marriage might have lacked something for his young bride, Maxim buys all the carnations available at a conveniently placed flower seller and deposits them on “I”’s lap. This is significant for two reasons. The first is that their unarranged state, in keeping with Freudian symbolism, is suggestive of “I”’s unexplored sexuality, which is further indicated by Maxim depositing them in her lap. Secondly, the carnations which Maxim buys, while innocuous in terms of symbolic content to a British or American audience, are for Eastern European audiences a flower associated with the death of a loved one. This, inadvertently, evokes the figure of the dead Rebecca.

Flowers are further developed as a symbolic element within the film and one of which the makers were aware. Leff notes:

Selznick had trimmed some dialogue in which Mrs. Danvers speaks of maintaining flowers in Rebecca’s room; the line in question was, as Selznick argued, “Silly” and the idea could more economically be conveyed by simply placing fresh flowers in the scene’s opening shot. (69)

While economical, I would suggest that Selznick was incorrect in this decision. The only remaining reference to flowers in the screenplay is made by Beatrice in passing when she says that Mrs. Danvers must have learnt her flower arranging from Rebecca. The line, which is important as it indicates Rebecca’s skilled manipulation of her sexuality, if we accept that flowers are symbolic of female sexuality, loses significance as it is uttered by a minor character. By eradicating dialogue for one of the central characters as a means of indicating symbolic content, the causal viewer would merely interpret the flowers as a decorative element of the *mise-en-scène* and so disregard them from being visual clues indicating psychological depth.

As a result, the simple flower arrangements in “I”’s own room in comparison to the more complex ones in Rebecca’s room, as suggestive of Mrs. Danver’s attitude towards both characters, would be overlooked. Leff, however, correctly suggests:

Hitchcock used the flowers even more tellingly. Danvers reverently holds out Rebecca's black nightgown and asks "I" whether she has seen anything "so delicate": the young woman stands frame left, her face mottled by the spindly shadows of the cut flowers as though entrapped by all that Rebecca meant to those at Manderley. (71)

This is, of course, a multi-faceted shot. Firstly, we have the frequently commented upon lesbian undertones of Mrs. Danver's treatment of the negligee. Secondly, at this stage in the film, the "so delicate" is an accurate description of "I"'s mental state. Finally, the shadows of the flowers develop the metaphor which has been introduced, albeit because of Selznick, not at the level of the text, throughout the film.

There is one final example that indicates that flowers should be treated as a serious thematic element in the film. It occurs during Rebecca's point of view shot in the seaside cottage while Maxim reveals the events leading up to her death. The camera, filming Rebecca's absent perspective, concentrates on the empty sofa and the filled ashtray. It then tilts up and pans slowly left before eventually focusing on Maxim. Within the pan, the camera views two vases full of dead flowers in front of a picture of a sailing vessel. These dead stems of flowers, due to the symbolic value already established in the film, clearly indicate the shrivelling female influence of Rebecca's Real, Id, and Superego on the ingenuous "I". Furthermore, the combination of the two vases of dead flowers and the picture of the sailing boat foreshadows Maxim's confession as to what he did with Rebecca's body by scuttling her boat. This scuttling leads to a further symbolic element which needs to be considered: the sea.

Mrs. Danvers: Listen to the sea. So soothing. (*Rebecca*)

The first point to note is that the sea is linked, at both the level of the script and through the mise-en-scène, to Rebecca's bedroom. Mrs. Danvers first introduces the room in the following manner: "That room in the west wing I was telling you about is there through that door. . . . The most beautiful room in the house. The only one that looks down across the lawns to the sea. It was Mrs. de Winter's room" (*Rebecca*). What is of note in this speech is that the words "beautiful", and "Mrs. De Winters" reinforce the impression the audience have already formed of Rebecca, but now deepen our apparent understanding of the character to include her taste. However, the key reference in the speech is that made to the sea.

Mrs. Danvers makes the above speech in a long shot from the end of the corridor leading to it where we see the ornate doors guarded by Jasper, the family

dog, making his first appearance. Unusually for Hitchcock and his normally positive treatment of dogs, Jasper's initial presence is perceived by "I" and the audience as threatening. Perhaps Hitchcock has intentionally done this so as to allude to Greek mythology and Cerberus guarding the gates of Hades.

After this initial, cursory, introduction to Rebecca's room, "I" enters the bedroom on two occasions and each of the visits ends with a reference to the sea. Her first entrance is the much-discussed scene in which Mrs. Danvers describes Rebecca getting ready for bed. This scene begins with a reverse tracking shot of "I" approaching Rebecca's door. This camera movement is suggestive of the spirit of Rebecca retreating before the advancement of "I" and is similar to the camera's evocation of mother in *Notorious*. This view is supported if we notice that Mrs. Danvers herself believes that Rebecca comes back from the dead to watch the living.

After entering the room, "I" is faced with a floor-to-ceiling-length veiled curtain which effectively divides the room into a (semi-) public and private space. The film cuts to the other side of this veil to see "I" enter Rebecca's private world. The gauze serves a further purpose than merely to divide the space. It also obfuscates what is either side of it since we can only see the outlines of objects and not details. In this respect, this veil is also in effect a screen, if we take into account McGowan's discussion of what Lacan means by a screen:

One looks at a movie screen and sees images on the screen, but a screen in front of someone prevents one from seeing her or him. Lacan's conception of the screen is paradoxical: it "hides the real" when it functions as a site for seeing, but it "indicates" the real through the act of blocking what the subject can see. (McGowan 71)

This notion of obscuring the Real rather than revealing it is given further credence by Mrs. Danvers in her speech, apparently giving details of Rebecca's night-time preparations. What she is actually doing, in her lovingly obsessive depiction of Rebecca's bedtime preparations, is exacerbating "I"'s and, at this stage, the audience's, misunderstanding of Rebecca. In so doing, she acts to block what "I" can see, or rather, perceive of Rebecca. This screening through the use of the Symbolic realm of language only emphasises the Real.

In fact, Mrs. Danvers can be said to be Rebecca incarnate in the film, particularly in the two bedroom scenes. Rebecca's malevolence, as it is finally revealed, is manifest in Mrs. Danvers, almost from her first appearance. What we therefore have in Mrs. Danvers is a representation of the personality of Rebecca, while

others describe her physical beauty, which of course we don't see. If we regard Mrs. Danvers as a depiction of Rebecca's personality, then her love of Rebecca, is not simply the attraction of one woman to another, but also allusive of Rebecca's narcissism.

This notion is given credence if we consider how, according to Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca would laugh at them all, suggestive of a person who sees herself as superior to those around her. This I would assert is an illustration of Rebecca's and, through inference, Mrs. Danvers' megalomania which Freud links to narcissism in his eponymously-titled essay in the following manner: "This megalomania has no doubt come into being at the expense of object-libido. The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism" (Freud, *On Narcissism* 5). This narcissism is reflected in the fact that Mrs. Danvers' comments during this first visit are all to do with Rebecca's appearance and are consistent with what Joan Copjec states in "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan": "The subject's narcissistic relation to the self is seen to conflict with and disrupt other social relations" (Stam *et al.* 442). Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca's narcissism serves precisely the purpose of disrupting "I"'s understanding just as Mrs. Danvers is in almost open conflict with "I" as soon as she arrives at Manderley.

The first bedroom scene ends with the audience being given the first clue, not just to Mrs. Danvers' burgeoning madness, but also to Rebecca's duplicitous nature. After Mrs. Danvers has uttered the words, "Listen to the sea. It's so soothing" (*Rebecca*) words which drive a tearful "I" out of the room, Hitchcock has a dissolve shot of a violent sea crashing against the shore. This is a relatively common Hitchcock symbol to represent extreme emotion⁴ and here it serves, I would propose, three symbolic purposes. Firstly, through the juxtaposition of words and image, it alludes to Mrs. Danvers' delusional state. Secondly, it is the first indication that, contrary to Mrs. Danvers' description of her, Rebecca is not a soothing force of nature. Finally, this shot of the sea can also be said to represent "I"'s emotional state, since the shot of the sea dissolves into a shot of "I" tearful at her desk.

"I" enters Rebecca's bedroom on one other occasion and the sea is once more prominent: after her humiliating entrance at the ball, to confront Mrs. Danvers, who goads "I" into considering suicide. Tania Modleski comments on how the camera moves in this shot in the following manner: "The culminating instance of this backward movement occurs when Mrs. Danvers attempts to persuade her to jump out of the window to her death, and the camera, placed outside the window, begins to move

away as if inviting her and luring her to her doom” (45). While Modleski has rightly argued that, throughout the early part of the film, Hitchcock shoots “I” beginning in close up and then zooming or tracking out, so as to emphasise her feeling of psychic claustrophobia in close up moving to the long shot to express her isolation, I would claim that in the present example, Modleski’s interpretation can be taken a degree further.

It has been suggested above that Rebecca’s initial approach to the room, which was filmed in a reverse tracking shot, could be interpreted as the camera metaphorically being the spirit of Rebecca recoiling away. In this context, this final shot “luring her to her doom” (Modleski 45) mirrors the former shot and it is the spirit of Rebecca through the camera which is luring “I”. Yet it is the sea, and, I would suggest, in this case, contrary to Michael Walker’s assertion that “Water - especially the sea - is most often a source of threat” (388), which rescues “I” from the clutches of Rebecca and her physical manifestation, Mrs. Danvers. In the very next shot the camera reverts to a point of view shot of the flare announcing a ship on the rocks, which breaks the spell Mrs. Danvers has over “I”. Thus, the sea, which Mrs. Danvers erroneously thinks has killed Rebecca and yet entirely in keeping with her deluded rationale, through the grounding of the ship and the consequent discovery of Rebecca’s body, begins the process which leads to “I” becoming more mature. In addition, Rebecca is revealed as being absent in body, morals and any notion of love or empathy, someone whose interests were purely narcissistic.

Frith: I’m afraid the fire is not usually lit in the library till the afternoon. (*Rebecca*)

Fireplaces in *Rebecca*, due to their large size and frequency of appearance, can be interpreted symbolically as well. That Freud interpreted the symbol of the fireplace as representing female genitalia should not be considered coincidental in Hitchcock’s filming of them, either in this film or other Hitchcock films.

The symbol of the fireplace is shown on three occasions. The first of which is when “I” enters the library on the morning after her arrival at Manderley. The room is obviously cold, as the windows are open and “I” is not just cold but lost. We see the fireplace fully loaded with logs waiting to be lit. Frith informs her, as the introductory line for this segment indicates, that, while the option is open to her, the fire is not normally lit at this time of day. This should be interpreted beyond the realm of the Superego and should be considered as a reference to her and Maxim’s relationship at this time: the passion they wish to express should not be expressed at this time, as it is inappropriate due to unresolved issues.

The fireplace next makes a symbolic appearance during Maxim's confession at the cottage. Here, the symbolism refers to a different character. The empty cobwebbed fireplace is here a representation of Rebecca's barren sexuality, due to her death. The cobwebs on the fireplace also, however, symbolise Maxim being influenced by the past and his inability to move forward with "I".

Nevertheless, his speech in this scene is cathartic, not just from his point of view, but from "I"'s, as it leads to her assuming control of Manderley, albeit temporarily, with the yin and yang of Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers nearly defeated. As "I" descends the staircase of Manderley, after the confession scene, she is dressed more like Mrs. Danvers and Frith's attitude towards her is supportive, not just of her, but more importantly, the family she now represents. Upon meeting her in the library Maxim comments: "I can't forget what it's done to you. I killed that when I told you about Rebecca. In a few hours you have grown so much older" (*Rebecca*).

This murder was necessary, though, for the film is not just an exploration of a malevolent influence, but more importantly a rites of passage, the story of a girl growing into a woman and having to face adult responsibilities. It is at this point that, in an action that flaunts P.C.A. regulations, "I" and Maxim kiss properly and continually for eleven seconds. This kiss is framed under an arch, which is a Freudian symbol of unity. Yet the arch behind the kissing couple a fire burns in the fireplace. This not only foreshadows the final burning of Manderley and the removal of Mrs. Danvers but is an explicit symbol of the euphemism: the fire that has been lit between them.

Maxim: I hated her. (*Rebecca*)

Rebecca is a film which suffers from two steps forward and two steps back. Selznick was responsible for all four steps. His intrusion at the level of the script probably robbed the film of the typical Hitchcock humour, of which only a few examples remain. One is Beatrice's comment on teeth needing to be removed, as they are troublesome things, which echoes a similar reference in *Young and Innocent* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. The second is the policeman's bizarrely muttered swearing in of the witness at the coroner's hearing, as if to suggest that justice was an unwritten rule that did not need voicing.

Furthermore, the editing in the film, which Hitchcock largely stayed away from, apart from the sequence in the cottage discussed above, is less reliant on Hitchcock's "editing in the camera"⁵ and more reliant on multiple takes from different angles. This allowed Selznick to tinker with the footage to select whichever particular

emphasis he wanted to achieve.

However, Selznick involvement gave Hitchcock's work a depth he had previously lacked. As Leff notes: "Hitchcock's British pictures lurched from one big moment to the next, the characters riding the roller coaster of the plot; Selznick helped bring mood, seamless continuity, and psychological nuance to the director's work" (82). While Hitchcock's film still had the roller coaster ride moments, his characters became more flawed and thus, psychologically deeper and more interesting.

Finally, the inevitable consequence of signing to Selznick and moving to America was that it gave Hitchcock access to the best of everything. This includes actors, equipment, filmmaking professionals and scriptwriters. These, in conjunction with more psychologically flawed characters, vastly improve the quality of Hitchcock's films from then on.

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¹ The building was initially used as a set by Thomas Ince and then converted by Cecil B. DeMille.

² The full opening monologue is as follows: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron-gate leading to the drive and for a while, I could not enter for the way was barred to me. Then, like all dreamers, I was possessed all of a sudden with supernatural powers and passed through the barrier before me.

The drive wound away in front of me, twisting and turning as it always had done, but as I advanced, I was aware that a change had come upon it. Nature had come into her own again and little by little had encroached upon the drive with long tenacious fingers.

On and on wound the poor thread that had once been our drive and finally, there was Manderley. Manderley, secretive and silent - time could not mar the perfect symmetry of those walls.

Moonlight can play odd tricks upon the fancy and suddenly it seemed to me that light came from the windows and then a cloud came upon the moon and hovered an instant like a dark hand before a face. The illusion went with it. I looked upon a desolate shell with no whisper of the past about its staring walls. We can never go back to Manderley again, that much is certain. But sometimes, in my dreams, I go back to those strange days of my life, which began for me in the South of France" (*Rebecca*).

³ Mrs. Van Hopper is the prototype of the aging libidinous widow Uncle Charlie exploits in *Shadow of a Doubt*. In fact, his description could have been written with Mrs. Van Hopper in mind: "And what do the wives do, these useless women? You see them in the hotels, the best hotels, every day by the thousands, drinking the money, eating the money, losing the money at bridge, playing all day and all night, smelling of money, proud of their jewelry but of nothing else, horrible, faded, fat, greedy women. . . Are they human or are they fat, wheezing animals, hmm?" (*Rebecca*).

⁴ Examples of this can be seen in *Suspicion* and *Vertigo*.

⁵ The strategy by which Hitchcock's storyboarding foresaw every camera position thus making filming more economical and assembling the final film more straightforward.

(Un)Making it in Rapture: The Critique of the Myth of the Self-Made Man, of Ayn Rand, and of Objectivism in *BioShock* (2007) and in *BioShock: Rapture* (2011)

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Abstract

This paper attempts to prove that *BioShock* (2007), a science fiction video game set in 1960, and *BioShock: Rapture* (2011), the novel published in its wake which starts in 1945, present a powerful critique of the myth of the self-made man, conveyed via the depiction of the fall of Rapture. Rapture is the dystopian, underwater city created by Andrew Ryan in which both the video game and the novel take place. The city is built in an art deco style reminiscent of the 1927 movie *Metropolis*. A Russian-born American tycoon, Ryan believed that nuclear annihilation was at hand and despised anything resembling socialist-like policies, which is why he decided to seclude himself and a few chosen ones somewhere underneath the Atlantic Ocean. The place he selected, Rapture, was based on Objectivism and closely related to Ayn Rand, an American-Russian writer who promoted an extreme version of individualism and laissez-faire capitalism, namely on one of her novels, entitled *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), in which she presents the capitalist utopia called Galt’s Gulch. Although they are never explicitly mentioned in the texts analysed here, both Rand and Galt’s Gulch provide Ryan and Rapture with their ethos, given that Ryan clearly resembles Rand and Rapture is strikingly similar to Galt’s Gulch. Despite promising that those willing to work hard enough would be able to fulfil the promises of the myth of the self-made man, Rapture ends up falling, largely because of its defence of Rand and Objectivist-inspired capitalist ideals, with the myth of the self-made man failing to be fulfilled. As a result, both the myth and, by extension, Rand and Objectivism, are called into question by *BioShock* and *BioShock: Rapture*, clearly located within the context of Cold War era and American culture and history.

Keywords: *BioShock*; Self-made Man; Cold War; Ayn Rand; Objectivism

Resumo

O presente ensaio procura demonstrar que *BioShock* (2007), um jogo digital de ficção científica cuja ação decorre em 1960, e *BioShock: Rapture* (2011), o romance que se lhe seguiu e que começa em 1945, esboçam uma clara crítica ao mito norte-americano do “self-made man”, apresentada através da descrição da queda de Rapture, uma cidade distópica localizada debaixo do Oceano Atlântico, na qual tanto o jogo como o romance se desenrolam. Construída através do recurso a um estilo Art Déco que lembra o filme *Metropolis* de 1927, Rapture foi imaginada e concebida por Andrew Ryan, um magnata norte-americano nascido no Império Russo que acreditava numa catástrofe nuclear eminente e que desprezava qualquer política remotamente conectada com o socialismo. Como tal, Ryan decidiu refugiar-se em Rapture, levando consigo algumas pessoas que ele mesmo havia selecionado criteriosamente. Rapture baseava-se na filosofia objetivista desenvolvida por Ayn Rand, também ela uma norte-americana nascida na Rússia que apoiava versões extremas do individualismo e do capitalismo, nomeadamente num dos seus romances, intitulado *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), no qual Rand apresenta a utopia capitalista Galt’s Gulch. Ainda que nunca sejam explicitamente mencionados nos textos aqui analisados, tanto Rand como Galt’s Gulch são fundamentais para Ryan e para Rapture, já que a personagem de Ryan se baseia na figura de Rand e que Rapture possui múltiplos pontos em comum com Galt’s Gulch. Ainda que Rapture prometa a todos aqueles dispostos a trabalhar arduamente que poderão converter-se em “self-made men”, tal acaba por não ocorrer, já que Rapture falha estrondosamente, em larga medida devido à adoção dos ideais objetivistas de Rand. Como resultado, tanto o mito do “self-made man” como a visão objetivista de Rand são postos em causa por *BioShock* e *BioShock: Rapture*, claramente localizados no contexto da Guerra Fria na cultura e história norte-americanas.

Palavras-chave: *BioShock*; Mito do Self-Made Man; Guerra Fria; Ayn Rand; Objetivismo

Introduction¹

In the opening scene of *BioShock* (a first-person shooter published in 2007), which takes place in 1960, the protagonist of the video game, Jack, is aboard a plane headed for San Francisco that ends up crashing somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. When he manages to come to the surface and take a much-needed breath of air, he finds himself surrounded by burning pieces of the airplane he had just been on and must swim to a nearby lighthouse reminiscent of Verne’s *The Lighthouse at the End of the World* (Gibbons n. pag.). There, he comes across an open door awaiting his entry (and that same door conveniently closes once he’s inside the building) and is welcomed by the menacing, giant gold bust of a stern-looking man, as well as by the ironically pleasant tune of the instrumental of “La Mer”, popularized by Darin in 1959 as “Beyond the Sea”. Underneath the bust, there is a red banner with the puzzling sentence “NO GODS OR KINGS. ONLY MAN.” spelled out in golden letters. In what follows, Jack comes face to face with an underwater fallen city called Rapture,

resembling Fritz Lang's (1890-1976) *Metropolis* (1927), but instead of motor vehicles and aircrafts driving and flying around, there are fish everywhere. The art deco city Jack has apparently stumbled upon, as the main character quickly discovers, is a utopian capitalist paradise largely based on American-Russian Ayn Rand's (1905-1982) Objectivist philosophy, created by the Russian-born American tycoon Andrew Ryan, whose bust was at the entrance of the lighthouse. This dilapidated city, clearly indebted to utopian and dystopian literatures and to science fiction, has turned into a dystopian cautionary tale which questions Rand and her Objectivist views and the myth of the self-made man.

Since its release, *BioShock* has become one of the most critically acclaimed and best-selling video games of all time, with several other digital games, downloadable content, viral games, novels (namely *BioShock: Rapture*, from 2011), board games, and a live-action cinematic adaptation (yet to be released by Netflix) being produced in its wake. *BioShock*'s critical acclaim and high sales were followed by the publication of several studies, such as the articles written by William Gibbons (2010) and Jessica Aldred and Brian Greenspan (2011) and the book by Felan Parker and Aldred (2018), and the numerous theses published over the years in different countries. Even though a lot has been said about *BioShock* and its relation to game studies, utopian and dystopian literatures, and science fiction, the way *BioShock* and *BioShock: Rapture* alongside it relate to Cold War era in America and call into question some of "the myths that made America" (Paul 11) has not received enough or even much attention. This paper sets out to accomplish just that, analysing *BioShock*, and the novel that followed it, as a powerful critique of the myth of the self-made man, and, by extension, of Rand and her Objectivist beliefs, conveyed via the utter collapse of Rapture from a Rand and Objectivist-based capitalist utopia to a dystopian nightmare devoid of a way out.

According to Heike Paul, the myth² of the self-made man appears under the arc of the ideological paradigm of American exceptionalism (14), an expression that can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), a French aristocrat who remarked that "the position of the Americans was quite exceptional" (36; Paul 14). Tocqueville was referring to the uniqueness of the American political system, with the American democracy contrasting sharply with the French instability sparked by social and political discontent that had led to violent revolutions, counterrevolutions, and the restoration of monarchical rule (Paul 14). American exceptionalism was quickly decontextualized and used to describe the genesis of the American nation in a much more comprehensive way, as Paul argues (14). Byron E. Shafer, for example, declares

that “American exceptionalism . . . is the notion that the United States was created differently, developed differently, and thus has to be understood differently - essentially on its own terms and within its own context” (v; Paul 14). As Paul explains, the expression began being applied in an unspecific manner “to claim American superiority vis-à-vis non-Americans and to legitimate American hegemony outside the US”, while also conveying the notions of uniqueness and predestination (14). Among other things, American exceptionalism is responsible for informing and structuring American self-representations, fashioning internal coherence, and projecting American hegemony outside the United States (Paul 17). The myths located under the arc of the ideological paradigm of American exceptionalism, such as that of the self-made man, play a crucial role in building plausible and self-evident discursive constructions of the nation, creating internal solidarity and commitment to the nation state and what it stands up for, and representing the United States to outsiders (Paul 17). As a result, this myth, encompassed by what Paul described as the “umbrella myth” of the American dream,³ reinforces the main tenets of American exceptionalism.

In order to analyse *BioShock's* and *BioShock: Rapture's* criticism of the myth of the self-made man (and, as a result, of Rand and Objectivism) by depicting the fall of Rapture, this paper performs a close reading of the video game directed by Ken Levine and of the novel written by John Shirley, adopting an approach clearly located within the field of cultural studies. While doing so, this study also embraces the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies, establishing a parallel between game studies, Cold War era American history and culture, utopian and dystopian literatures, and American narratives that address the myth of the self-made man. Looking at *BioShock* and *BioShock: Rapture* as cultural texts⁴ laden with meaning at all levels, this study starts by taking a close look at the figure of Ryan, Rapture's creator, so that the reader can understand the events and the set of beliefs that led to the establishment of a city based on Rand and her Objectivist ideals. Then, the paper establishes a parallel between the capitalist utopia the Russian-born writer envisioned in *Atlas Shrugged*, entitled Galt's Gulch, and Ryan's own capitalist utopia, Rapture. Afterwards, this article presents the myth of the self-made man, placing it within the context of American literature and culture and showing how those that moved to Rapture believed they could go from rags to riches through their talents and sheer hard work. Finally, this analysis finishes off by arguing that the texts studied here criticize the myth mentioned above by depicting the fall of Rapture, and, as a result, paint a dire picture of Rand and her Objectivist views. All the while, this paper will refrain from giving *BioShock's* and *BioShock: Rapture's* endings away, mostly for a lack

of space to do so, but also partially for the sake of those who still haven't played the game or read the novel.

1. Andrew Ryan: The New Deal, the Atomic Bombings, and Anticommunism

BioShock and *BioShock: Rapture*, which begins in 1945, during the presidency of Harry S. Truman (1884-1972), give us some cues as to why the city of Rapture was created. As the game's prequel and as the game itself make clear, Ryan, the founder of Rapture and one of its most important individuals, fled from the Russian Empire in either 1918 or 1919,⁵ after the Russian Revolution of 1917 that overthrew the imperial government and that placed the Bolsheviks in power. Born in a village located somewhere near Minsk (the capital of modern-day Belarus), the then Andrei Rianofski witnessed the Revolution and the resulting destruction of his family's business, as well as the execution of some of his family members at the hands of the Bolsheviks for speaking out against Communism. Accompanied by his father, Rianofski eventually got to America, where he believed he was free to "own his own work" and "benefit from the brilliance of his own mind, the strength of his own muscles, the MIGHT of his own will" (*BioShock* n. pag.).

In the US, he anglicized his name, changing it to Andrew Ryan, and made a fortune, becoming one of America's wealthiest men, owning Ryan Oil, most of America's coal, and its second largest railroad. However, after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's (1882-1945) New Deal, Ryan become disillusioned with America. He started believing that what he considered to be "the devastation of socialism" (Shirley 20) had finally reached American shores and that the United States had begun drinking from what he described as "the Bolshevik poison, spoon-fed to [the Americans] by Roosevelt and his New Dealers" (*BioShock* n. pag.).

Central to Ryan's criticism of the New Deal is his conception of "parasite", which basically referred to anyone who the American-Russian magnate believed to be profiting undeservingly from someone else's work or to be stomping on someone else's freedoms. In an attempt to differentiate between a man and a parasite, Ryan declares in one of his audio diaries the following: "What is the difference between a Man and a Parasite? A Man builds. A Parasite asks, 'Where is my share?' A Man creates. A Parasite says, 'What will the neighbors think?' A Man invents. A Parasite says, 'Watch out, or you might tread on the toes of God. . .'" (*BioShock* n. pag.). Among those considered to be parasites by the Russian-born tycoon are Bolsheviks, Roosevelt, and Truman, as Ryan suggests while speaking to Sullivan, the Head of Security of his Private Forces, specifically when he calls them "little men", who, like leeches, are on the backs of

“great ones”: “I despise what this civilization is becoming, Sullivan. First the Bolsheviks and then - Roosevelt. Truman, carrying on much of what Roosevelt began. Little men on the backs of great ones” (Shirley 14).

Ryan’s stance on the New Deal mirrors some of the criticism it received during the 1930’s. Following the economic meltdown that took place on October 29, 1929, or on what became known as “Black Tuesday”, America’s markets lost billions of dollars, prices fell by some 40 percent, and unemployment rose to around 14 million (Grant 300). President Herbert Hoover’s (1874-1964) response to this monetary crisis was to follow “the Republican’s party creed that America’s strength lay in what he termed the ‘rugged individualism’” of the American people (Grant 301). Hoover believed that Americans were “in an extraordinary degree self-sustaining” and would soon be able to “lead the march of prosperity” once again. As a result, there was no need to heed the reasonable Democratic calls for federal intervention, given that, according to Hoover, the depression could not be “cured by legislative action or executive pronouncement”. Instead, “economic wounds must be healed by the action of the cells of the economic body - the producers and consumers themselves” (Grant 301). Federal intervention was, to Hoover, completely at odds with the American way of life (Grant 301).

Despite Hoover’s words, there eventually was federal relief to corporations, under the auspices of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), and it was believed that American citizens would benefit, albeit indirectly, from this financial aid. Yet, direct federal support for American individuals was still perceived as “a dangerous step towards socialism” (Grant 302). Soon after, Roosevelt was elected President of the US in a landslide victory and promised the American people a New Deal. This New Deal came in the shape of a domestic program which took action to bring about short-term economic relief and longer-term economic and social reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, waterpower, labour, and housing. Notwithstanding its achievements, the New Deal failed to rescue the American economy, and, in 1938, the Depression reached its nadir, with new layoffs and further economic instability (Chafe 5). With the 1942 congressional election, the conservative withdrawal from New Deal programs began, and when the 78th Congress arrived in Washington in 1943, a round of assaults against these same programs started, with several relief agencies being abolished. Other agencies also suffered, such as the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), which was accused of working in the name of socialism (Chafe 22). Unsurprisingly, the New Deal was depicted as “a new incarnation of the Red Menace”, and indistinguishable from communism (Chafe 91), as Ryan also suggests in *BioShock* by pairing the Bolsheviks with Roosevelt and Truman.

Even though Ryan clearly despised Roosevelt's New Deal and what he perceived to be its resemblance to socialist policies and Bolshevik ideals, it was only after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945) that the American-Russian businessman decided that something had to be done before it was too late. While talking to Sullivan about the devastation of both Japanese cities, the long-term effects of exposure to radiation, and what they both believed to be "*the inevitability of Atomic war*" (Shirley 15), Ryan made the decision of building Rapture. He grandiloquently reveals his intention, telling Sullivan that they both "can escape . . . and certain others. We can escape from the mutual destruction of the mad little men who scuttle about the halls of government power. We are going to build a *new world* in the one place these madmen cannot touch. . ." (Shirley 13-5)

Ryan's repulsion regarding the atomic bombs echoes the disgust of some Americans who spoke out against using them at the time that they were deployed. In August, 1945, the United States ended World War II (1939-1945) with what Susan-Mary Grant called "a devastating show of strength" (328), after dropping the atomic bombs developed in Los Alamos Laboratory, New Mexico, as part of the Manhattan Project. As Melvyn P. Leffler put it, the use of these weapons "vividly demonstrated American power; they confirmed that enemies of America would pay for their transgressions" (26). However, the deployment of the atomic bombs proved controversial, and not just because of the loss of life and material devastation that followed, as Grant argues (328). After all, scientific research had ceased to be, in political and public perception, what Hoover described as "one of the most potent impulses to progress" (Grant 328). Instead, it became "a deadly and dangerous threat not just to life but to national security" (Grant 328), especially after America lost the atomic monopoly in 1949 (Grant 330), when the Soviet Union tested a fission weapon of its own. Besides, many doubted the need of dropping the atomic bombs at all, as can be seen by a US intelligence survey that states that "Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped" (Chafe 53). Henry Stimson (1867-1950), Roosevelt's Secretary of War, thought so too, asserting that America could have ended the war by telling the Japanese that they could keep their emperor, as did the President Dwight Eisenhower (1890-1969), who noted that "the Japanese were ready to surrender, and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing" (Chafe 53).

As soon as the decision of building Rapture had been made, secrecy about it had to be kept at all costs, to stop the American "leftist" government or the communist Russian state from ruining it by infiltrating into it. The same is asserted during a conversation between Sullivan and Ruben Greavy, one of Rapture's head

engineers, in which Greavy alludes to Ryan's fear of external interference, as well as to the need to keep Rapture a secret:

Mr. Ryan doesn't want any outsiders going down there to report on what he's building. . . . He figures if governments know about it, they'll infiltrate. And then there's the union types, Communist organizers. . . suppose *they* were to worm their way in? The best way to keep people like that out is to keep it completely secret from them. (Shirley 39)

In a further effort to preserve secrecy about Rapture, Ryan forbade any sort of contact with what he termed the "surface world", which meant that people who moved to Rapture were not allowed to leave it, just like they were not free to communicate with anyone on the outside.

Ryan's fears of "leftist" or Communist interference mirror the wave of anticommunism that swept through America in the 1940's and 50's. There had previously been a Red Scare following the Russian Revolution of 1917 (the same revolution that forced Ryan and his father to flee Russia), and, in the mid-1920's, women's groups devoted to social welfare were accused of being "part of a 'spider web' conspiracy emanating from Moscow and determined to subvert the American family" (Chafe 91). A decade later, during Roosevelt's presidency, the New Deal was perceived by many as a new form of the Red Menace, as was argued above. However, it was only in the years following World War II, as the Cold War deepened, that anticommunism reached unprecedented levels of hysteria (Grant 332). Created in 1938 to investigate anti-American propaganda, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was made a permanent standing committee, and the Smith Act (passed in 1940) was used as a vehicle to prosecute anyone who supported communism (Chafe 91-92). The Truman administration also issued Executive Order 9835 just nine days after the Truman Doctrine⁶ had been proclaimed, creating a Federal Employee Loyalty Program, giving government security officials clearance to screen over 2 million employees of the federal government, and allowing the Attorney General to draw up a list of "totalitarian, fascist, or subversive organizations" (Chafe 93). Anyone even remotely connected to such groups could then be accused of being disloyal (Chafe 93).

After the election of 1948 (which Truman surprisingly won), anticommunism dominated American political life, with increasing evidence suggesting that there was indeed a real threat of communist subversion (Chafe 99; Schrecker 39) and with suspicions that the communist conspiracy was being aided by thousands of disloyal

American citizens multiplying (Chafe 99). Taking advantage of this context, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin announced in 1950 that he had in his possession “a list of 205 [card-carrying communists] . . . who are still working and shaping policy in the State Department” (Chafe 99), thus inaugurating the period that came to be known as McCarthyism, which produced several investigations and hearings in an effort to expose alleged communist infiltration in the American government. Ultimately, this wave of anticommunism made “suspect any politician, group, or cause that could be described as ‘leftist’” (Chafe 100) and led to the definition of advocacy of essential social reforms as “perilous, unsafe, and out of bounds” (Chafe 102). As a result, many important reforms were struck from the agenda of acceptable discussion (Chafe 103), as *BioShock: Rapture* depicts when Roland Wallace, senior maintenance engineer at Rapture, mentions the need for a minimum wage at Rapture and is accused by Ryan of having communist ideas:

Wallace gulped but went bravely on. “. . . [P]eople working for most merchants here aren’t getting paid much. There’s no minimum wage so it’s kind of hard to earn enough to save and, uh. . . .” “The resourceful will earn! . . . And I must say, Wallace, I’m surprised to hear these Communist ideas from you. . . .” (Shirley 247)

Despising the New Deal, atomic warfare, and communism, Ryan was able to build his city, a capitalist utopia clearly indebted to Rand and Objectivism, as the next part attempts to prove.

2. Capitalist Utopias: Andrew Ryan’s Rapture and Ayn Rand’s Galt’s Gulch

Within the aquarium-like walls of Rapture, Ryan was determined that the answer to the over-simplistic question “is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow?” (*BioShock* n. pag.) would be no other than a resounding yes. Despising anything resembling socialism, he also established that property rights were inviolate and that everything was privately owned, including healthcare and sanitation and the police and fire departments, in spite of common sense. Eventually, Ryan decided that even the public park Arcadia would also become closed to all but paying customers, as Julie Langford, the scientist who created and maintained Arcadia, tells Bill McDonagh, the general contractor in Rapture:

“[N]ow he wants to turn this place into a paying tourist attraction - for residents of Rapture, I mean.” “What? But I thought this was a public park.” “So it was to be, but he doesn’t really believe in *public* ownership of anything.” . . . “Should a farmer not

be able to sell his food? Is a potter not entitled to a profit from his pots?” (Shirley 235)

Langford’s and McDonagh’s dismay only increases once the scientist reveals that Ryan is entertaining the idea of charging people for the air they breathe: “Yeah well - it doesn’t end there. He’s even talking about a *surcharge for oxygen*! He says the air in Rapture is only there to breathe because Ryan Industries provided it!” (Shirley 235).

Inside Ryan’s Rapture, markets and their evolution would be guided by “*a Great Chain of industry*” (Shirley 119), supposedly a reference to Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) invisible hand of the market. According to the ideal of the Great Chain of industry, the economy is influenced by each individual’s self-interest to produce, buy and sell, and the combined actions of all of these people together create a unified movement, with every individual representing a link in the chain (*BioShock Wiki* n. pag.). The Great Chain of industry then obeys the laws of exchange, establishing pricing and distribution, as well as supply and demand (*BioShock Wiki* n. pag.). As a result, there allegedly is no need for government control, which would only hinder economic freedoms and deprive people of the fruits of their labor, or for divine intervention, which some would attempt to signal as the reason behind the movement of the Great Chain of industry (*BioShock Wiki* n. pag.). Instead, only “men” (meaning both women and men, one would hope) are needed at Rapture, as can be read in the banner displayed in front of the bust of Ryan, located at the top of the stairs of the lighthouse, where it is written “NO GODS OR KINGS. ONLY MAN” (*BioShock* n. pag.). The entrepreneur’s description of the Great Chain of industry can be read in the following quote, where Ryan reiterates the assertion presented in the banner:

True cooperation is enlightened self-interest, not grubbing parasitism! True cooperation is not based on the bloodsucking that the parasites call ‘taxation’! True cooperation is people working together - each for their own profit! A man’s self-interest is at the root of all that he accomplishes! But there is something more powerful than each of us: a combination of our efforts, *a Great Chain of industry* that unites us. It is only when we struggle in our own interest that the chain pulls society in the right direction. The chain is too powerful and too mysterious for any government to guide. The Great Chain may sound mystical. . . . It is not! Some would imagine the hand of their so-called God behind every mystery! The best of human nature, the laws of natural selection - such is the power behind the Great Chain, not God! We need no gods or kings in Rapture! Only man! (Shirley 119)

Of course, the ideal of the Great Chain of industry completely disregards what can transpire if employers, looking out for their self-interest, decide to take advantage of their employees or if workplaces, wishing to cut costs, do not provide their workers with safe and healthy working conditions. It also does not even remotely take into account employers' rights if they fall ill, especially as a result of their professional activity, and must stay home from work or if corporations decide that they do not care about the environment, as long as they are filling their pockets.

Up-holding property rights, lacking public services, and rejecting any type of government interference whatsoever, *BioShock's* Rapture surely attempts to present itself as a capitalist utopia, with striking similarities to another capitalist utopia, specifically the one envisioned by Rand in *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), entitled Galt's Gulch. With its name serving as the inspiration for the name of the revolutionary Atlas, a mysterious man who has revolted against Ryan and who guides Jack through Rapture via radio messages, *Atlas Shrugged* is set in an industrial America in decline. Several of its entrepreneurs are struggling to run their businesses in "the face of collectivist inefficiency and a widespread mood of fatalism" (Allitt 256). Ragner Danneskjold, or what Patrick Allitt described as "the anti-Robin Hood" (256), actually begins seizing ships on the high seas and giving the proceeds to these people, who had allegedly been unjustly taxed. Simultaneously, the nation's business leaders begin disappearing one by one, and the interrogative sentence "Who is John Galt?" starts appearing everywhere, similarly to the sentence "Who is Atlas?", printed out in posters spread across Rapture. Finally, the reader discovers that America's entrepreneurs have gone on strike, secluding themselves in a Colorado hideaway named Galt's Gulch and led by Galt himself, who is supposed to be the greatest of them all.

Galt's Gulch is a capitalist utopia based on Rand's Objectivist philosophy. Among other things, Objectivism upholds ethical egoism, according to which "an action is morally right if it promotes the self-interest of the agent" (Duignan, "Objectivism" n. pag.), and individualism, which states that "a political system is just if it properly respects the rights and interests of the individual" (Duignan, "Objectivism" n. pag.). It also endorses laissez-faire capitalism, which combines minimal governmental interference with an economic system in which "most means of production are privately owned and production is guided and income distributed largely through the operation of markets" (Heilbroner and Boettke n. pag.). Just like Galt's Gulch, Rapture is also modelled on Objectivist ideals, clearly embraced by Ryan, despite the fact that forbidding any sort of economic exchanges with the "surface world" is the exact opposite of what a laissez-faire economy should be about.

As was seen above, in Rapture all is owned by specific individuals whose property rights are inalienable, and the government does not interfere in the economy, given that it is up to the Great Chain of industry to guide markets and their development. Additionally, self-interest is not only desirable but also essential, because, according to Ryan, it “oils the wheels of business” (Shirley 62), or, more precisely, of the Great Chain itself. Furthermore, Objectivism defends that altruism is a “destructive force, since it encourage[s] individuals to live for the benefit of others rather than for themselves: it corrupt[s] givers and receivers alike” (Allitt 255). Unsurprisingly, Ryan expresses a similar view, when he declares that altruism leads to the lightning of “the torch of destruction” (*BioShock* n. pag.).

Both Galt’s Gulch and Rapture share the same goal as other utopias, “namely, that of criticizing the negative features of a certain society by comparing it to another, fictional one” (Vieira 25), just like Thomas More (1478-1535) did over 500 years ago. In 1516, More published the book *Utopia* (in Latin), whose main audience was a small, intellectual elite who could not only read but also understand that the neologism that gave the work its title played on the prefixes *eu* (meaning good) and *ou* (which means no). By doing so, More’s text implied that the island of Utopia was the good place that was no place, just like it suggested that the philosopher and traveller Raphael Hythloday was the “purveyor of nonsense” (Marks, Wagner-Lawlor and Vieira 1). Throughout More’s book, Hythloday describes his fictional voyage alongside Amerigo Vespucci (1454-1512) and how he came across Utopia, while also declaring that the island’s organization, customs, and philosophy are far superior to those of sixteenth century Europe. In Utopia, however, a section of its population is enslaved, and the doors of each house open automatically, so that “there is nothing private anywhere” (More 42; Marks, Wagner-Lawlor and Vieira 2), among other aspects that one would hardly find utopian. What is certain is that, as Marks, Wagner-Lawlor and Vieira underline, “[b]uilt into *Utopia*’s DNA is the comparison of one world with another”, specifically the one “conjured up by Hythloday” and the one the text’s first readers inhabited (2). In the case of Galt’s Gulch and Rapture, a comparison is being established between Rand’s and Ryan’s capitalist utopias and Cold War era America, which, in the case of at least Ryan’s, is believed to be too in line with socialist ideals.

The similarities established between *BioShock* and *Atlas Shrugged* are not restricted to Rapture and Galt’s Gulch, however. Ryan himself and part of his life story clearly resemble Rand and her own personal life. Much like the creator of Rapture, the American-Russian writer was born in the Russian Empire, to a prosperous Jewish shopkeeper in St Petersburg who named her Alissa Rosenbaum. Nevertheless, following

the Russian Revolution, and just like what had happened to Ryan, Rand's family lost everything, which probably contributed to her utter hatred for the Bolsheviks and what they stood for, another feature that she shares with Ryan. By contrast, she loved the West, and, in 1926, managed to escape to America, where, like the Russian-born entrepreneur, she changed her name to the one she is now known by, which curiously is a partial anagram of the American-Russian tycoon's name. In the following years, she developed an extreme aversion for the New Deal (Burns 38) and wrote anti-communist novels, which reveals that Rand and Ryan would probably have sat on the same side of the political aisle.

Within the confines of Ryan's utopian Rapture, all of those who repudiated Bolshevik-like ideals, who were talented individuals, and who exhibited a hard work ethic were told that they could fulfil the promises of the myth of the self-made man, or so they hoped.

3. The Myth of the Self-Made Man: The Protestant Work Ethic, American Economic Exceptionalism, Upward Mobility, and Social Darwinism

To populate Rapture, Ryan handpicked a very "special" group of people himself. These supposedly "were a unique people in a unique place - each one of them with a chance to make their own destiny within the walls of Rapture", which acquired the character of a promised land of sorts, as its very name suggests.⁷ Consisting of "the moneyed patricians, eccentrics, and pioneering professionals Ryan had recruited" and "[t]he determined blue-collar types" (Shirley 117), all of these people were required to reject what the Russian-born tycoon deemed to be the socialist "evils" of a surface world which seemed about to blow itself to smithereens. They additionally had to be talented and industrious individuals, and to trade their homeland for Rapture, as the letter of recruitment discretely disseminated by Ryan highlights:

Tired of taxes? Tired of bullying governments, business regulations, unions, people expecting a handout from you? Want a new start? Do you have a skill, an ambition to be a pioneer? If you're receiving this notice, you've already been considered and selected to fill out an application for a life in Rapture. This amazing new enterprise will require emigration. But it will cost you nothing except sweat and determination to come and take part in a new world. (Shirley 110)

Rejecting big government (or, in other words, an excessively interventionist state), resorting to their own individual talents and hard work, and immigrating to a brave

new world, these people were completely sold on the idea that they could make their own luck and, as a result, become self-made individuals.

The term “Self-Made Man” can be traced back to Henry Clay, who wrote, in 1832, that “In Kentucky, almost every manufactory known to me is in the hands of enterprising self-made men, who have whatever wealth they possess by patient and diligent labor” (39; Paul 369). Like Clay’s statement highlights, the concept of the self-made man, frequently connected to immigrant narratives and to the promise of a better life for all of those that move to the United States, is typically used to describe talented people who, by resorting to a hard work ethic, are able to achieve unlimited prosperity, especially of the economic kind. This hard work ethic is very much related to the Protestant work ethic, a concept developed by Max Weber (1864-1920) and defined as “the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in one’s worldly calling, which, especially in the Calvinist view, were deemed signs of an individual’s election, or eternal salvation” (*Britannica*, “Protestant Ethic” n. pag.). The Protestant work ethic played an important role in the economic success of Protestant groups in the early stages of European capitalism, according to Weber, who argued that “because worldly success could be interpreted as a sign of eternal salvation, it was vigorously pursued” (*Britannica*, “Protestant Ethic” n. pag.). As a result, “a direct link between a ‘Protestant Ethic’, the ‘Spirit of Capitalism’ and the consequent propensity of certain Protestant groups to see the accumulation of wealth as a moral duty and an end in itself, thereby giving a major stimulus to the origins of modern capitalism” (Dickson and McLachlan 81), was established.

Closely associated both with the myth of the self-made man and with the Protestant work ethic (although not in an uncontroversial way)⁸ is Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), an autodidact who has often been described as “the *homo americanus* par excellence” (Paul 370-1), “a model representative of the American Dream” (Huang and Mulford 147; Paul 371), and “a liberal capitalist hero” (Newman 173; Paul 371). Among Franklin’s writings is his *Autobiography*, which was published after his death in 1793 and where Franklin provides guidance on how to rise from “Obscurity” to “some Degree of Reputation in the World” (Franklin 1; Paul 371). The *Autobiography* is divided in four parts, composed at different times in Franklin’s life, and recounts the success story of “a printer’s apprentice who becomes an internationally recognized statesman due to his ‘industry’ and ‘frugality’” (Paul 371). Additionally, it presents the humble origins of its author as contributing to his virtue, instead of choosing to hide them, and, in so doing, questions “old-world” prejudices against those described as “social upstarts and ‘parvenus’”, while also underlining the “greater liberty,

equality, and social justice in America” (Paul 371). Moreover, it implies that individualism and free will are invaluable tools against the inflexible social orders that characterized European societies, while also suggesting that everyone is responsible for their own fortune, with “self-improvement and self-perfectibility loom[ing] large in his texts” (Paul 372). However, it should be noted that, as Ormond Seavey argues, Franklin’s meteoric rise to prosperity is, to a large extent, the result of “risk-taking, partnership, and currying favour at the right time” (Seavey xviii), and not simply the outcome of industry and frugality, as is suggested in his *Autobiography*.

Another author clearly related to the myth of the self-made man and to the Protestant work ethic is Horatio Alger (1832-1899), who wrote numerous pieces of popular fiction about “impoverished boys who through hard work and virtue achieve great wealth and respect” (Paul 373). As Paul argues, Alger’s protagonists usually live with their single mothers, who they must support, and come across well-to-do gentlemen, who, seeing the moral integrity and hard work of the boys, decide to mentor them. The protagonists are then able to comfortably enter middle-class America and to become established in “a secure white-collar position, either as a clerk with the promise of a junior partnership or as a junior member of a successful mercantile establishment” (Paul 373). Extremely popular, Alger’s stories propelled and reinforced the myth of the self-made man in the nineteenth century, as Paul argues, structuring national discourse as “a narrative of personal initiative, enterprise, financial responsibility, thrift, equal opportunity, hard-work ethic, education and self-education, and other similar values of Puritan-Calvinist and liberal extraction” (Moraru 57; Paul 374). After the success of Alger’s narratives diminished towards the end of the author’s life, they became truly iconic in the twentieth century, when they were used to identify the “American way of life”, in contrast to the “un-American” ideas surrounding socialism and communism (Paul 374). During the Cold War era, Alger even came to be perceived as “a patriotic defender of the social and political status quo and erstwhile advocate of laissez-faire capitalism” (Scharnhorst and Bales 152; Paul 374), which probably was very much related to the fact that “the defense of capitalism is, time and again, the tacit subtext of the narratives of self-made men” (Paul 372). However, Alger’s stories cannot unquestionably be considered rags to riches narratives, given that their protagonists never achieve success by their own means, but thanks to the fortunate help of gentlemen that they conveniently bump into. They also never become spectacularly rich, but only rise to a comfortable middle-class position, without ever managing to go beyond that.

Among Rapture's self-made individuals seems to be Ryan himself, who, as was previously argued, left the Russian Empire in search of a life that was not defined by socialist ideals and Bolshevik beliefs, which he despised and associated with what he called "parasites". When he reached America, he was extremely lucky, striking oil on his property, and then proceeded to make smart investments that helped him acquire the fortune with which he built Rapture. As a result, Ryan's success, much like the achievements of Franklin and, although at a more moderate level, of Alger's protagonists, is a consequence of luck, which was then coupled with inventiveness. The same is suggested by Sullivan in the prologue of *BioShock: Rapture*, in which he quietly listens to Ryan aggressively condemn the union strikes going on at some Kentucky mines and a Mississippi refinery. Ryan finishes off by saying that he never had the need of unions, choosing, instead, to make his "own way", to which Sullivan mentally responds by thinking to himself "that the Great Man [Ryan] had the benefit of luck - he'd struck oil, as a young man - but it was true he'd invested brilliantly" (Shirley 12-3). In this way, the myth of the self-made man seems to be called into question right from the very start, and Ryan looks as if he is making his own truth, to fit his Randian and Objectivist-like views.

The idea of the self-made man is closely related to the economic dimension of American exceptionalism, which is often connected to individualism, a political and social philosophy that places a great deal of value on individual freedom and for which the individual is of supreme importance (Lukes n. pag.). Developed in Britain with the ideas of Smith and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and described by Tocqueville as essential to the American temper, individualism cherishes self-reliance, privacy, and respect, while opposing authority and any form of control over the individual (Lukes n. pag.). Individualism defends that people's interests are best served when they are given maximum freedom and responsibility for choosing their own objectives and the means of attaining them (Lukes n. pag.). As a result, individualists think that government interference should be kept at a minimum, confining itself to maintaining law and order, among other aspects (Lukes n. pag.). They also believe that each person should have the maximum of opportunity to acquire all the property that they see fit, managing and disposing of it as they wish (Lukes n. pag.). Individualism is, within the context of the economic character of American exceptionalism, depicted as essential for individual success, which is mainly understood in economic terms. In relation to the notion of the self-made man, individualism clearly relates to its inclusion of aspects of self-realization "based on an ethic of self-interest that aims at the sheer accumulation of property, recognition, prestige, and personal gain without

any concern for others” (Paul 369-70), something that also evidently resonates with Rand’s and Objectivism’s capitalist ideals, their defence of self-interest and their rejection of altruism.

One cannot help but to hear the echoes of the alleged economic exceptionality of America in *BioShock* and *BioShock: Rapture*, where individualism is supposed to be a key feature of Ryan and of the Rand and Objectivism-inspired capitalist utopia he set up somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, Rapture, the city created by the Russian-born tycoon, is, on the one hand, the clearest demonstration of Ryan’s individuality - something that he himself had “ordained”, “the manifestation of *his will*” (Shirley 106) - and, on the other hand, a monument dedicated to individualism, where “free markets, free will, and free men” can purportedly find a safe haven (*BioShock* n. pag.). However, the truth is that no one is allowed to leave Rapture, to worship a divinity of their own choosing, or to have a different political view from Ryan. If they do, they are locked up in Persephone Correctional Facility, as was the case of the psychiatrist Sofia Lamb, who expressed socialist-like opinions which began to gain too much traction among Rapture’s population. Also in this hidden gulag, inmates can be and often are rented out as test subjects against their will, in a clear violation of their freedom. Apart from this, and as was seen earlier, people’s property rights are allegedly respected above all else, while the self-interest of every individual is said to be defended and any sort of government interference is repudiated, so that the Great Chain of industry can follow its own course. In this way, each person, and, as a result, society itself, is believed to be on the road to riches and to be about to attain “unstinting prosperity” (Shirley 62), thus fulfilling the promises of the myth of the self-made man. Ryan suggests so in the following quote, in which he mentions Rapture to McDonagh (by referring to a “great social experiment”) and talks of its potential, even before Rapture has finished being built:

I intend to prove that self-interest oils the wheels of business - and that freedom from the . . . the *tentacles* of government, from the usual social shackles on science and technology and growth, will produce unstinting prosperity. I have envisioned a great social experiment. (Shirley 62)

Nevertheless, the truth is, once again, much more complicated than that, given that not only are property rights not inviolate (e.g. Ryan takes hold of businesses when he feels threatened by them), but also only the self-interest of the rich is protected, while the poor are exploited, unable to earn a decent wage that will allow them to

feed themselves and their children or to live in a place that houses only one family instead of multiple (Shirley 165-6).

Those same echoes of the supposed exceptionality of America, both in relation to its economic and to its other dimensions (namely religious and political),⁹ can be perceived in Ryan's assurance that Rapture would one day be revealed to what was left of humankind, following the atomic war that he believed to be at hand. Once it became known to the world, Rapture's Rand and Objectivism-inspired capitalist ideals would be proven right, and the city would become a glimmering example that everyone else would strive to mimic, or what the Russian-born entrepreneur described as "the capital city of all civilization" (Shirley 109). The idea encapsulated in Ryan's description of Rapture as a beacon for all humankind bears a striking resemblance to the idea expressed in John Winthrop's (1588-1649) sermon *A Model of Christian Charity*. In his lay sermon, Winthrop, supposedly addressing those (of which not all were Puritans) that were to embark or that had already embarked the *Arbella* in 1630, proclaims that "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us" (Levine 188). As Abram c. Van Engen explains, the sermon and the expression "the city upon a hill" were largely lost, forgotten, and ignored until the 1960's, amid the Cold War, when John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), and, later on, Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973) and Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), used it in their presidential speeches. From that moment onwards, it witnessed its own "rags-to-riches rise", as Van Engen puts it (295), becoming inexorably intertwined with the idea of American exceptionalism and popping up in various forms and moments in different texts, such as, for example, the ones under analysis. Through it, Winthrop, a reformist who hoped that the Puritans' "New Jerusalem" in America would set an example that would be replicated in England (Paul 151), attempts to induce the settlers to prove that the path chosen by the Puritans is the righteous one and that the Puritans, by choosing it, are right, while those that persecuted them are wrong (Grant 53). However, just like the idea of America as a glimmering example for the rest of the world raises ever more question marks, the hope that Rapture would become the "capital city of all civilization" (Shirley 109) failed to be fulfilled, becoming instead a cautionary tale.

The figure of the self-made man has often been identified with the utopian ideal of a classless society, or, at the very least, with the notion of social mobility, regularly described by the expression "from rags to riches" or by Crèvecoeur's statement "from a servant to the rank of a master" (60; Paul 16, 368). This alleged upward mobility illustrates the often-unrealistic promise of economic success in

America, and it has historically been deceptively depicted as unlimited, regardless of the social and financial context in which one is born. It has also been described as a direct consequence of the purported freedom and equality, specifically equality of opportunity, that characterize America, and it has been used to contrast American and European societies. While America and the American economic system lead to “a higher standard of living in general as well as to a higher degree of individual agency and economic opportunity” (Paul 367), Europe and its societies are defined by “rigidly stratified social hierarchies” (Paul 367).

The idea of classlessness and of social mobility is also mentioned during another conversation between Ryan and McDonagh, in which McDonagh refers that he traded Britain for America because he believes that in the latter anyone can rise straight to the top:

“A man must make of his life a ladder that he never ceases to climb - if you’re not rising, you are slipping down the rungs, my friend.” “But by ascending,” Ryan went on, . . . “one makes one’s own class, do you see? Eh? One classes oneself!” . . . “Couldn’t agree more, sir!” Bill blurted. “That’s why I’ve come to the USA. Anyone can rise up, here. Right to the top!” (Shirley 33)

McDonagh did not stick around the United States enough time to see whether or not he was right about anyone being able to rise up there, given that not long after this conversation he was hired by Ryan to be Rapture’s building engineer, and, afterwards, general contractor. However, and as the positions he occupied within Rapture prove, he was able to climb the social ladder quite successfully within the confines of the city built by Ryan. Yet, perhaps that wasn’t exclusively the result of his talent for plumbing and hard work, but also of chance, which allowed him to meet Ryan when he was still living in America, share some or most of his views, and make a profound impression on him, which motivated Ryan to lend him a helping hand. In this way, McDonagh clearly resembles Alger’s protagonists, who, as was said above, rise to a comfortable middle-class position due to fortunate encounters with helper figures such as gentlemen who decide to mentor them when they see their moral integrity and hard work ethic (Paul 373). So, once again, the validity of the myth of the self-made man seems to be questioned by the creators of the texts under analysis, whose alleged self-made individuals benefit from luck, instead of profiting exclusively from their talents and hard work.

The “formula” of the self-made man is based on the illusion that the exception is the rule, as Paul points out, and follows a social Darwinist logic grounded on the

belief that those fit enough to compete and succeed shall be selected in the supposedly “post-stratificatory [American] society” (Helmstetter 709; Paul 368). This logic places little or no responsibility for the well-being of the average Jane and Joe on society, given that it departs from the convenient belief on the illusion of equality of opportunity, already inscribed in the fallacious American creed of social mobility. Both deceptively purport, just like the myth of the self-made man, that there is “parity in competition” (Potter 92; Paul 368) and “an endless race open to all” (Thernstrom 63; Paul 368), despite that not being the case at all, given that “not all start out even or compete on equal footing” (Paul 368).

Consider, for example, the case of the immigrant experience of the Lithuanian family described by Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) in *The Jungle* (1906), working in the Chicago meat packing industry and filled with hope about moving to America. When it gets there, however, it is taken advantage of, scammed into living in an appalling house, and forced to work in dangerous conditions, which ultimately results in the alienation and death of several family members. This muckraking novel¹⁰ shows that, for many immigrants that arrive in America, the myth of the self-made man fails to live up to its promises and “shrugs off the fact that it is not success and self-making but sheer survival that is at stake for many immigrants in a society that is characterized by gross class inequities” (Paul 388). The same might be said of Ryan, who chooses to celebrate the social Darwinist logic that paves the way for some to succeed and some to fail in the profoundly unequal Rapture, not understanding, or, more accurately, not caring whether some people perish in the process, especially given that they cannot leave Rapture to look for greener pastures elsewhere. As the American-Russian magnate argues, Rapture was meant to be “[a] new world - where men and women will stand up on their own two feet in the glory of competition. They will empower themselves with struggle!” (Shirley 110), when, in reality, most of them simply ended up with empty stomachs.

Despite believing that they could make their own fortune and, as a result, become self-made individuals in the fashion of Franklin or Alger’s protagonists, those that arrived in Rapture quickly met with unforgiving disappointment.

4. Rapture: Immigration and Self-(Un)Making

It quickly became apparent that Rapture could not live up to its utopian promises, becoming, instead, a dystopian nightmare from which there was no escape. Not long after it was built and it welcomed a large number of immigrants, Rapture witnessed the widening of the social gap between those that were already rich and powerful

when they got there and those that had nothing besides their determination to climb the social ladder. This was very much the consequence of the Randian absence of government interference at any level of society, which stipulated that markets were largely left to their own devices. It was also the outcome of the fundamentalistic defence of each individuals' self-interest with no regard for the well-being of others, which allowed the rich to exploit the poor, and of the Objectivist-like rejection of altruism, which meant that there was nothing resembling labour laws, unions, social programmes, charities, or even orphanages.¹¹ As a result, if one were to find oneself in a disadvantageous situation, it would be very hard to get out of it, as the story of Margie shows.

Talking to Lamb, Margie reveals how she moved to Rapture “fulla hopes and dreams” (Shirley 174), only to end up working in some “strip joint” (Shirley 174), from where she was fired after rejecting the sexual advances of her manager (Shirley 174). As there were no laws regarding workplace harassment or employee termination, Margie could do nothing but walk out empty-handed and humiliated, and, after she failed to secure a job waitressing, she had to resort to selling her clothes, but her money quickly ran out, as did her food. “Living on stuff cadged outta trashcans” (Shirley 174) and with her requests to go back to the surface denied, Margie was forced into prostitution, much like Marija, Ona's cousin in Sinclair's *The Jungle* who has to support whatever family she has left after the Chicago meat packing industry is done with it.

Both Margie's and Marija's stories address the myth of the self-made man from an immigrant perspective and end up showing that it does not stand up to its promises, neither in Rapture nor in America. These, as it turns out, are not classless societies, but highly stratified ones, as it is profoundly difficult to avoid rising further down, let alone rise up. Also, they are unequivocally based on a social Darwinist logic that does not care whether or not a fair race is assured from the beginning, but that time and again forces those less well positioned to fight for their survival, and not for their success. Ryan is well aware of this and could not care less, as can be seen in the case of a grocer that is telling him that he is being bullied by a competing grocer that is trying to put him out of business. Even though the grocer, called Gravenstein, hopes that Ryan will intervene on his behalf, the American-Russian businessman declares the following instead:

the great marketplace is like a thriving jungle, where some survive and become king of their territory - and some don't. It's the way of nature! Survival of the fittest

weans out the weaklings, Gravenstein! I advise you to find some means of competing - or move out.” (Shirley 172)

So, while Ryan had promised that “[t]heoretically everyone in Rapture started on an equal footing - and anyone could rise to the top with hard work, enterprise, talent, ruthless dedication to the simple, liberating power of free enterprise” (Shirley 161), that was not the case at all. People that had moved to Rapture hoping to become self-made individuals quickly realized that “[t]hey [had gone] to Rapture thinking they [were going to] be captains of industry, but they all [forgot] that somebody [had to] scrub the toilets” (*BioShock* n. pag.). The Randian and Objectivist-like capitalist ideals on which the foundations of the city had been built, which completely repudiated anything slightly resembling socialist beliefs, assured that the rich, looking out for their self-interest, only got richer, and that the poor, no matter how many toilets they scrubbed, only became poorer. All of these people were trapped in Ryan’s “fortress dedicated to freedom” (Shirley 20), which, in reality, was an underwater, art deco prison, as Peach Wilkins, a blue collar worker that ends up becoming a smuggler, suggests when he states the following, while also revealing how disillusioned he has become with the promises of Rapture and, by extension, of the myth of the self-made man: “We all come down here, figured we’d all be part of Ryan’s Great Chain. Turns out Ryan’s chain is made of gold, and ours are the sort with the big iron ball around your ankle” (*BioShock* n. pag.).

Despite Rapture’s inability to live up to its promises, at least one person was able to make it straight to the top, namely Frank Fontaine, a conman that became Ryan’s nemesis. Fontaine, whose real last name is never revealed, escaped from an orphanage at an early age and worked in various places throughout his life, while also adopting numerous names. When he got to Rapture, he created a highly successful (as well as illegal) smuggling operation to provide items from the surface world (with which people were to have no contact whatsoever) which had been forbidden by Ryan (such as bibles or luxury products) to the people of Rapture. With the money he acquired smuggling goods into Rapture, he funded an extremely lucrative business which commercialized ADAM, a green substance harvested from sea slugs that basically gave its users, also called splicers, what might appropriately be called superpowers. ADAM, one of *BioShock*’s nova (according to the terminology proposed by Darko Suvin), was remarkably addictive, which means that it was in great demand within the confines of Rapture and that it had an unlimited business potential, despite the fact that it drove its users to insanity and that it permanently disfigured them. After discovering that little girls could mass-produce ADAM, Fontaine built the Little Sister’s

Orphanage, where he, with the help of two scientists, Dr. Brigid Tenenbaum and Dr. Yi Suchong, had them genetically altered and mentally conditioned to do his bidding. The little girls, or little sisters, were nightmarish creatures who come out of vent holes carrying a syringe so that they could harvest ADAM from corpses, while under the protection of Frankenstein-like men (called Big Daddies) who had been genetically enhanced and who had their skin and organs grafted into armoured diving suits, as awful as that sounds.¹² Simultaneously, Fontaine created a Home for the Poor, supposedly a charity program meant to help those that had fallen in hard times, but which, in reality, was intended to get people to trust Fontaine, who gave them as much ADAM as they wanted, so that they would turn against Ryan. Eventually, after a civil war (during which Ryan pumped Rapture's citizens with pheromones so that they would be susceptible to mental suggestion, which again goes to show that there wasn't much freedom or value of individuality around Rapture) and following the events depicted in *BioShock*, which by no means can be described here, Fontaine ended up taking control of Rapture, with Jack's involuntary help.

Fontaine's story of self-made manhood bears a striking resemblance to narratives of self-making such as the ones told throughout the *Godfather* saga, *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), or *Gangs of New York* (2002), whose characters, in one way or another, transgress the limits of legality (Paul 389-90). These stories of self-made men of both Italian-American and Irish-American lineage acknowledge how hard it is to make it in mainstream America, especially if one is an immigrant facing discrimination every step of the way. Instead, success is sought via criminal organizations, which are glamorized, but which also resemble "the kind of ruthless business enterprise which successful Americans have always carried on" (Bell 347; Paul 390). As a result, "[t]he drama of the criminal gang has become a kind of allegory of the corporation and the corporate society", conveying "the dark message that America is a society of criminals" (Bell 353, 355; Paul 390). In these narratives and in the one surrounding Fontaine, it seems as if one can only go from rags to riches in America and in Rapture if the rules of the game are broken, with crime indeed paying exceedingly well, at least for a while.

Initially envisioned as a utopian capitalist paradise, Rapture ended up becoming a dystopian cautionary tale that conveys a powerful critique to the myth of the self-made man and, as a result, to Rand and her Objectivist views, as was seen above.

Conclusion

Because Rapture is a dystopia, it not only critiques the myth of the self-made man and, by extension, Rand and her Objectivist beliefs, but it also comments on the America that the first players of *BioShock* lived in. It should be noted that it is not easy to distinguish dystopia from utopia, for both share the same goal, “namely, that of criticizing the negative features of a certain society by comparing it to another, fictional one” (Vieira 25), just like More did over 500 years ago and just like Rand and Ryan respectively did in relation to the utopias they themselves created, as was seen above. *BioShock*, which began being produced around the turn of the century and was released in 2007, isn’t any different, criticizing the America of the early 2000s, marked by George W. Bush’s presidency and his commitment to Old Right¹³ economic conservatism. In fact, during his time in power, Bush cut taxes far beyond Reagan’s wildest dreams - who until 2001 had seemed the epitome of the Old Right (Chafe 545) -, rolled back environmental regulations, and even attempted to privatize Social Security (Chafe, 2022, p. 580). Among many other problems (such as the almost unprecedented degree of indebtedness that the United States reached), this contributed to the dramatic increase of the discrepancy between the wealthy, who were able to save millions of dollars in taxes, and the common folks, who received close to nothing (Chafe 544-546). While an America with this type of economic policies would likely have made Ryan’s (and Rand’s, for that matter) heart beat faster with excitement, *BioShock* comments on it by showing a science fictional and dystopian version of what could happen if those measures were taken even further. As a result, Rapture is a sort of funhouse mirror, showing America where it could be headed, and, in fact, with Donald Trump’s presidency, who is said to enjoy a Rand novel every now and then¹⁴ and who enlisted the help of Newt Gingrich,¹⁵ it did not seem too far away from it.

BioShock finishes with a glint of hope (at least in one of its endings), with those that had been born in Rapture (e.g., the little sisters) being able to leave it and being excused for their parents’ mistakes, which means that the game acquires the characteristics of a critical dystopia.¹⁶ Likewise, despite Americans’ growing division along ideological and political lines, Trump’s maddening new bid for presidency, the renewed threat of nuclear annihilation, and all the other dizzying issues going on in the United States today, surely there is still hope in America, for “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers -/ That perches in the soul” and which can be heard “in the chilliest land -/ And on the strangest Sea” (Dickinson n. pag.), as Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) so beautifully put it.

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¹ Whenever a quotation contains a word or several words in italics it is because it already contained them in its original form, which means that no emphasis was added.

² Paul points out that, in its everyday use, the concept of myth is often contrasted with truth or scientific thought and equated with falsehood, fiction, and primitivity, among other aspects. Critics such as Roland Barthes (1915-1980), however, conceptualize myth as "a system of communication" (109) and a "metalanguage" (115). For more on Barthes' take on myth, see Hall's analysis of it. Cf. Hall 20-6.

³ The American dream was defined by James Truslow Adams as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (Campbell and Kean 11), meaning that it is very much related to the myth of the self-made man, as well as to the myth of the promised land.

⁴ Remember that, within the context of cultural studies, the concept of text refers to all practices that signify, and not simply to the written word. As a result, a cultural text may be an image, a sound, an object (e.g., clothes), and an activity (for example, dance), for all of these are sign systems which signify with the same mechanism as a language (Barker and Jane 13).

⁵ The book and the game present conflicting information regarding the date in which Ryan fled for America. Right at the beginning of the book, it is mentioned that he left in 1918 (Shirley 16), but later on, in both the book and the novel, the date of 1919 is mentioned instead (Shirley 335; *BioShock* n. pag.).

⁶ Truman's commitment to provide immediate economic and military aid to the Greek and Turkish governments, threatened by communism and the Soviet Union (*Britannica*, "Truman Doctrine" n. pag.).

⁷ Put simply, the Rapture, in Christianity, refers to the eschatological belief that all of those who are faithful will ascend into heaven, the prototypical promised land, to meet Jesus Christ at the Second Coming (Stefon n. pag.).

⁸ The parallel established between Franklin and the Protestant work ethic has raised some question marks. Cf. Dickson and McLachlan 81-89.

⁹ Cf. Paul 14-16.

¹⁰ The works produced by a group of American writers related to pre-World War I reform which "provided detailed, accurate journalistic accounts of the political and economic corruption and social hardships caused by the power of big business in a rapidly industrializing United States" (*Britannica*, "Muckraker" n. pag.).

¹¹ Many of *BioShock's* fans will argue that Rapture became a dystopia for various reasons (which will not be outlined here for a lack of space) not necessarily related to Rand and Objectivism. However, while those things exponentially accelerated the fall of Rapture, the city already was a dystopia for a large spectrum of the population, even while it still seemed utopian to Ryan and his closest allies, such as McDonagh. After all, one should bear in mind that someone's utopia might very well be somebody else's dystopia, especially if that somebody else is living in substandard conditions, as the blue collar workers

and their families, for example, were. These substandard conditions were indeed the result of Rand and Objectivist inspired ideas, which completely neglected the more fragile sections of Rapture's population.

¹² Once again violating people's individuality, despite claiming to be the champion of individualism, Ryan orders his minions to kidnap little girls from their parents, so that they too can be turned into little sisters, in an attempt to fulfill the increasing need for ADAM.

¹³ The Old Right typically refers to a movement within American conservatism that seeks, among other aspects, to limit the powers of the federal government, to promote respect for traditional regional cultures such as that of the Old South, to scale back the welfare state initiated in the 1930s by Roosevelt, and to maintain free market capitalism at home and protectionism abroad (Duignan, "Paleoconservatism" n. pag.).

¹⁴ Cf. Freedland n. pag.

¹⁵ It should be noted that, in the 1990s, Gingrich, serving as speaker of the United States' House of Representatives, announced a "Contract with America" which consisted of 10 items, including measures promoting tax cuts, the reduction of government size, radical welfare reforms, and the dismantling of the New Deal state (Chafe 511-2).

¹⁶ Cf. Baccolini and Moylan 1-8.

Normas de Referência Bibliográfica

MLA Style Manual (2016)

I. Aspeto Gráfico

1. Papel A4, a um espaço e meio (1,5); corpo de letra 11, Trebuchet MS.

2. **Notas** - todas no final do texto, numeradas com algarismos, antes do item "Obras Citadas". No corpo do texto, o algarismo que remete para a nota deverá ser colocado depois do sinal de pontuação, exceto no caso de se tratar de travessões.

3. **Referências bibliográficas** - no corpo do texto, identificando, entre parênteses curvos, o nome do autor e o(s) número(s) da(s) página(s) em causa.

Ex: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (Shelley 794).

(ver secção II. REFERÊNCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS para mais ocorrências)

4. Citações

4.1. **com menos de quatro linhas:** integradas no corpo do texto, entre aspas (" ' ' "); a indicação da fonte (autor, página) deve ser colocada preferencialmente no final da frase, *antes* do sinal de pontuação.

Ex: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", wrote Charles Dickens about the eighteenth century (35).

4.2. **com mais de quatro linhas:** separadas do texto, recolhidas 1,5 cm, na margem esquerda, em corpo 10, sem aspas. Manter o mesmo espaçamento entre as linhas (1,5). A indicação da fonte (autor, página) deve ser colocada preferencialmente no final da citação, *depois* do sinal de pontuação.

Ex: *At the conclusion of Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and the other boys realize the horror of their actions:

The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. (186)

5. Interpolações - identificadas por meio de parênteses retos: [].

6. Omissões - assinaladas por três pontos com um espaço entre cada um deles e um espaço depois do último: . . .

Ex: “Medical thinking . . . stressed air as the communicator of the disease”.

Se a omissão se verificar no final da frase, usar quatro pontos, isto é, três pontos seguidos de ponto final:

Ex: “Presidential control reached its zenith under Andrew Jackson For a time, there were fifty-seven journalists on the government payroll”.

7. “Obras Citadas” - sob este título, no final de cada texto e antes das notas, deverão ser identificadas todas as obras citadas ao longo do texto, de acordo com as normas do MLA, abaixo descritas.

II. Normas De Referência Bibliográfica

1. Citação parentética, no corpo do texto - identificando, entre parênteses curvos, o nome do autor e o(s) número(s) da(s) página(s) em causa.

1.1. Um só autor (sobrenome + página):

Ex: “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (Shelley 794).

Se o nome do autor estiver mencionado na frase, indicar apenas a página. Ex: “Poets”, said Shelley, “are the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (794).

1.2. Dois autores (sobrenomes + página): (Williams and Ford 45-7)

1.3. Dois ou três autores (todos os sobrenomes + página): (Demetz, Lyman, and Harris 30)

1.3.1. Mais de três autores

(sobrenome do primeiro autor + *et al.* + pág.)

ou (todos os sobrenomes + pág.)

(Demetz et al. 30) ou (Demetz, Lyman, Harris, and Johnson 747)

1.4. Um ou mais livros do(s) mesmo(s) autor(es)

(sobrenome + título do livro + página)

Ex: Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been called a "comedy of grotesque" (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 85).

Depois de ter sido mencionado pelo menos uma vez na totalidade (regra que não se aplica a títulos muito longos), o título pode ser encurtado:

Ex: Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been called a "comedy of grotesque" (Frye, *Anatomy* 85).

O título pode também ser abreviado. Neste caso, deve indicar-se, entre parênteses, a abreviatura a usar logo na primeira ocorrência do título:

Ex: In *As You Like It* (AYL), Shakespeare . . .

Os títulos abreviados devem começar pela palavra que é usada para ordenar o título alfabeticamente na lista de "obras citadas".

No caso de o nome do autor ter sido já referido na frase, indicar apenas título e página:

According to Frye, the play is a "comedy of grotesque" (*Anatomy* 85).

Em todos estes casos, na lista de "Obras Citadas" deverá aparecer:

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton UP, 1957.

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Wordsworth, 1993.

1.5. Mais do que um autor com o mesmo sobrenome

(inicial do nome + sobrenome + pág.)

(A. Patterson 184-85) e (L. Patterson 340)

Se a inicial for a mesma, usar o primeiro nome por extenso.

1.6. Citação indireta (qtd. in [quoted in] + sobrenome + pág.) (qtd. in Boswell 57)

1.7. Mais do que uma obra na mesma citação parentética

(Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 1-25; Murphy 39-52)

1.8. Obra com mais de um volume (sobrenome + número do volume + pág.) (Boswell 2: 450)

2. "Obras Citadas" - lista completa das obras referidas ao longo do texto, por ordem alfabética de apelido dos autores, de acordo com os seguintes modelos:

2.1. Livros

Borroff, Marie. *Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore*. U of Chicago P, 1979.

2.1.1. Dois ou mais livros do mesmo autor

Usar três hífen seguidos de ponto (---.) para substituir o nome do autor.

Usar três hífen seguidos de vírgula (---,) no caso de o autor desempenhar funções de editor, tradutor ou organizador: (---, editor.), (---, translator.)

Os títulos do autor devem aparecer organizados por ordem alfabética.

Borroff, Marie. *Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore*. U of Chicago P, 1979.

---. "Sound Symbolism as Drama in the Poetry of Robert Frost." *PMLA*, vol. 107, no.1, 1992, pp. 131-44.

---, editor. *Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice, 1963.

No caso de o nome do autor surgir combinado com outros, não usar hífen.

Scholes, Robert. *Protocols of Reading*. Yale UP, 1989.

Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellog. *The Nature of Narrative*. Oxford, 1966.

2.1.2. Livro de vários autores

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 2nd ed., U of Chicago P, 2003.

Durant, Will, and Ariel Durant. *The Age of Voltaire*. Simon, 1965.

Saraiva, António José, e Óscar Lopes. *História da Literatura Portuguesa*. 14ª ed., Porto Editora, 1987.

ou

Gilman, Sander, et al. *Hysteria beyond Freud*. U of California P, 1993.

2.1.3. Livros anónimos

The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing. 8th ed., The Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

2.2. Antologias ou colectâneas

Usar, depois do último nome do(s) autor(es), e antecedido por uma vírgula, *editor/editors, translator, compiler/compilers*. Em português, usar *editor/editores, tradutor, organizador*.

Peter Demetz et al., editors. *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*. Yale UP, 1968.

Kepner, Susan Fulop, editor and translator. *The Lioness in Bloom: Modern Thai Fiction about Women*. U of Berkeley P, 1996.

2.3. Edições críticas

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*. Edited by Fredson Bowers, UP of Virginia, 1975.

3. Artigos em revistas

Chauí, Marilena. “Política cultural, cultura política.” *Brasil*, no. 13, 1995, pp. 9-24.

Piper, Andrew. “Rethinking the Print Object: Goethe and the Book of Everything.” *PMLA*, vol. 121, no.1, 2006, pp. 124-38.

3.1. Artigos em jornais

Coutinho, Isabel, “Os Pioneiros da Literatura ‘Queer’ em Portugal.” *Público*, 24 Agosto 2007, p. 9.

Mckay, Peter A. "Stocks Feel the Dollar's Weight." *Wall Street Journal*, 4 December 2006, p. C1.

3.2. Artigos em coletâneas ou antologias

Greene, Thomas. "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature." *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, edited by Peter Demetz and William L. Vance, Yale UP, 1969, pp. 40-67.

3.3. Artigo anônimo

"The Decade of the Spy." *Newsweek*, 7 March 1994, pp. 26-27.

3.4. Um editorial

"It's Subpoena Time." Editorial. *New York Times*, 8 June 2007, late edition, p. A28.

3.5. Prefácios, introduções e posfácios

Borges, Jorge Luis. Preface. *Selected Poems, 1923-1967*, by Borges, edited by Norman Thomas Di Giovanni, Delta-Dell, 1973, pp. xv-xvi.

Drabble, Margaret. Introduction. *Middlemarch*, by George Elliot, Bantam, 1985, pp. vii-xvii.

4. Dissertações não publicadas

Kane, Sophia. "Acts of Coercion: Father-Daughter Relationships in British Women's Fiction, 1778-1814." Dissertation, University of New York, 2003.

5. Publicações de edição eletrônica

Para a referência a publicações de edição eletrônica deverão ser seguidas as normas de referência acima indicadas para livros, volumes de artigos e revistas periódicas, acrescidas de:

- nome do Web site, em itálico;

- editor ou patrocinador do Web site (caso o texto esteja apenas publicado na Internet); não havendo, usar n.p.

- data de publicação (dia, mês, ano) (caso o texto esteja apenas publicado na Internet); não havendo, usar n.d.

- data de acesso (dia, mês, ano)

- endereço eletrônico (URL)

Eaves, Morris, Rober Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, editors. *The William Blake Archive*. Library of Congress, 28 September 2008, www.blakearchive.org/blake/. Accessed 20 November 2007.

5.1. Revista eletrônica

Sargent, Lyman Tower. “Em Defesa da Utopia.” *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos/An Electronic Journal of Anglo-American Studies*, no. 1, 2008, pp. 3-12, <http://ler.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/5168.pdf>. Accessed 10 January 2009.

Schmidt-Nieto, Jorge R. “The Political Side of Bilingual Education.” *Arachne@Rutgers*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2002, n. pag, www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/projects/arachne/vol2_2schmidt.html. Accessed 12 Mar. 2007.

Nota:

Usar as seguintes abreviaturas para informação desconhecida:

n. p. no publisher given	Ex: n. p., 2006, pp. 340-3
n. d. no date of publication given	Ex: U of Gotham P, n. d., pp. 340-3.
n. pag. no pagination given	Ex: U of Gotham P, 2006, n. pag.

Para estas e outras ocorrências, consultar:

MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing. Eighth Edition. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2016.