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‘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*

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Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Anglo-Americanos,

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Porto, 29 de setembro de 2022

Gonçalo Parra Soares Dias

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Resumo

Embora existam em abundância abordagens temáticas da obra de James Joyce e Toni Morrison individualmente, análises comparativas entre os dois autores são escassas, especificamente entre os dois romances em questão, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* e *Sula*. À luz desta lacuna, a presente dissertação propõe uma abordagem feminista dos sistemas de dominação específicos ao Ocidente presentes nas esferas diegéticas de ambos os trabalhos através da estrutura teórica criada por bell hooks. Isto permitirá uma analise das relações e sistemas estabelecidos entre as personagens de cada narrativa, considerando que a valoração ocidental está tanto refletida quando refratada numa experiência coletiva de comunidade, ambientes familiares e tensões de poder. Enquanto Stephen Dedalus e Sula Peace – os protagonistas dos romances de Joyce e Morrison, respetivamente – navegam as suas comunidades na sua marginalidade, é possível traçar aspetos comuns teorizados por hooks num reconhecimento de sistemas de dominação perpetuados por uma presença exterior. Isto pode ser alcançado ao analisar a perceção dos protagonistas sobre os seus respetivos ambientes socioeconómicos, levando a questionar o que são esses sistemas de dominação ocidentais, como se manifestam nos procedimentos perpetuados pelas comunidades, e como a sua influência conduz a experiência interpessoal das personagens. O primeiro capítulo aborda esse mesmo funcionamento das comunidades diegéticas, desenvolvendo especial foco no ambiente familiar e funções atribuídas sob dominação ideológica ocidental. O segundo capítulo considera a rejeição irónica das comunidades em questão por parte de Stephen e Sula e como a marginalidade dos protagonistas reforça esse distanciamento. O terceiro capítulo analisa o papel das tendências artísticas comuns ao Stephen e à Sula na divergência multifacetada de ambos e como uma experiência de interseccionalidade diferencia os protagonistas.

Palavras-chave: Estudos Feministas; Sistemas de dominação; Ironia; Interseccionalidade; Divergência artística.

Abstract

Despite there being an abundance of thematic approaches to the works of both James Joyce and Toni Morrison individually, comparative analyses between the two authors are scarce, specifically between the two novels at hand, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Sula*. In view of this gap, the present dissertation proposes a feminist approach to the specifically-Western systems of domination present in the diegetic realms of both works through the theoretical framework devised by bell hooks. This will allow an analysis of the relationships and systems established between the characters in each narrative, considering that Western valuation is both reflected and refracted into a collective communal experience, familial environments and power strains. As Stephen Dedalus and Sula Peace – the protagonists of Joyce and Morrison's novels, respectively – navigate their communities in marginality, one can trace common aspects theorized by hooks into a recognition of systems of domination perpetuated by exterior experience. This can be achieved by analysing the protagonists' perception of their respective socioeconomic environments, leading to a questioning of what such Western domination systems are, how they are manifested in the procedures perpetuated by the communities, and how their influence drives the characters' interpersonal experience. The first chapter considers said functioning of the diegetic communities, developing special focus on the familial environment and attributed roles under Western ideological domination. The second chapter considers the ironic rejection of the communities at hand on behalf of Stephen and Sula and how the protagonists' marginality reinforces said distancing. The third chapter analyses the role of Stephen and Sula's common artistic tendencies in their multifaceted divergence and how an intersectional experience differentiates the protagonists.

Key-words: Feminist Studies; Systems of domination; Irony; Intersectionality; Artistic divergence.

List of abbreviations

Henceforth, all quotations from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Sula* will be identified by the novels' initials in italics (*P* and *S*, respectively) accompanied by the page number(s), as follows. Moreover, the brief references to *Dubliners* will be identified by the collection's initial (*D*), also accompanied by the respective page numbers(s). Such is the case because both of Joyce's texts are to be found in the edition used in the present dissertation – the Barnes & Noble Classics edition. All other references shall follow standard citation procedures, and the comprehensive list of cited works can be found in the corresponding section.

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN ..... *P*

SULA ..... *S*

DUBLINERS ..... *D*

It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.

James Joyce

I am not like *James Joyce; I am not* like *Thomas Hardy; I am not* like *Faulkner. I am not* like *in that sense.*

Toni Morrison

Introduction

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* arise from largely different backgrounds: the former was published as a book in 1916 – its author coming from an Irish Catholic upbringing and its publication and creation process a shifting one–; the latter being published in 1973, the work of an African American female author whose class struggle marked her experience as a writer. The present dissertation proposes the novels for a thematic consideration informed by the systems of domination and the (im)possibility for artistic divergence from said systems which mark the diegeses and their characters.

A Portrait earned Joyce prominence on the literary scene, a distinction which grew exponentially with the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 – a novel often considered the height of literary Modernism. The initial iteration of *A Portrait* was called *Stephen Hero*, an unfinished manuscript that bore autobiographical marks of Joyce's experience as a Catholic Irishman, a work which underwent severe modification into becoming the finished version. The latter interpretation of the novel displays an evolution not only of style, but of cultural and identity awareness, both from Joyce's initial iteration as well as from *Dubliners*, Joyce's collection of short stories, published in 1914, two years prior to *A Portrait*'s official integral publication.[1] *A Portrait* presents Stephen Dedalus as its protagonist, a young Irish Catholic boy who attempts to shape his own personal (and artistic, as the novel's name makes explicit) development. As the narrative accompanies his oscillation between a self-and-hetero-recognition of his artistic and individual capabilities of critical experience, the protagonist's compliance with an overpowering system of expectation and to the overwhelming dynamics of oppression present in his community of origin wavers, revealing an underlying rejection of domination. This novel allows, triggers and develops Joycean rejection and liberation from communal limitation which allowed for no Icarian flight to take place. As it is known, the flight both Joyce and Stephen take from their own Irish labyrinthine origins may have led to a recurrent

[1] Joyce's *A Portrait* was initially published in serialized form beginning in 1914 in *The Egoist* literary magazine. Its integral form was published two years afterwards with the help of Ezra Pound.

backward-look into the deserted place, but without this movement, such an attempt at a critically distanced system of valuation and perception would not be possible.

Similarly, Morrison's *Sula* was the author's second artistic publication and the one which created a layout for broader critical approaches that marked not only the author's work, but the critical world as well. *Sula* influenced the creation of a series of critical approaches, the most visible of which was Barbara Smith's "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" (1978), where a lesbian – albeit not necessarily homosexual[2] – reading of Morrison's novel was performed as a means to explore black female existence as self-sufficient regardless of male presence and imposed heteronormativity. This reading appears in light of a lack of critical and cultural consideration of black women and their artistic creation and possibility, using Morrison's novel as a vehicle through which the development of a category of Criticism that considered this forcefully-absent group became possible – as referred to in the title of the critical work.

Sula, however, and once more growing approximate to *A Portrait*, did not achieve explosive distinction for the author as was the case with the following novel, *Song of Solomon*, and even more so with *Beloved*, originally published in 1977 and 1987, respectively. The two latter and later novels consolidated Toni Morrison as both a canonical American and African American author – in its specificity in the American cultural landscape – as well as a figure of critical and aesthetic relevance, but these novels were also the vehicle through which Morrison possessed greater contact with the general public, aiding in the development of visibility of the African American experience in, by and for itself.

Whilst a great deal of critical consideration has been produced regarding such authors, and, specifically, the aforementioned novels individually, much of it has been directed towards locating them inside cultural landscapes against which said novels gained specific significance and value – namely, in their own individual cultural framework, as regards to the disruption of expectations and exterior imposition,

[2] "[L]esbian literature," according to Smith, does not necessarily entail a portrayal of romantic or sexual involvement between women, but it is rather writing in which women "are the central figures, are positively portrayed and have pivotal relationships with one another" as opposed to the standards of heterosexism, specifically that of "white patriarchal culture" (1978, 23).

especially at different moments in time. James Joyce's rejection of dogmatic structures of existence was reflected in the thematic and linguistic fluidity of his work, yet the canonical establishment of Joyce's *oeuvre* as innovative in literary Modernism is counteracted by Morrison's consideration, in a meeting with Paul Gilroy, that "modern life begins with slavery" in its rupturing of a previously-known world into a new realm of perception – one marked, as argued by the author, by dehumanization and pathology (1993, 178). As Morrison says "[t]he so-called modernist writers of the nineteenth century registered the impact of industrialization in literature – the great transformation from the old world to the new," she simultaneously argues that enslaved African voice was already charged with a modern need for "[c]ertain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability" in favour of survival in slavery (178), thus proposing a reconsideration of Western canonical perception. Despite the existence of the tension regarding the beginning of this change, the theme of reconstruction and transformation of a world of tradition into a possibility of the modern pervades Joycean work and Stephen's existence as a young figure of artistic potential, to which Sula's experience bears a striking resemblance in such an attempt at transformative possibility.

If one takes the existence of this resemblance into consideration, the existing gap in critical approaches to not only the two novels, but the two authors in convergence may be bridged, as the most characteristic surpassing of such boundaries is confined to the interpretation of Joycean use of codes of blackness – intertwining the likes of bodily release, racism and darkness through Morrison's literary and critical expression – in Sheldon Brivic's "Toni Morrison's Funk at 'Finnegans Wake'" (1998).[3] The links that are established in the critical world are recurrently indirect, in a chain that analyzes Joycean influence upon American writers such as William Faulkner in parallel with analyses of Faulkner's impact upon Morrisonian style and linguistic choice. This palimpsestic overlapping of influence in Modernist creation, whilst informative and enlightening,

[3] Another relevant, albeit smaller reference to Joyce can be found in Rita A. Bergenholtz's "Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Satire on Binary Thinking" (1996), where one can find an equation between the two authors' depictions of the grotesque.

presents a tendency to overlook the possibility for comparison between James Joyce and Toni Morrison's work in various fields of critical study due to their apparent cultural distance. This distance is reinforced by Morrison herself when, in an interview conducted by Nellie McKay (1983), the author establishes clearly: "I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner. I am not *like* in that sense" (426).[4] The "sense" referred by Morrison may be considered to be the specificity of her intersectional experience as a black woman writing, and concurrently that of African Americans in comparison to the experience of the originary communities of such authors.

Intersectionality plays a crucial role in shaping not only the genre of criticism present in the aforementioned article by Barbara Smith, but also in further developments in feminist thinking. The concept of intersectionality consists of the study of the convergence of race, gender and class as influential elements in manifestations of discrimination and prejudice, and how these factors (and their respective exploitation) are particularly adjusted to collective experiences of groups present in differing standings of vulnerability.[5] The experience of black women as characteristically vulnerable to such inequity is focused on, additionally to Barbara Smith, in the works of Kimberlé Crenshaw and bell hooks – the latter author's *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, published in 1984, being a radical and intersectional feminist work of theory which carries the present dissertation's main conceptual framework regarding the existence of patriarchal and binary systems of domination, and the possibility for overcoming their dynamics. The concept of intersectionality, whilst recurrent in the present dissertation, will find its most explicit usage in Chapter 3.

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[4] The considerations of approximation of the authors, as Morrison makes explicit in the aforementioned interview, regard solely matters of writerly greatness, and the scarce critical dialogue established between Joyce and Morrison by the critical realm focuses, in its majority, on Joycean influence upon Modernist writing.

[5] In many intersectional approaches, additional factors such as sexual orientation and religious oppression are considered in confluence with the previously enumerated factors. For example, Barbara Smith's referred article engages with the former, while articles such as Jakeet Singh's "Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality" (2015) considers the latter along with the recurrent hesitation to consider the role of religion in intersectional studies.

The interspace between Joyce and Morrison grows faint once more when considered through the prism of hooks' theory of systems of domination, which are perceived as common to all Western patriarchal communities – an attribution in which the two diegeses at hand are characteristically inserted. While systems of domination exist globally, the present argument will focus upon the systems of the West, using the Irish and North American communities as its starting points. Although these two realms of experience appear both distant and distinct, the similarities found between the two (and, specifically, between the similar structures of domination present in both) will be argued throughout the dissertation. The recognition of the diegetic communities inside this Western categorization comes into fruition once one recognizes that Western perception and experience are based on a frame of reference that is dualistic and oppositional rather than complimentary and compatible (hooks, 2015a, 31). Such a framing of experience promoted an othering vision which located tension between male/female, white/black, middle/lower-class and, ultimately, I/Other, establishing simultaneously a hierachy of domination based upon "the belief that the superior should control the inferior" (36) – namely, that all former experiences should overpower the latter inside the gendered, racial and socioeconomic realms. The Irish and African American communities present in the novels exist according to this model and in reference to an exterior experience that influences their own, yet rejects it: the rejection by an overpowering force consequently creates communities marked by self-division, fragmentation and lack of self-recognition. If from such a rejection blooms an artistic process of perception and self-definition against an oppressive force, Sula and Stephen may converge around their common capacity for artistic distancing and gaze in light of the dynamics present in their respective birth communities. This merging between artistic perception and a refusal of domination allows them to develop a revolutionary stance informed by critical and ironical distance that presents an alternative, de-centralized mode of independent existence from the exteriorly-originated systems of domination.

One must consider, however, that Stephen does not possess an African origin and his community has not been submitted to the dynamics of slavery and its aftermath.

Stephen stands, as a white male figure, in a typically empowered hierarchical location in opposition to Sula's vulnerability as a black woman whose (geographical and communal) ancestry is marked by slavery and white manipulation. The concept of intersectionality proves relevant once more, in bringing to the foreground the contrasting experiences that remain even if the characters exist inside similar systems of patriarchal domination: Stephen's artistic expression and process of intellectual liberation from domination is not equivalent to Sula's, and the latter's struggles recurrently revolve around her imposed role as a black working-class woman. This acknowledgement of the factors which distance the two protagonists in their own individual and communal specificity is not to be undermined nor downplayed in the present comparative analysis. Instead, the difference between each of the integrant parts is to be emphasized whilst recognized inside its partaking of the same order of perception perpetrated by and in Western patriarchal experience.

Manifestations of female emancipation from Western patriachy grew into recognition by the end of the 19th century, in a primary wish for legal equivalence to the male experience, with specific emphasis on women's suffrage. The ebbing of this wave of revolutionary acts against such a longstanding issue led to the assymetrical (re-)sprouting of feminist manifestations in the 1960s – owing to, but not synonymous with the Women's Suffrage movement, – and their primary considerations regarded the emancipation of white middle-class women from the domestic life as central goal. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, charged the experience of white middle-class women into the fulfilment of this desire, although said fulfilment remained in convergence with the existence of a domestic life manifested through the nuclear family. For such an experience to be possible, the tasks relegated to the previously-homebound women had to be relocated into a body of inferiorly-perceived social, economic (and racial) status – if white middle-class women were in pursuit of equality of opportunity with men of the same socioeconomic class, lower-class women were charged with the fulfilment of the domestic obligations of the bourgeois women. In the United States of America, said role was often allocated to African American women, as a manifestation of the maintenance of racial tension remaining from the end of slavery.

Concurrently, in the liberation of white middle-class women's experience, masculine existence, as a result of the binary considerations of the patriarchal domestic/working existence, was perceived as negative, hostile and exterior to this effort, resulting in a prevalence of hostility and hierarchizing configuration of and in women's experience in the Western world. As recently as 2013, Jonathan Crowe's article "Can Men Be Feminists?" positions men as subsidiary, secondary and solely supportive in the dynamics of feminist experience, while it simultaneously refuses to consider women's role in the perpetuation of patriarchal systems of valuation and perception. To perceive feminism as a promotion of "the well-being of women," (Crowe, 2013, 3) the purpose of which is "to advance women's position in society" (4) in a consideration that "feminism is both *about* and *for* women" (5) is to fail to consider that, despite the differences in hierarchizing conceptions of existence and selfhood, the dynamics of oppression of Western experience converge towards a similar structure of domination. Even in their varied manifestations and different locations, geographical and cultural, systems of domination affect both men and women, and engage with all of human experience in their perpetuation, as the roles provided for individual and collective experiences are informed by said permanence of domination. As bell hooks defends in *Feminist Theory*, Western experience is marked by the prevalence of such hierarchizing experience through violence, and that wishing to obtain an equivalence of women to the highest-located force (in the shape of manhood) is to, consequently, wish to maintain the structure of violence and domination, shifting only one's position from vulnerability into power (2015a, 84-86). The structuralizing perception discredited by hooks, thus, is shown to fail to understand the impact that the referred dynamics possess in the experience of both women and men – albeit with different access to power, men and women embody both victim and perpetrator inside the preying systems of domination, a consideration hooks argues many feminist theoretical ground and movement manifestations fail to perceive (86-90).

It is in light of such a void in feminist theory that bell hooks found her work rising. As hooks observes,

> The insistence on a concentrated focus on individualism, on the primacy of self, deemed "liberatory" by women's liberationists, was not a visionary, radical concept of freedom […]. It was the same idea of independence perpetuated by the imperialist patriarchal state which equates independence with narcissism, and lack of concern with triumph over others. (78)

In maintaining the existing hierarchizing power dynamics between prepotent and subordinate groups through individualized modes of existence, regardless of whom integrates said classifications, a full liberation from any form of oppression and constraint is prevented and a state of governing stasis is preserved through the illusion of change in the revolving motion of who constitutes these groups. If women are merely to achieve the upward-moving motion defended by Crowe and Friedan, such an advancement might translate not into the extinguishing of the expected roles which womanhood occupied, but into the cyclical replacement of who occupies these roles. In maintaining the superior/inferior binary perception through which Western society moderates its denomination of success, subordination remains the vehicle through which a capitalist patriarchal system promotes (self-)consumption – "a system that depends on the exploitation of underclass groups for its survival" (102).[6]

Thus, hooks argued for the need of a theoretical feminist framework which looks beyond such a composition, and, as "[t]o critique sexist images without offering alternatives is an incomplete intervention" (hooks, 2015b, 35), she presented in *Feminist theory* a theoretical structure which could be used as a basis through which a politicized and complete intervention could be established. This intervention would not only denounce male command over female existence, but would also attempt to remove all forms of violence and domination from human relations and relationships, indiscriminate from and towards whom they exist. Moreover, hooks advocated for the recognition of the existence of intersectionality in the greater vulnerability of some groups as critical in the development and application of such a theory – as is the case in the added vulnerability of African American women.

[6] For manifestations of (self-)consumption in the specified novels of James Joyce and Toni Morrison, see Chapter 1, pages 40-43.

An article such as Crowe's is, nevertheless, and when in comparison to hooks' theoretical framework, revealing of the tendency for divergence inside feminist theory that has been present from its conception, in a recurrent oscillation in the consideration of the role of men, women of colour and experiences other than those of educated white middle-class women. Accordingly, the present dissertation does not wish to perceive Sula, Stephen or any of the characters in either novel as characteristically feminist – to do so would involve an essentializing equation of divergence with feminism. Instead, there will be a location of the protagonists as figures integrated into the dynamics and systems of domination theorized by hooks, and of the characters' divergence (or lack thereof) as manifestations of de-centralizing experience – or of maintenance of the patriarchal *status quo*, if such is their goal.

Additionally, and as expressed in the previous paragraphs, feminist studies have often considered male existence to be an arresting factor of full hegemony and dominance, but no such considerations will be present here. Contrary to this, the present point of perception considers men as, albeit frequently hierarchically positioned in superiority and with distinct degrees of oppression – as is Stephen's experience, – equally targeted by patriarchal domination as women. The diegetic patriarchal systems of oppression and its dynamics target both male and female existence, and both male and female existence is capable of its maintenance and promotion. Eva Peace, for example, despite having been quasi-fully destroyed by the patriarchal, individualist white patterns of existence in which she is inserted, earns an income which originates in said patterns at the supposed expense of her own material mutilation, and later promotes its mechanisms to Sula as the sole appropriate manner of living. Similarly, Dante, Stephen's governess, whilst vocal regarding Irish Catholic political experience, advocates for a system which, ultimately, places her existence in an inferior condition as a woman in Catholic systems. The self-sabotaging actions of oppressed characters are revelatory of the systemic undermining produced by the patriarchal systems the diegetic communities undertake.

Through hooks' theory, one must consider the pair of protagonists as common victims and constituents of the systems of domination of two distinct communities with

radically different sets of experience and beliefs, but whose dynamics and politics similarly belong to a Western structure of perception and expectation. The presence of a limiting and self-consumptive structure in both diegetic experiences is clear and made explicit by the protagonists themselves, as Stephen discloses that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (*P* 180), and Sula similarly expresses her own wish in confrontation with the imposing Eva Peace: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (*S* 92). Therefore, such presences are not interrogated here. Instead, the present argument analyses the development and various manifestations of these systems and the communities' and protagonists' reaction to them through the theorization of domination systems developed by hooks.

One may ask, then, what patterns of existence are imposed in the diegetic communities and how these patterns are shaped – in essence, what they are, where they have originated from, how they are imposed and how they make their presence (un)known. Moreover, how do the communities suffering from this imposition react to such an obtruding force? How does this obtrusion grow into normalcy? How do Stephen and Sula diverge from the main imposed patterns of existence and systems of valuation and perception in their respective diegetic communities and familial dynamics, in their condition of progeny of said shared experience? And, ultimately, how do Stephen and Sula diverge from each other in their own rejection of delineated expectations in light of their artistic tendency and capacity, considering that Sula requires Nel's presence for a full expression of being, while Stephen (apparently) manages to do so alone, even if constrained? Through locating the root of the diegetic systems of domination, one is capable of, in consequence, locating the mechanisms used by the protagonists to distance and differentiate their own existence from the one which originated them. This will then lead to proposing a new mode of experience which does not conceive an exterior reference of existence and perception as central to its own. While Sula and Stephen will be the main focus of the present dissertation, one cannot nor should ignore the presence and influence of characters such as Simon and Mary Dedalus, Dante (Mrs. Riordan), Eva Peace, Nel Wright and Shadrack as characters whose differing compliance with and divergence from their communities mark not only their own, but also Stephen

and Sula's presence in the established systems. Characteristics of deviance and defiance in contrast with complaisance in such characters can be located and will be specifically noted.

Reflecting such questions, the first chapter of the present dissertation will focus on the diegetic communal environments and their occlusive, repressive and deprecating dynamics and systems of value and perception, especially in the familial realm. If Stephen and Sula (along with other characters) are recurrently limited, their limitations originate inside family structures which are, themselves, part of communities immersed in patterns of existence and expectation formed by and in relation to an exterior presence intruding in its functioning – a functioning in which every character is forced to play a role and towards which one must contribute. These characters are simultaneously victim and perpetrator of the valuation system imposed by the occluded dominant presence which continues to shape the dynamics of the communities.

After defining, in Chapter 1, the collective experience of the diegetic communities and their effect on the familial environment of each protagonist, Chapter 2 will demonstrate how said protagonists are capable – if at all – of breaking away from these dynamics and environment. Stephen and Sula shape their own identity based upon an interiority and individuality which are cyclically and systemically denied by the communal environment in which the characters are inserted and the roles of which they (attempt to) fully deny. The protagonists' actions and considerations of divergence and their (often material) location of marginality allow them to develop an irony-based critical perception over the (voluntarily) unperceived systems of domination the communities undertake, as they grow from excluded children to self-distancing adults.

In the final chapter, after understanding where the protagonists are inserted in and how they diverge from said insertion in the respective previous chapters, the artistic capability with which the protagonists are endowed is considered as an additional, but defining layer in the capacity for self-distancing and the development of a critical overview of the communal and familial dynamics. The protagonists are not granted, however, the same opportunities in their individual and communal existence, and intersectionality as a theoretical concept will be used as to inform the reading one might

have of the asymmetrical circumstances, obstacles and relationships which constitute each of the protagonists' existence and experience, their divergence and opportunities for selfhood (or lack thereof).

If, in the past decades and most recent centuries, the continuous (but light) blurring of binary considerations resting upon the gulf between a privileged, distanced centre and a forced marginality has led to the rise of artists such as James Joyce and Toni Morrison, along with many others, one can only imagine the amount of artistic genius and wit which has been lost due to the rigidity of racism, sexism and class hierarchy, amongst other compulsory considerations of such factors as debilitating. It is the present dissertation's proposal to acknowledge and to display how artistic predisposition and creation may come from all sides – including those whose walls stand much too close for breathing – if only they are not removed of their rightful space, place and centre.

Chapter 1

Blood-bound – Systems of Domination in Communal and Familial Experience

As bell hooks defines in *Feminist theory: from margin to center*,

> Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (2015a, 26)

This definition of feminism highlights the different elements of intersection which are exploited by the systems of domination present in the binary West: as "sexist oppression" is maintained via a reinforcement of the dichotomy between men and women, the hierarchical configuration of domination relegates womanhood into a condition of servitude and subservience towards male power. As "economic expansion, and material desires" are available to select groups representing socioeconomic domination, the gulf between middle and lower-class is widened, insomuch as those dispossessed or of lower economic strength do not have access to control and are, in turn, exploited by those who do. Finally, the imperialist sense of hegemonic control over a group which is foreign to one's experience finds in colonial expression a possibility for maintenance of power: tensions such as British/Irish and white/black are based upon an overpowering hegemony – with due consideration to the differences in origin of the specified conflicts.

Indeed, as the commonplace definition of power considered by hooks is made explicit as "domination and control over people or things" (84) – although the author argues that other manifestations of power are possible and some desirable[7] – the

[7] In the "Changing Perspectives on Power" chapter of hooks' *Feminist Theory*, the author analyses the different existing dimensions of power, ranging from the prevailing domination and control (84) to the

perpetuated “ideology of domination” (26) prevents independent (self-)perception and finds in the exploitation of the multilayered binary tension between these elements the possibility for installing its systems and assuring its own continuation. Yet the sectioning made between such different factors becomes blurred once one considers their interaction and mutual influence. As these elements are simultaneously constitutive of one’s experience of domination, their severance cannot be created, because the consideration of one element implies the influence of other factors onto itself. However, one’s positioning of power inside one realm does not imply a similar positioning in the others mentioned. Conversely, one’s submission in one factor does not entail full subservience, and each experience becomes specific according to the manner in which the different factors converge in one’s life.

One of the first aspects hooks defines as being a manifestation of said systems and ideology of domination is the manner through which

> The ethics of Western society informed by imperialism and capitalism are personal rather than social. They teach us that the individual good is more important than the collective good, and consequently that individual change is of greater significance than collective change. (30)

The imposition of an individualizing experience is rooted upon the competitive “either/or dualistic thinking that is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society,” configured by “the belief that the self is formed in opposition to an other” (31). Considering that “[m]ost people are socialized to think in terms of opposition rather than compatibility” (31), hooks, once more, explains that “[w]ithin our [Western] society, all forms of oppression are supported by traditional Western thinking. The primary contradiction in Western cultural thought is the belief that the superior should control the inferior” (36). The consideration that there is a

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capacity for rejection of imposed identity (91) to the power of and in consumption and its absence (94-95). Ultimately, hooks argues that “[s]exism has never rendered women powerless. It has either suppressed their strength or exploited it. Recognition of that strength, that power [that women exercise daily and which can be used to combat sexist domination], is a step women together can take towards liberation” (95). Throughout the present dissertation, however, the focus will be on the predominant concept of power, unless specified otherwise.

hierarchizing scale which measures some as superior or inferior to others is explicitly present in both *A Portrait* and *Sula*, and marks the majority of the interactions the different characters develop toward one another. It is through such oppositional and binary considerations that the systems of domination pervading both communities in their Western configuration are manifested: centre/margin, dominant/subject, male/female and I/Other are all dual determinant factors in the maintenance of the Western order[8] – and it is upon such distinctions that its existence rests, consequently imposing a rejection of any divergence in favour of standardized convergence.

These considerations demonstrate the existence of a mutual dependence and definition of the "I" in light of the presence of the "Other" through a truncating experience which alters the valuation systems of the subdued communities into ones similar to those of the dominant communities. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in 1952, argued regarding black French colonial relations that "[t]he [black] Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other," as well as that "[e]very position of one's own, every effort at security, is based upon relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. […] The Antillean is characterized by his desire to dominate the other" (2008, 163-164). Correspondingly, hooks explains that "[t]he 'whiteness' that bonds [white feminist activists, but, in this context, such a reference grows into the possibility of differentiating racial groups] together is a racial identity that is directly related to the experience of non-white people as 'other' and as a 'threat'" (2015a, 56). Conjoining the ideas of the two authors, one can understand that there is an application of binary considerations regarding negative *otherness* to the existence of the subdued communities – in turn, these communities, in awareness of this perceived inferiority, assimilate it to their own

[8] The I/Other division, however, is not limited to an individual "I" against an individual "Other". There is, in both novels (and in accordance to Western experience), a possibility for oscillation between an individual and collective reference to both ends of the binary system – namely, the "I" and "Other" can simultaneously indicate Stephen, Sula, Sula and Nel as one indistinguishable unit, Irish Catholic experience, the community of the Bottom of Medallion, among others, and its reversion remains valid as long as it maintains a binary and oppositional configuration.

experience through adopting references of power and of expression of identity originating in the exterior dominant perception.

Indeed, the Other/other mentioned by Fanon does not refer to the otherness inculcated by white experience onto the Antillean case, instead referring to fellow black people upon which dominant considerations of worth are sewn. As Fanon expresses, "The Martinican does not compare himself with the white man *qua* father, leader, God; he compares himself with his fellow against the pattern of the white man" (2008, 167). The imposition of systems of domination – and, consequently, of the value systems – created by the dominant experience does not necessarily function as an opposite reference towards which the community interiorizes inferiority, but rather creates a projection of binary inferiority (and of its opposite idealized superiority) towards the communities' own constituents. The subservient communities' dynamics, as a consequence, incorporate a dichotomy which is forcefully imprinted into the perception of the subdued people and which distorts their original (self-)perception into that of the dominant side – from the moment such an imprint is created, the perception of the subdued people becomes the dominant one, creating a negative self-perception which entails patterns of limitation, fragmentation and self-sabotage.

It is in this light that British and Catholic forces appear in *A Portrait*. One is confronted with an Irish Catholic community which is characterized by its division with regard to the Protestant Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell's forced intertwining of political and personal life against a British force which entails Irish fragmentation. Another manifestation of said fragmentation is the division between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, as demonstrated when a young Stephen declares his child-like wish to marry a Protestant girl. Upon such a declaration, there is a rebuking and reprimanding action towards his intentions that perpetuates a sectarian division between the two groups of common Irish existence that share both territory and history. Stephen, from childhood, is presented with a hostile communal self-perception not only in his familial environment, but also in his fellow students' reaction towards themselves and others. In the different moments presented of Stephen's life, the entirety of the Irish Catholic community tends to repeat the aforementioned practices of binary consideration onto

its constituents in pressure to perpetuate the divided identity upon which a fragmented self-perception rests – to be divided in this political manner is understood by the majority of the characters as a prideful fact.

There is a recurrence in referencing British presence in Irish territory, politics, literature, and, ultimately, identity – through references to figures such as Hamilton Rowan (*P* 7), the eighteenth-century group of whiteboys (*P* 33), Lord Byron (*P* 61), British-imposed curfews (*P* 159), Wolfe Tone (*P* 162), amongst others – which are found at the root of every divisive consideration in the novel, but which are never fully faced. Manifestations of its diegetic influence on Stephen's and Ireland's experience can be understood specifically in episodes such as the portrayal of Stephen's classroom dynamics as a student in Clongowes Wood College, through the use of British political and historical imagery. Namely, to be in accordance with the school's expectation translates into the attribution of white and red rose badges and to be denominated "York" and "Lancaster", respectively (*P* 9), symbols which make evident the presence of British political history in Irish experience. Another such instance is present during the Christmas dinner at Stephen's house, as the heated discussion between Stephen's father, Simon Dedalus, and Mr. Casey against Dante,[9] whilst informed by a respective rejection and support for Catholic views over Parnell, not only maintains British existence as a foreign force which has been imposed upon Irish experience but is also illustrative of the division within Catholic Ireland.

Likewise, the community of the Bottom of Medallion, in Morrison's *Sula*, was founded upon what the narrator classifies as a "nigger joke" (*S* 4) – a manifestation of purposeful misleading originated in imposition of white will upon black experience – when a white slave master, who had promised an enslaved man a piece of "bottom land" (*S* 5) in exchange for labour, deceived the black man into receiving hill land, formulating that the naming and superiority of such a land owed to the consideration that "when God looks down, it's the bottom […] of heaven – best land there is" (*S* 5).

[9] "Dante" is Stephen's child-like manner of pronouncing "auntie" (*P* 4) – the character's name is, in fact, Mrs. Riordan.

Upon receiving "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" (*S* 5), the black man erected a community, the community of the Bottom. Its origin became imbued with white deceit, expectation and profit, which ingrained the expectations of the formerly-enslaved black man – and the subsequent communal experience – with the expectation of white superiority, a white overarching presence which shaped the community. In the black man's condition as a former slave, autochthony is not only denied, but, when apparently granted by white power, it is supplanted with white machinations and manifestations of said power which develop in parallel with the occupation of the land by black experience. Therefore, all the subsequent and consequent black experience in said land would unavoidably be marked by such a deceit which became cyclical and, even if unwittingly, self-imposed. This forcing of the community into self-deceit shaped the identity of itself and of its residents, all of them falling into some categorization shaped by white perception. It did not matter that they were geographically above the comfortable white experience of the valley of Medallion – they were always the "Bottom" end, in its full scatological connotation, of white consideration through the originating "nigger joke" (*S* 4).[10]

Despite the prevailing influence of the dominant forces in the dynamics of the dominated and oppressed communities, the quantifiable representation of these exterior experiences is minimal in both novels. Each novel possesses minimal diegetic representatives of such dominant potency – namely, the most relevant ones prove to be, in *A Portrait*, the dean of studies with whom Stephen converses at University College Dublin, and, in *Sula*, the train conductor who Helene and Nel Wright come in contact with. The representative characters, considering their dominant origin and position of power, are comparable in their inadequacy in the dominated communities.

The dean of studies with whom Stephen communicates, despite being present on Irish territory and being of English origin, lacks knowledge and mastery over Irish expression in the English language – the language which was, in turn, imposed on Irish

[10] For an analysis of such scatological considerations, see Kathryn Bond Stockton's *Heaven's Bottom: Anal Economics and the Critical Debasement of Freud in Toni Morrison's "Sula"* (1993).

existence by British imperialist ambition – and the train conductor, in his assertion of power and superiority over Helene Wright (Nel's mother and the product of a strict upbringing created by her grandmother in response to Helene's mother being a prostitute) and the other African American passengers, must move towards the segregated section of the train, where he becomes the quantifiable minority. Stephen, in his contact, understands his own displacement in the English language, which, despite being the language he uses, is always "an acquired speech" (*P* 167). As Stephen further confesses: "I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of [the dean of studies'] language" (*P* 167). The Western imposition of dominance carried out by English experience into Irish territory, intellect and existence is perceived by Stephen to be limiting and alienating. Due to his critical capacity, Stephen is capable of understanding and perceiving the existence of said systems of domination and the mutual inadequacy of himself in the English language and of the dean of studies in Irish territory and experience – a capacity which Helene Wright is incapable of producing.

Helene Wright, in her limited condition as a dominated Western woman, attempts to appease the dominant figure in its expression of power, earning, through such actions, the contempt of those of her own community, including that of her own daughter,[11] insomuch as Helene Wright's "custard" (*S* 22) skin colour and mentality create a distance between her family and the same black existence it originated from.[12]

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[11] Nel's reaction to the presented situation, however, is peculiar. Due to her mother's recurrent inculcation of Western dominant valuation of womanhood's role and experience upon Nel, she feels "both pleased and ashamed" by the hatred displayed in the African American soldiers' eyes regarding Helene's subservience to the white train conductor (*S* 22) – while her pleasure stems from the defiance of the processes of limitation her mother imposes on her familial experience, her shame results from her own familial connection with Helene and from her own absorption of Western domination systems.

[12] The word "custard", here, refers to an assimilation of white valuation systems in one's perception of themselves and their community. Helene's "custard" complexion gains special significance in the referenced episode of facing the train conductor, as the "deep-brown wool" (*S* 19) of the character's dress may be considered to disclose her African American heritage as being rejected by the lighter tone of her perception, reflected upon the colour of her skin. This perception, along with the smile displayed towards the prejudiced train conductor, can be considered to align Helene Wright's view with the arbitrary division between coloured and "nigger" experience inside African American existence alluded to by the character throughout the novel – the former being in convergence with white standards and the latter not corresponding to such valuation.

She is, then, understood as a traitor by her fellow African Americans, in her subservient attitude towards the dominant man – thus, her presence, in its attempt at convergence with white standards, is perceived as inadequate in both racial communities. This inadequacy is revealed when she is forced to forfeit her façade of (racial and class) superiority and ask where "the toilet" (*S* 13) is, and then proceeding to relieve herself in "a field of high grass on the far side of the track" (*S* 23) along with other black people – a moment which makes evident her positioning as inferior alongside any other African American in the eyes of the dominant white train conductor.

The inadequacy of both the dominant and subject figures is revealed in situations such as those faced by Stephen and Helene, as they result from the inequivalent relation and distribution of power in their common human existence: in environments which favour the dominant force, its representative figures, despite their numerical inferiority, maintain their placing upon a hierarchized location of power over whom they perceive as a supposedly inferior majority. This asymmetrical allocation of power in hierarchical systems damages the dominated communities but is replicated by them in their internal relations, as previously conveyed through Fanon. Whilst the dominant figures are recognized as exterior and negatively perceived by the communities, the patterns of valuation created and imposed by said domination become ingrained in the communal self-perception of those subjected to dominance – and these patterns are marked by an application of violence in favour of self-assertion. As Fanon expresses regarding Antillean relations, "[i]t is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility" (2008, 164). This expression, in incorporating the supposed Antillean perception, is not only revelatory of the functioning pertaining the hierarchical systems of domination, but also of the correspondence of domination with masculine figuration. In the referred binary systems, submission is recurrently relegated to the feminine, in a symbiotic relation that informs the binary gendered roles. These (con)figurations are, then, transmitted and enforced by the community onto its own constituents particularly through familial environments.

As defined in hooks' theoretical framework, and considering the author's usage of John L. Hodge's work in her argument, the family in Western patriarchal society is

pervaded by a binary assertion of hierarchic authority which establishes the male figure as responsible for the economic realm of such a familial structure – a factor which grants a position of domination and control over the family – whilst the female figure is responsible for providing care in submission to the economically-dominant male figure (2015a, 37). It is also disclosed that the familial environment is the primary (both in chronological manner and in intensity) force in transmitting patriarchal dichotomy and hierarchy to its constituents and from parent to child, as such a setting is the child's initial and absorbing contact with systemic oppressions (37). Yet another stratum of control is established in this environment, one which places domination on the parent, male or female, and subjection on the youth (37). This definition of how familial dynamics of Western experience inculcate values of oppression and hierarchizing control can be perceived in the families and relations of all characters in both novels.

In *A Portrait*, the presence of both father and mother figures is in accordance with this structure, as Simon Dedalus, Stephen's father, is the central figure of economic security, thus exercising control over the familial domain. Upon the loss of his employment and the socioeconomic downward spiralling of the Dedalus family, and despite his failure to meet his expected contribution, Simon's position of power remains, and the family is forced into adaptation to the new condition of the central figure. Even as Stephen produces his own experience of monetary gains for the family, the parent/child structure of domination remains as an unmovable binary of hierarchy and does not allow the protagonist the centrality he would expect. As follows hooks' argument regarding the maintenance of gender roles in "men's liberation movement," despite any change in the role of the "economic provider" through unemployment, the attribution of extensive housework to women preserves the binary dynamics of power distribution (80). Said power over the familial environment is revealed to be sustained to the detriment of Mary and Stephen Dedalus, the mother and child figures presented, who are to remain in their expected roles of subservience.

The same default composition of family systems can be located in *Sula*, specifically in the Wright household: Nel's father, Wiley Wright, despite being absent for the majority of the novel, is bearer of the expected male economic security and this is

the reason for his absence. Yet, when present, he attempts to maintain the dynamics associated with his domination, as when calling Helene's attention to the disruption of the white lace curtains (*S* 79), in fulfilment of the role imparted on him. Helene Wright, Nel's mother, provides care for her child, but such a care is converged with a transmission of subordination onto Nel's psyche, a subordination which the young girl is to undertake and to transmit to her own children in the cyclical familial domination – and this transmission on Helene's part is successful, as the binary and patriarchal familial dynamics are reproduced in Nel's marriage to Jude Greene.

Jude is characterized by a recurrent frustration and resentment which finds its origin in his failure to secure employment under the dominant (white) capitalist community in the construction of the New River Road, instead undertaking employment as a waiter. This project's initial plans for a bridge were replaced by the construction of a tunnel, which the community of the Bottom targeted by the end of the novel. Jude's wish for work on this road was supplanted by the exclusive employment of white employees by white employers: "thin-armed white boys from the Virginia hills and the bull-necked Greeks and Italians" were privileged over capable black men, the latter group being recurrently met with the declaration and order that there was "'[n]othing else today. Come back tomorrow'" (*S* 82). Moreover, the sole employment opportunity presented to black existence was reserved for older black men in frail condition in the form of servile aid (*S* 81) – a replication of the conditions of enslaved treatment by white masters being expected from the vulnerable group.

This recurrent rejection in promise of benefit and employment led to Jude's understanding of the "nigger joke" (4) quality of the employment system – that white existence exerted power over black experience and that no such foundational status, even of material construction and generation, would be granted by white men towards black people. This realization led to a process of psychological emasculation in Jude, which is similar to the one described by hooks, as

> the poor or working-class man who has been socialized via sexist ideology to believe that there are privileges and powers he should possess solely because he is male often finds that few, if any, of these benefits are automatically bestowed on him in life. […] he is constantly concerned about

> the contradiction between the notion of masculinity he was taught and his inability to live up to that notion. (2015a, 75)

The ideology of domination, then, is directly linked to the economic control available to male existence in Western dualistic familial dynamics, because there is a recurrent need for the failure of such expectation of power and privilege to be soothed by feminine presence. Even if the opposite role is not played by men, the maintenance of the female role of care is of essence in its configuration of subjugation, so as to compensate for the frustration made explicit by hooks. Correspondingly, the men present in the novels want someone "to care about [their] hurt, to care very deeply" (*S* 82), a reflection of the role assigned to women inside the dominant system. However, due to the hierarchizing considerations of male over female and parent over child which mark Western familial experience, in order for the full ascension of male existence into power, the female figure who provides emotional support and household care cannot overlap with the figure of the mother – "if he [Jude] were to be a man, that someone could no longer be his mother" (*S* 82).

For Jude to truly achieve his potential inside the systems of domination theorized by hooks and against the unachievable notions of masculinity promoted by said systems, he needed to embody the figure of full dominance inside a family of his own, in which his providing of economic security and stability would assert him as the main figure of power. As the Western "notion of masculinity" (hooks, 2015a, 75) rests upon the binary dependence of those in vulnerability on those with power, despite "his parents and their seven other children" (*S* 80) being dependent on him prior to his marriage to Nel, his parents remained in a powerful position due to parent/child systemic domination. Therefore, in an attempt at countering the resentment of dominant rejection in labour and, simultaneously, the vulnerability of not being a figure of full power in his familial environment against said dominant rejection, Jude sought for Nel in her compliance and (transmitted) tendency for providing the expected emotional care. Jude marries Nel in order to obtain this warmth as compensation for his inability to meet the dominantly-asserted expectations over male existence which have converged and been marked by

the same “nigger joke” (4) quality that permeates the creation of the Bottom of Medallion.

Consequently, Helene Wright finds relief in her daughter’s marriage, and attitudes which would potentially be understood as disruptive to the *status quo*, such as the aforementioned minimal interference with white curtains, become insignificant in light of the marital contract. This relief, considering the systems of domination present in both novels, originates in a realization and full convergence with the prospects urged and inflicted by such systems and their manifestations, in that this realization equates with a full submission to domination. Marriage, in both novels (and in most patriarchal structures of domination), is presented as a mechanism through which one formally and contractually accepts and complies with the systems of domination perpetuated by binary thinking. It is these systems of recurrent denial and rejection that the protagonists are expected to absorb and to propagate towards the rest of the community. Helene no longer worries about the (significantly) white curtains after Nel accepts marriage because the disruption of the (literally) white standards no longer poses a threat of divergence: the transition into full acceptance of such standards has been cemented by a marital contract. In turn, Jude’s relief, once more, stems from his own acknowledgement that, in marriage, solace will be mandatory in his wife’s correspondence to dominant expectation, therefore providing him with Western and patriarchal masculinity.

Men, in the presented novels – and specifically Jude and Stephen – also come into (even if unacknowledged) awareness of the equation of power with financial security, and how said equation partially validates – or denies, in case of nonfulfillment – their realization of the Western role of masculinity. The frustration Stephen feels upon financially contributing to his family, similarly to Jude, results from not being the main figure of power inside the dynamics of his household, as this role belongs to his father, according to Western and patriarchal considerations of domination and power. In his economic contribution to the familial environment through the prizes he won due to his writing skills, Stephen goes on a spree of consumption that, whilst asserting of his own

power, simultaneously distanced him from those who are marked by their incapability to contribute on the economic level. As the narrator discloses,

> He [Stephen] saw clearly, too, his own futile isolation. He had not gone one step nearer the lives he had sought to approach nor bridged the restless shame and rancour that had divided him from mother and brother and sister. He felt that he was hardly of the one blood with them but stood to them rather in the mystical kinship of fosterage, foster child and foster brother. (*P* 86-87)

Despite Stephen's wish for approach, the system of domination he resides in does not allow him that proximity. Characteristically, Stephen's feeling of "fosterage" is only expressive of his relation to his "mother and brother and sister," who are, similarly, not eligible to be the main figures of power of the family due to their lack of financial contribution along with their status of submission. Relevantly not mentioned, however, is Stephen's father, Simon, to whom, even if implicitly, Stephen is capable of relating to due to his own recent ascension into economic provision. Once more, even if the father is not contributing economically to the household, he remains established as the figure and reference of power for Stephen due to the conflation of fulfilled roles in the family, including that of Stephen's own submission as his father's son.

Indeed, Stephen is on middle ground through his contribution, similarly to Jude: they have both undertaken the role of economic provider, but their control is not yet established, due to their persisting condition as subjected children under their parents' presence. A matching need for control in light of wishing for someone "to care about [the masculine] hurt, to care very deeply" (*S* 82) in the possible fulfilment of their role of masculinity is the reason for which Jude seeks Nel's hand in marriage while, in parallel and immediately succeeding the end of his consumption spree, Stephen, has a sexual encounter with a prostitute. These two situations, however, diverge in their realization: because Jude's marriage to Nel is established as a link marked by supposed permanence, it not only consummates his fulfilment of the male role of Western experience and grants him the care provided by the female figure, but it concurrently justifies and apparently overwrites his racial and class struggle against the ruling (white) rejection. Jude's position as a ruling Western male is effectively substantiated, as "[w]ith her [Nel]

he was head of a household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of necessity. The two of them together would make one Jude" (*S* 83) despite his subjugation as a black male to dominant white existence. The elimination of any possible configuration of Nel as an individual, consequently, makes Jude exploiter and exploited simultaneously, as all characters of both novels and of Western experience are.[13]

Stephen, on the other hand, due to the temporary nature of his contractual encounter, is incapable of fully substantiating his position as a dominating figure in permanence – "In her arms he [Stephen] felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself. But his lips would not bend to kiss her" (*P* 89). Stephen's inability to maintain an emotional proximity due to the encounter being a manifestation of his desire both for ascension into a role of power as for contact with characters such as Emma Clery or the fictional Mercedes reveals the superficiality of his attempt. As the economic security is replaced by a transaction and a process of granting of pain in exchange for emotional care – another factor necessary for the establishment of Western roles of domination in gendered existence – is manipulated into female physical provision, Stephen fails to grow into the role of dominating figure assigned to him. Due to his inner world and hurt not being transposed into a relationship with a woman who embodies the permanent role of subjection to systemic domination despite the economic providing, Stephen's efforts are frustrated.[14]

The female emotional care lacking in Stephen's sexual encounter with the prostitute is crucial for the maintenance of the dynamics of domination. As Jude had to display his pain to Nel in order for her to develop compliance with the possibility of marriage – "Nel's indifference to his hints about marriage disappeared altogether when she discovered his pain. Jude could see himself taking shape in her eyes" (*S* 83) – so did

[13] The words "exploiter" and "exploited" here are purposeful: hooks defines that "[b]eing oppressed means the *absence of* choices" and that "exploitation and discrimination" are more accurate in the description of the condition of the majority of women in the United States of America (2015a, 5). Therefore, as most characters in the novels possess some possibility for choice, even if oftentimes limited, distinction in the use of such terms is of relevance.

[14] This frustration does not, however, invalidate Stephen's use of said experience as a means for growth. It merely makes explicit and predictable the denunciation of these actions by the Irish Catholic community due to it being a thwarted, non-complicit attempt at compliance.

Stephen require such a demonstration of the pain caused by the systems of domination. As Ajax, a man who is a staple of masculinity for the community of the Bottom of Medallion, discloses, "all they [women] want, man, is they own misery. Ax em [*sic*] to die for you and they yours for life" (*S* 83): Nel located in said granting of vulnerability and pain by Jude the need to fulfil the imperative of caretaking that had been inculcated into her perception by her mother, even at the expense of her friendship with Sula. As the narrator divulges, "Nel's response to Jude's shame and anger selected her away from Sula. And greater than her friendship was this new feeling of being needed by someone who saw her singly" (84).[15]

However, such Western valuation is not solely transmitted in the nuclear family structure, as explained by hooks: "Even in families where no male is present, children may learn to value dominating, authoritative rule via their relationship to mothers and other adults, as well as strict adherence to sexist-defined role patterns" (2015a, 37). Sula's familial environment corresponds to this description, as the lack of male presence does not impede the transmission of such values of patriarchal identity.

Whilst most fathers are characteristically absent in *Sula*, their absence is noteworthy in its expression of Western dynamics of male dominance and supremacy. Eva Peace, for example, has the need to create material and bodily self-limitation as a result of BoyBoy's abandonment of their family because the economic safety provided by the male patriarchal figure is no longer present. Moreover, in her house in the Bottom of Medallion, Eva Peace meets the men of the community and provides them with an intellectual engagement which satisfies their needs, whilst simultaneously being a figure of judgement for the community's women – "With other people's affairs Eva was equally prejudiced about men" (*S* 42), albeit in their favour, criticizing all women who faltered in caretaking. As Eva Peace fully catered to the Western patriarchal perception of women conceding care through emotional obligation, Hannah Peace's love and need is primarily bodily, but, nevertheless, the catering to the community's needs remained in her physical granting of pleasure.

[15] For deeper insight on Sisterhood in Sula and Nel's friendship, see Chapter 2, pages 49-50.

Hannah Peace, Sula's mother, is marked by her sexual desire and activity in Medallion, although not in divergence from the dynamics of Western valuation, instead reinforcing them. In Hannah's sexual activity, she "had been a nuisance, but she was complimenting the women, in a way, by wanting their husbands" (*S* 115). Hannah's existence, then, had been cemented into Medallion's dynamics: by simultaneously satisfying men's desire and catering to the women's vanity, Hannah's actions were a tribute-paying and service to the community, at the expense of her lack of love.

In a manner which echoes the absence of BoyBoy, Hannah transmutes the experience of grief and the male absence of Sula's father, Rekus, into this complimenting contribution to the dynamics of value in the Bottom of Medallion. The "manlove" (*S* 41) inherited by the female figures of the family, in convergence with the factual absence of male figures, creates a generational need in the women of the Peace family to contribute to the fulfilment of all roles in Western community. This, ultimately, reveals that the value systems have been fully absorbed by these women, and that their difference from the women of the community in their lack of a male figure is not purposeful – as Eva discloses to Sula, the absence of permanently-allocated men in their lives was "[n]ot by choice" (*S* 92).

Inside such limiting patriarchal families, femininity gains special significance as the means through which systems of domination may be maintained. As hooks' theoretical understanding of women's positioning (inside dynamics which impose inferiority on their own existence) argues, "[w]omen, though assigned different roles to play in society based on sex, are not taught a different value system. […] Like most men, most women are taught from childhood on that dominating and controlling others is *the* basic expression of power" (2015a, 87). It is inside these considerations that the presented diegetic communities develop and expect their women to behave, even in a double-fold manner, as explained by the theorist as regards sexist considerations inside the feminist movement:

> Even though women organizing and participating in feminist movement were in no way passive, unassertive, or unable to make decisions, they perpetuated the idea that these characteristics were typical female traits, a perspective that mirrored male supremacist interpretations of

> women's reality. They did not distinguish between the passive role many women assume in relation to male peers and/or male authority figures, and the assertive, even domineering, role they assume in relation to one another, to children, or to those individuals, female or male, who have lower social status, whom they see as inferiors. (hooks, 2015a, 92-93)

Such is the experience of Eva Peace and Mary Dedalus in their motherhood. In the presence of dominating men, their experience is one of passivity and complimentary action towards this domination: as Eva Peace's love for men provides for them intellectual care, Mary Dedalus is shown to be subsidiary regarding Simon Dedalus, and the entirety of the household work is directed by her when the Dedalus family faces economic difficulty. However, their ambivalence is also denoted in their marked hostility towards the protagonists in their expression of divergence from the systems of domination, as Eva's rebuking of Sula's lifestyle (*S* 91-94) frequently resembles Mary's rejection of Stephen's distance from the Catholic church (*P* 152-153).

Moreover, it is in this consideration that Eva murders her son, Plum – because, as a black man who had the opportunity to thrive on the work and limitation of a black woman, he was unable to rise to the patriarchal role of masculinity assigned to him. As women are placed in between the role of exploited in their subservience to men and exploiter in their power over children, the care they are to grant becomes nullified when confronted with their obligations toward patriarchal experience. As Mary Dedalus rebukes Stephen's experience of college education, she maintains the care allocated to her role and love for her children – as she prepares Stephen and washes him, Stephen recognizes that her granting of love "gives [her] pleasure" (*P* 153). Similarly, before Eva's burning of Plum, Eva held her son, demonstrating not only the affection she felt for her him, but also her fulfilment of her role of caregiver as a Western woman and mother. As Hannah unknowingly attempts to signal Eva of such an incident, Eva merely says "'Is? My baby? Burning?'" (*S* 48). In this light, one can understand that Eva's burning of Plum was an act of maintenance of Plum's status as a child, one who is unable to have access to control and power, being dependent on his mother, as opposed to a life of non-fulfilment of the expected role of masculine control and power in Western dynamics. For Eva and Mary (and, by extension, for Western patriarchal society), the worst

possibility of existence is one which is revolutionary in its denial of these dynamics and systems of domination: Plum's life (albeit one riddled with drug addiction and post-traumatic stress from military experience), is a direct rejection of the roles of Western capitalist experience in its favour of a seemingly powerless and non-controlling practice. In this manner, Eva maintains her status of perpetuation of Western systems of domination by eliminating divergence, even if painstakingly.

Such processes and perpetuation of domination by those who are dominated display a cyclical involvement of the individual in these systems. To exist in these communities is to become a part of the dynamics in which one simultaneously subjugates and is subjugated. For instance, when Stephen is being admitted into Clongowes Wood College, his father's sole advice for him is "whatever he [Stephen] did, never to peach on a fellow" (*P* 6). Whilst this advice may be considered to be a part of a fatherly attempt at the integration of his child, the underlying lesson and ramifications imply said integration as solely possible if one undertakes the systems of pain and secrecy determined inside the presented communities. After his father's advice is delivered, Stephen is faced with an instance of physical overpowering by Wells, a colleague of the protagonist, against Stephen's purposeful marginality. When growing into sickness as a result of this altercation and being asked by Wells not to denounce his actions, Stephen remembers his father's advice, and chooses not to proceed with the denunciation that would make evident the cause of his own illness (*P* 8, 17-18). Whilst this instance is of relatively light consequence, it is symptomatic of the self-sabotage expected and imposed on the characters in both novels in favour of a collective subservience to the *status quo*, and it is particularly revealing regarding patriarchal effects on male existence: as men are to be figures of power inside these structures, they are not to be characterized in any way similar to women. Due to the binary configuration of the systems of domination, which consider opposition rather that complementarity and compatibility (hooks, 2015a, 31), there is an impossibility of overlapping of female submission with expected male domination, and vice versa. In Stephen's case, to disclose information on the situation which led to his illness would be to adopt a frail, 'feminine' attitude that would be rejected by his community.

Stephen's experience of pain in the aforementioned episode is merely an indication and exposure of its existence. As Stephen grows, his constant struggle between the asserted and expected Catholic priestly future and an occlusion of his inner personal and artistic experience is likewise symptomatic of the connection between the dynamics of self-limitation, pain and secrecy. Stephen conceals his pain under the pressure to integrate such dynamics, in a manner which grows into self-destruction in favour of standardization. The sermons delivered by Father Arnall – regarding "death, judgement, hell and heaven" (*P* 97) – that Stephen is faced with present a full disclosure of what is promised if one is incapable or unwilling to commit to systemic self-repression: material and intellectual divine obliteration against which the present pain and secrecy pale, an experience of fiery destruction as that which invaded Plum, Eva Peace's son.

Sula, however, possesses a more material approach to the oscillations of secrecy and truthfulness, such as when the title character accidentally kills Chicken Little, a young boy of her own community, and Nel, having absorbed these considerations from the recurrent self-oppression-and-repression promoted by her mother, denotes that "[s]omebody saw" (*S* 61) the incident. Despite Sula believing that Shadrack had witnessed the situation, her experience is marked by a fragmentation in oscillation between the exposure of truth and occlusion for safety, an experience shared by Nel, who convinces herself that she had not contributed materially to Chicken Little's death. This opting for denial on Nel's part works to the detriment of her and Sula's bonds of Sisterhood, and creates a permanent gulf between the two. This fragmentation between purposeful occlusion and secrecy and acknowledgement of one's condition marks the experience, even if implicitly, of all characters in the novels, as Eva Peace's capacity for the creation and maintenance of her house is also dependent on covertness and similarly occludes physical destruction.

Upon Sula's unexpected return to the Bottom of Medallion after her flight from the community as a response to Nel's marriage, the protagonist meets her grandmother, Eva, and openly criticizes and rejects her supposed secret – that, in a moment of desperation, she had purposefully had her own leg severed from her body by a moving

train in order to gain access to an income which would make her and her children's survival possible. Eva, due to BoyBoy's absence – and consequent lack of economic provision, as previously considered, – is forced into submitting her bodily and intellectual possessions to a severance which secured Western and patriarchal dominant dynamics as her family's new economic safety, in exchange for a full yielding and acceptance of its standards. Eva's action to obtain a monthly income to support her family's existence is an action of extreme subjection to the dominant Western structures of power, wealth, value and identity as an act of survival. In having her leg severed from her body, Eva literally removed a portion of her existence, crippling herself, and becoming fully dependent on white structures and dynamics, with the entirety of the familial environment she created being centred upon a source of income that, whilst created by her, is not hers – instead, it is granted by the dominant systems, echoing the originating "nigger joke" (*S* 4). Eva's action displays a renunciation of identity in favour of the systemic denial of value, which Sula rejects as having shaped and consumed Eva both on the realm of the intellect as well as on the realm of the material, which gains special significance once one considers the bodily means through which Sula attempts self-determination. Eva does not create a moment of self-affirmation; her self-mutilation is a feeding of the dominant entity.

Tellingly, such an acceptance of submission is displayed when BoyBoy visits Eva in her new condition, alongside the woman with whom he developed a relationship *a posteriori* to leaving Eva. As BoyBoy refuses to acknowledge his responsibility in her severing of her leg, Eva immediately dissolves into a subjection that has become imprinted on her through this severing, and her submissive attitude (despite the pain and hatred she feels) is revelatory of the deep-rootedness of binary and patriarchal patterns of female subjugation. Additionally, despite Eva's secret not being disclosed as fully genuine or merely a fabrication, its existence as an explanation for her ability to create the living conditions that she and the Peace family possess being conceivable and

believed in by Sula and the community demonstrates the ingrained intertwining of pain and self-limitation with secrecy in favour of survival in the diegeses.[16]

Both diegetic communities of the novels present such dynamics of self-mutilation – equally material and intellectual – in their submissive and passive attitude towards the exterior communities that exert their influence, even if indirectly, over their own systems and dynamics of perception and existence. Stephen's interaction with his colleagues brings this to light:

> When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.
> Davin knocked the ashes from his pipe.
> - Too deep for me, Stevie, he said. But a man's country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after. (*P* 180)

In this dialogue, Stephen shows that he has developed the critical thinking capable of recognizing the limitations imposed by a society marked by self-restriction and rejection of artistic predisposition in all its constituents. In the same conversation, Stephen recognizes that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (*P* 180) – by considering Ireland as an "old sow" who eats her offspring, Stephen is highlighting the folding over oneself that characterizes the fragmentation of Irish experience inculcated into its constituents' perception. As Stephen expressed, "nationality, language, religion" (*P* 180) are all vehicles through which Ireland prevents a renovation of intellect and identity. The "sow" that metaphorically embodies Ireland in Stephen's argument being characterized as "old" is not merely an indicator of time, but also of fatality in preventing the organic and spontaneous discourse of evolution – by eating her farrow, the old sow is prolonging her individual lifespan through unnatural means, thus creating a distortion in the natural continuation and renovation of existence. The farrow, who should grow to renovate, invigorate and, ultimately, replace the sow herself as an extension of her own existence are unable to do so as a result of being consumed and destroyed by their own birth giver.

[16] Tellingly, the community of the Bottom of Medallion speculates on the reason for Eva Peace's missing leg, and all theories involve willing mutilation in exchange for monetary compensation (*S* 31).

Ultimately, the argument also reveals the misery that pervades both the sow and the farrow's existence, as the lack of nourishment for identity in associating Irish existence with the natural landscape of the sow demonstrates that there is no source of sustenance for the sow, thus compelling her to eat her own offspring and creation, all the while she is in a process of undeniable and unstoppable aging.[17] A situation of impending doom through self-consumption and lack of renovation is created in the repeated cycle Stephen makes explicit in consequence of the constant frustration and limitation of selfhood characteristic of the diegetic Irish and African American communities of *A Portrait* and *Sula* – as the convergence of all interactions Eva Peace possesses locate her as the Bottom's "old sow" (*P* 180).

The diegetic communities, however, refuse to acknowledge the complacency in their own oppression that is perpetuated through these dynamics and rituals. The preservation of these imposed figurations of domination in the communities through generational transmission proves to be a suffocating fact that all characters must undergo in order to become integrated. Just as Nel, upon discovering Sula and Jude's sexual interaction, grows accompanied by "a ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109), it becomes implicit that every character in both novels possesses such an imaginary object which is systematically and constantly refused consideration and acknowledgment.

The "ball of muddy strings" can be recognized as the understanding of the communities' own subjection to the dynamics of oppression and of their own experience in subduing their fellow communal constituents. The "gray ball" (*S* 109) that is refused recognition is the essence of oneself, of an individual identity in grief for its own repression in favour of a dominant entity – "a deeply personal cry for one's own pain" (*S* 108) whose expression has been denied in favour of an imposed standard of existence which promotes individuality to the detriment of communal identity. This object, in its composition of "mud and dead leaves" (*S* 107) and "the smell of overripe green things," is reminiscent of "the [living, and significantly] dark leaves of the horse

[17] Not only is the landscape where the "sow" (*P* 180) exists apparently destroyed, but, in her figuration of an Irish political and cultural denigration, so is the sow *herself* an exploited and destroyed landscape. For more considerations on this figuration of the Irish landscape, see pages 90-92.

chestnut" (*S* 28) Nel stares at in a moment of youthful self-recognition. The creation and consideration of such a decaying object composed of a previously-living self-recognition upon the discovery of what is deemed unacceptable by dominant systems brings into evidence the fact that, once more, divergence (and self-valuation) must be truncated in these systems and their dynamics. The "terrible […] malevolence" is not in the essence of "the little ball of fur and string and hair" (*S* 109) but in its shaping by a secrecy under which pain has spread unacknowledged. What is "terrible" in the ball is not its existence, but "the effort it took not to look" (*S* 109), and its "malevolence" originates in the processes of self-truncation which are imposed by overarching Western denial of independent identity, being malevolent in its purposeful juxtaposition of pain and secrecy – because it must remain forcefully unacknowledged in order not to be disclosed. To look directly into this shape would be to perceive and directly confront the continuous perpetuation of subjugation and self-consumption that the communities have been both victim to and perpetrator of throughout their existence, and, ultimately, to confess the self-destruction that has ravaged their independent identity.

If Nel, upon realizing (and finally confronting) her own "ball of muddy strings", composed of the "movement of mud and dead leaves" (*S* 107) that she had ignored throughout her life, finds nothing but "circles and circles of sorrow" (*S* 174) in what appears to be an irredeemable experience of suffering, she is finally capable of critically understanding her own exploitation. The fact that many citizens of the Bottom of Medallion, in a moment of liberation from such dynamics, fully confronted the New River Road tunnel – a "nigger joke" (*S* 4) promise which had grown "leaf-dead" (*S* 161) – in order to destroy it, is a disclosure that they were all aware of the existence (even if forcefully unacknowledged) of their communal "ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109) as a token of Western domination.

The presented communities – in falling prey to a set of machinations developed by Western exterior forces under which they have been forced into subjugation – have been stripped of their independent identity and a communal voice has been silenced in the diegetic dynamics of pain and subjugation. The journeys undergone by the protagonists of both novels, however, display the possibility for an alternative mode of

experience that is revolutionary in its configuration and the proposal of a distinct and independent experience free from domination.

Chapter 2

Experimental Lives – Stephen and Sula as Divergent Characters

Both Stephen Dedalus and Sula Peace, in their journeys through, inside and outside their respective communities, develop a marginality which figures both their material and intellectual realms. As children born inside communities bearing Western systems of domination and being assigned roles according to their gendered experience, the protagonists prefer a marginality which allows for them to critically perceive their particular circumstances and their communities' dynamics. This critical perception is a step towards divergence in both diegetic cases.

For both protagonists, the margins – material and intellectual – are the preferred location of the centralized and centralizing experience of Western society. Stephen and Sula recurrently, from childhood, maintain their material presence in the periphery of a central point of convergence, as can be perceived in Stephen's wilful failure to accompany his colleagues, who are playing football whilst the protagonist "kept on the fringe of his line, out of sight of his prefect, out of the reach of the rude feet" (*P* 4). Similarly, Sula, once discovering that her mother does not "like her" (*S* 57), goes with Nel to an area of forestation by the river away from the community's centre and it is there that she and Nel first explore a blooming sexuality through nature, a factor which grows into importance in Sula's expression and divergence. Both Stephen and Sula, in being inserted into centralized Western systems of domination and perception, turn to marginality as a field within which one's individuality and independence may bloom. Such individuality is presented not as the capitalist, economic and controlling individualism prevalent in the diegetic communities' experience, but one which is independent from points of reference which are exterior to their configuration, refusing to support power struggles amongst its constituents.

Stephen's rejection of his community springs from his childhood marginality – as his colleagues at Clongowes Wood College all play together, Stephen fails to accompany the athletic performance and watches from afar (*P* 4; 7). Even as a child, Stephen

displays a critical and questioning posture towards dogmatic domination and power, as he complains to rector Conmee about the unfair punishment carried out by Father Dolan to him in Clongowes, and Stephen's capacity for intellectual divergence is made evident in the attribution of the rose badges mentioned in Chapter 1.[18] As the use of British political imagery presents a binary expression that is exterior to the Irish community it invades, Stephen's imagination drifts into the impossibility of a "green rose" (*P* 9) inside this binary and hierarchical tension. Stephen considers, however, that "perhaps somewhere in the world you could [have a green rose]" springing from "the wild rose blossoms on the little green place" (*P* 9) that he remembers from songs, making evident a conceptual understanding not only of a truncated and limited experience shared in a territorial memory that is "green" in its configuration (as made evident by the use of "place"), but also of the need for an independence of identity to be developed for and by the Irish community.[19] Stephen's considerations of beauty in different colours regardless of the imposed hierarchy displays that this possibility can only exist if it is removed from the stratified structure imposed on Irish experience. As he grows, this rejection becomes more evident in its expression, and it is opposed by the pressure Stephen feels from his community's need for the conformation of its constituents. His recurrent oscillation between devotion and repulsion towards the Catholic institution and divisive Irish experience marks his life as one of fragmentation, paralleling that of the community.

In Stephen's constant contact in youth with Catholic teachings, the protagonist was presented with an intellectually stimulating, but normative environment, and this stimulation was recurrently limited by the Irish community itself. One can understand in Stephen's interactions with the different figures of Roman Catholicism that intellectual

[18] In page 26, specifically.

[19] One must remember that the colour green is characteristically associated with Irish experience, as is recurrently made evident throughout the novel – similarly to how Stephen's colleague, Fleming, paints a "green and […] maroon" (*P* 12) world in Stephen's geography book, the political use of such colours is established regarding Mrs. Riordan's brushes, "the brush with the green velvet back for Parnell and the brush with the maroon velvet back for Michael Davitt" (*P* 12). For a brief, but informative consideration of the use of green in Irish history, see Frédéric Armao's "The Color Green in Ireland: Ecological Mythology and the Recycling of Identity" (2013).

development is encouraged, but solely in its strict bordering defined by Catholic experience, as is implied by the English dean of studies in saying that Stephen's aesthetic questions resemble in profundity the act of "looking down from the cliffs of Moher into the depths. Many go down into the depths and never come up. Only the trained diver can go down into those depths and explore them and come to the surface again" (*P* 165). This remark implies a training that is conducted by a Catholic perception over experience that simultaneously promotes a binary consideration of "surface" and "depths" that echo those of heavenly and infernal Catholic thought, insomuch as the insightfulness of such aesthetic exploration is permeated by reproved sinful resonance that one can only avoid if fully submerged in Catholic – and, by extension in its binary and hierarchical formulation, Western – dominant perception. These dichotomous conceptions of exploration of knowledge are, once more, limited by a dominant force which imposes the systems of domination onto the constituents of a subjugated, limited existence. Here, Stephen is capable of aptly responding and surpassing the intellectual barriers imposed by the diegetic Catholic figures – "[Stephen's] greater quickness of mind, his consciousness of the dean's gestures as gestures, his consciousness of the failure of the man to achieve the visionary ideal which he pursues, all combine to drain Stephen of kinetic emotion," (Sharpless, 1967, 327) granting him static, ironic perception. However, Stephen's divergence is recurrently responded to with manipulation and hostility, regardless of his capacity for ironically overcoming these responses.

The majority of the episodes which mark Stephen's characteristic divergence from his community's ideological conceptions are composed of conversations the protagonist engages in with those around him, which function in positioning his own perception against those of the hostile community and its systems. If the English dean of studies proclaims a veiled intellectual superiority, Stephen questions his intellectual capacity within the dean's own language, one which is "foreign" (*P* 167) to Stephen and to Irish experience; if his community promotes compliance with Irish identity struggles directly, Stephen chooses to highlight the community's systemic severing of intellectual minds (*P* 179-180); if the Catholic church is deeply entrenched in Irish experience,

Stephen chooses to perceive and develop a rejection of Catholic domination and of Irish life under its power in favour of his individuality (*P* 212-220). Such realizations and questioning attitudes contribute to Stephen's development of a disillusioned and consequent critical approach and perception towards the structures in which he is inserted, and it is through such intellectual divergence that Stephen is capable of developing his characteristically ironic perception.

Sula's divergence, similarly, is also made evident from childhood. The protagonist and Nel Wright, her best friend, are rejected by their familial environments, ones in which, respectively, Nel's mother is constantly commanding her child to correctively pull her young nose, and Sula's mother discloses to her friends that, despite loving the protagonist, she does not "like her" (*S* 57) – in a manner which makes explicit that the mother's bond with Sula is not genuine in Hannah's individuality, but a product of Hannah's fulfilment of the Western role of womanhood. Correspondingly, hooks argues that an experience of mutual upbringing is necessary for both girls, as

> [w]omen who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to relinquish the belief that they exercise some measure of control, however relative, over their lives. They cannot afford to see themselves solely as "victims" because their survival depends on continued exercise of whatever personal powers they possess […]. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources […]. It is this type of bonding that is the essence of Sisterhood. (2015a, 46)

Sula and Nel become inseparable from childhood in their revolutionary expression of bonding against a system that attempts to define them as individually inferior and distinct in their blackness, femininity and class difference. Their manifestation of Sisterhood is a harnessing of power and control inside a structure which views their bond as a direct charge against domination in the refusal to apply hierarchical considerations over their differing experience as young girls, as well as refusing maintenance of Western patriarchal systems of domination through a dominant-endorsed shared victimhood.

As is disclosed in the narration of *Sula*, "Because each [Sula and Nel] had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom

and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on" (*S* 52). As Sula and Nel's reliance on each other was a means for self-cultivation and self-development, the young girls were capable of resisting patriarchal expectation. The young girls take solace not in "common oppression" (hooks, 2015a, 45) as victims of their lack of male and white characteristics, but in in their friendship, a shared realm of creational possibility through which mutual support in growth would be possible – a "something else to be" (*S* 52) that is not dependent on "shared victimization [which] directly reflects male supremacist thinking" (hooks, 2015a, 45). As "[s]exist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim" in maintenance of gendered binary experience, bell hooks remarks regarding Sisterhood as a form of political resistance that "[s]olidarity strengthens resistance struggle" (44-45). Such solidarity, instead of basing its own existence upon a converged self-perception of victimhood or separation and judgement, as rejected by hooks (45), rather recognizes the different aspects through which different women struggle with the Western patriarchal domination systems and presents a convergence in unity against the victimhood and conditions promoted by these same systems.

Moreover, Sisterhood is for both Sula and Nel a manner through which a detached and ironic perception over their communal experience is created and developed, in the cultivation of an intellectual divergence to be shared between the characters. This distance from the community, however, creates the need for them to defend their own experience as, similarly to Stephen, their divergence and limitations as young black girls are often met with hostile intentions. Yet, Sula and Nel's bond of Sisterhood is severed by the end of "Part One" of the novel.

This separation occurs because the role of emotional providing in womanhood, by being part of the dominant Western dynamics of dichotomy, requires an individualization that was not present in Sula and Nel's friendship, as they were indistinguishable from each other in their complementary existence as children – as Eva discloses when in conversation with Nel: "You. Sula. What's the difference?" (*S* 168). The role of female subservience towards a controlling male presence agreed to in the

marriage contract is incompatible with the existence of female friendship and solidarity in the novel, as mentioned in Chapter 1, particularly because the allocation of care becomes not directed at cooperation and mutual growth, but towards an absorption in exclusivity – one that Nel falls prey to by conceding to the role of female caregiving, becoming drained and dissolved in the assertion and the fulfilment of Jude's role as a (black) man (*S* 83).

The beginning of "Part Two" of *Sula* is marked by the protagonist's return to the Bottom of Medallion, having already developed an apparently divergent stance towards the community. Her evolution in divergence makes it possible for Sula to be central to the community while remaining divergent and marginal intellectually. In fact, her return to the Bottom is marked by a differentiated central focus on her experience, as the characters perceive and augment their own supposed binary goodness against the "evil" (*S* 117) Sula represents for them, feeling disgust towards the possibility of Sula being sexually interactive with white men (*S* 113). Such factors contribute to the placing of Sula as marginal and hierarchically inferior in the community's Western-structured perception, a placing reinforced when considered with the manner through which Sula subverts the expectations raised by her family. If Hannah's sexual encounters with the men of the Bottom were complimentary to the community's dynamics, Sula's sexual freedom was one which searched for inner development and self-realization (*S* 122-123). If Eva's negative perception over loosening gender roles contributed to the patriarchal experience of the Bottom of Medallion, as she argued with women who did not fully correspond to their Western expectation of caretaking (*S* 42), Sula attempts to destroy and subvert Western and patriarchal gender roles – "'You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?'" (*S* 142). If "Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in" Sula, "with a twist that was all her own imagination" (*S* 118), Sula was seen as a negative counterpart to the promotion of communal self-limitation perpetuated by the women of her family.

Indeed, as Stephen and Sula begin to perceive a systemic imposition of experience and identity inside their communities of origin, they begin to understand their own possibility for rejection of this imposition. hooks argues, using Elizabeth

Janeway's work, that those in submission possess the revolutionary power of denying an exterior definition of selfhood that is implemented by those in power and considers that "[w]omen need to know that they can reject the powerful's definition of their reality" (2015a, 92). Stephen and Sula, despite not having access to a full self-definition, remain in marginality and revolution through their capacity for disbelief in the imposed systems of domination, a scepticism which marks the beginning of their development of an ironic capacity that they are to use throughout their diegetic lives.

One of the manners through which Western systems of domination are manifested is the implementation of an individualistic perception over economic power, progress, and experience which defines value in binary "either/or" (hooks, 2015a, 31) terms. Such value systems, in their capitalist expression, define economic influx of power in an individual as positive against a collective shared experience of identity, once more because the systems of domination defend an individualization over collective experience (30). The systemic capacity for establishing a separationist dynamic inside the hierarchic valuation of dominance and economic power afflicts and divides the diegetic communities insomuch as the further the characters are embedded into Western systems of domination and economic power, the further distanced they are from unification.

Stephen and Sula's understanding of individuality directly clashes with the individualistic expression of selfhood expected by Western society, as the protagonists' manifestations of individuality bear a "collective struggle" which is recurrently undermined by a Western dualistic, binary "individual opportunism" (7) that places one's importance under a hierarchic scale. This echoes the consideration bell hooks developed regarding the appropriation of feminist work for the benefit of Western dynamics through centralized "prestige, fame, or money" (7), insomuch as Western society and power dynamics promote an individualism which is liberal (as opposed to collective) in its configuration. It is through marginality that Stephen and Sula recognize in their respective communal dynamics what hooks theorizes, by using Zillah Eisenstein's work, as the ways through which a liberally individualizing and competitive experience is capable of maintaining and reinforcing "class interests" to the disadvantage of "the

potential radicalism of feminist struggle" (9). If the potential for a revolutionary approach against deep-rooted Western systems of domination is lessened in the individualized centre of a class-based racial hegemony permeated by gendered benefit/detriment relations, one can conclude that it is through permanence in the margins, once more, that the protagonists may devise ways through which divergence from said centralized experience is able to promote a collective identity.

Correspondingly, as hooks argues with regard to marginal groups of women in feminist discourse, these groups "can make a place for themselves only if they first create, via critiques, an awareness of the factors that alienate them" (10). It is in marginality that one is capable of perceiving one's conditioning and, in one's distance from the centralized experience of binary superiority, morphing involved critique into transformative ironic, distanced and disengaged critical perception. It is such processes which Stephen and Sula develop in their communities' rejection, as Stephen's silent suffering of violence from Wells (*P* 8) in favour of the dynamics of pain and secrecy and Sula's rejection by Hannah (*S* 57) display manifestations of the constant rebuking the characters face throughout their respective diegeses, even when in compliance to the dominant dynamics. Due to experiencing this recurrent rejection, the protagonists become capable of perceiving their own condition as marginal, and purposefully further their distance with regard to the centralized Western experience of their communities, establishing an ironic individuality that becomes mutually informing of their marginality and their proposal of modes of experience, which do not rely on domination.

Ironic development, as made explicit in F. Parvin Sharpless' "Irony in Joyce's 'Portrait': The Stasis of Pity," is marked by a set of stages which Stephen must undergo in order to be able to achieve full critical detachment from the dynamics of his community (1967, 325). Detachment, in the aforementioned article – as opposed to "kinetic involvement" – is a "classical stasis" which allows Stephen to maintain objective distance from his community (325), classical in its removal of "subjective, involved, and active" (meaning, "kinetic") implication and connection in its apprehension of surrounding experience and art (321), as the author develops using both the work of S. L. Goldberg and Stephen's own reflections on a kinetic/static relation to aesthetic

experience. As Sharpless further explains, "[i]n the earliest, most youthful stage, Stephen's commitments are deeply felt and overwhelming to the personality. They are usually accompanied by public humiliation and with painful retreats which require the thematic apologies which Stephen finds so difficult" (1967, 325). Stephen's experience, as one can perceive through the established Western dynamics of domination, is felt by both communities in their entirety.

It is at this first stage that the majority of the characters in the novels under discussion are "arrested" in development – not in Stephen's use of the word, which ensues an intellectual and aesthetic capacity of surpassing "desire or loathing" as kinetic emotions (*P* 182), but in a truncation that is simultaneously imposed and self-reinforced, and characterized by permanence in kinetic perception. At such a stage, the communities' constituents' lives are marked by a constant painful rebuking of individuality and divergence which ensues kinetic, emotional, involved responses. As the communities fall prey to the dynamics of kinesis in the first stage of (non-)irony, there is a reinforcement of hierarchic dynamics of power, pain and domination applied by the dominant force whilst concurrently providing apparent confirmation of the imposed inferiority of those in subjection. The aforementioned reaction can be perceived clearly in episodes such as the opening demand of an apology from Stephen for voicing his wish to marry a Protestant girl (*P* 4), Fleming and Stephen's punishment by Father Dolan (*P* 42-45) and Helene Wright's smiling towards the chastening train conductor (*S* 21). In all of these instances, the characters being reprimanded actively react with and in submission to the exertion of dominance created by figures of power. Inside this binary of traumatic experience being applied to subjugated existence by dominant figures, Western systems of domination are strengthened, but it is also through the convergence of trauma with marginality that irony is developed.

Both Stephen and Sula, however, often fall into the same systems they grow to reject in their vulnerability as children. As none of the protagonists are aware of the possibility for divergence in marginality at that stage, they concede to and are unable to reject the patterns imposed on them. In the Western figuration of their familial environments and dynamics, the systems of domination present in such a communal

experience were transmitted to them, resulting in compliance on the protagonists' part to these systems and dynamics, as is made evident in Stephen's obedience to his father's advice in choosing not to denounce Wells' harmful actions – indeed, he "never [peaches] on a fellow" (*P* 6). Despite the marginality created by Stephen (and which he was made a victim of in Wells' violence), in his youth and consequent lack of experience in dealing with the systems of domination, the protagonist concedes to the damaging dynamics of pain and secrecy imprinted on his perception, even to his own disadvantage.

Similarly, Sula embodied the Western expectation of her as a young girl-turning-woman of enjoying capitalist, material possessions and caring for others. She quietly enjoyed Nel's "red-velvet sofa" (*S* 29) – velvet being the same kind of fabric from which Helene makes parts of the dress she wears when being confronted by the train conductor – and her presence soothed Helene Wright's considerations over the Peace family by proving that Sula fitted into the Western and patriarchal role imposed on her without correction. Contrary to Sula's passiveness, one finds the rest of the Peace women, who cater to the systems in alternative ways, as well as Nel, who was the constant target of Helene's assertions, as taking part in alternative, reproved compliance. This dichotomous comparison further displays the need for Western systems to indulge in binary perception, as even those who contribute to the domination systems are hierarchized and layered in the quality of their contribution.

Inside the protagonist's spotless compliance with her imposed role, Sula aided Chicken Little in successfully climbing a tree, thus providing him with a new, broader perception of the material world and helped him return to ground level afterwards. In this moment, Sula can be perceived as fully embracing the expectations projected onto her femininity. Sula's helping of Chicken Little is a providing comfort and support to a younger child figure who is male and, similarly, has had gendered expectations cast upon his own existence. Upon Chicken Little's interception of Sula and Nel's moment of sexual awakening and release through playful penetration of the earth, Nel's hostile attitude towards the young boy, even if joking, is countered by Sula's protection of Chicken Little – "Leave him 'lone, Nel" – along with a promise of aid in climbing a tree (*S* 59). At the beginning of the climb, Sula tells Chicken Little "I got you," (*S* 59-60) simultaneously

"steadying him, when he needed it, with her hand and her reassuring voice" (*S* 60): Sula's reassurance of the young male child fully echoes bell hooks' definition of motherly providing of support in favour of Western male figures (2015a, 37). Even if one is presented with a situation of two children helping each other in degrees appropriate to their difference in age, such roles are already made evident in their attitudes toward each other, as Chicken Little tells a hostile Nel to "[s]hut up" in his male projection of dominance, but feels reassured by a supportive Sula.

These moments of compliance, however, are obliterated by the meeting of this subservience with traumatic violence in the protagonists' marginal realm. Stephen's experience of being wrongly punished for not doing schoolwork – as a result of having his glasses broken – sets in motion a growing perception of unfairness and hypocritical patterns in the Catholic Church which the protagonist was not capable of perceiving before. Stephen grows aware of "the factors that alienate [him]" (hooks, 2015a, 10) because he was in complaisance with the domination systems when being the target of violence, so he must turn to his marginality – where he is safe – as the sole possible alternative of distance from the systemic application of domination. In this safe presence in the margins, he begins to examine the structure upon which his experience is founded and to develop a critical perception of it because he suffered not only in favour of compliance, but inside that same compliance as well. Stephen's journey, from this moment onward, and especially in the diegetic moments of his childhood, is pervaded by a recurrent disillusionment and disenchantment towards Catholic experience in Ireland.

In Sula's case, the most traumatic moment took shape in the accidental killing of Chicken Little. As she "swung him outward then around and around" (*S* 60), the young boy's hands slipped from hers and the boy was flung into the river. This experience of death is marked by her and Nel's observation, in Nel's apparent calm, and Sula's contrasting despair. As Sula's playful compliance with her role in playing with Chicken Little turns into macabre destruction of her intentions, Sula sees her factual experience as fully opposite to the expectations imprinted on her perception. The protagonist subsequently being told "Always" (*S* 62) by Shadrack – in what appears to be a failure in

communication due to the differing perspectives of both characters – is understood by Sula as Shadrack evidencing a dividing gulf which will perpetually mark her separation from the rest of the community. Beginning in this episode, Sula's perception shifts into one which is also perpetually evidencing the manners through which systemic domination and roles in her community are manifested and how she is located in their exterior, as does Stephen:

> As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, [Sula's] was an experimental life – ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the middle. The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow. (*S* 118-119)

From the moment the protagonists suffer from an irremediable destruction of their wilful compliance to the systems of domination perpetuated in and by their communities, their dominated perception becomes suffused and they perceive the hostility that exists in the relations inside their respective communal experiences. If they have "no other that [they] could count on," as made evident by their constant rebuking from their communities, by discovering "there was no self to count on either," the protagonists lose all sense of centrality: not only the centrality of the systems of domination they were born into, but also their self-perception, as such a vision was based upon the same centrality which they now see as flawed. From these moments onward, Stephen and Sula are forced to interrogate and reconstruct every factor composing their own existence, a reflection of what Morrison considers to be characteristically modern (Gilroy, 1993, 178).[20] Because the protagonists are forced into this recurrent questioning, they develop a series of experiments, both intellectual and material, in an attempt to find their own selfhood; one upon which they may build an identity which is independent from centralized systems of domination. They do not

[20] See Introduction, page 12.

favour a movement from margin to centre – intellectual and/or material, – but a transformation of a submissive marginality into an equally-shared centrality. Stephen and Sula lead characteristically "experimental [lives]" because theirs have been destroyed in the wake of domination.

Additionally, and because she is a young black girl, the death of Chicken Little marks a permanent breakage in Sula's fulfilment of the role of caring woman attributed to her existence. As Chicken Little, in being a male child, was Sula's "one major feeling of responsibility" (*S* 118) such Western and patriarchal responsibility being "exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the middle" (*S* 118) liberated Sula from the grasp of Western systems of gendered domination. In light of these systems being propagated through familial environments and everyday relations, one can consider that this situation echoes Jude's search for comfort and consolation, finding in Nel "someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply" (*S* 82). As Sula's responsibility of aiding Chicken Little in broadening his perspective and soothing his fear suffers an attempt at interception by Nel, so does Sula later intercept Nel and Jude's marriage, consequently dissolving the formation of "one Jude" (*S* 83).

Sula also loses Nel to the "closed place," as the latter girl relinquishes her marginality (and consequent possibility for irony) in favour of not losing her centrality. As Sula and Nel, after Chicken Little's death, are capable of perceiving the mournful screams of the women in their community for the young boy as performative and necessary for the fulfilment of their attributed roles of caregiving, the two girls are capable of further developing their critical standpoint. However, "[t]here was a space, a separateness, between them" (*S* 64), which, despite being occluded over time and in the ceremony leading to the burial of Chicken Little, was marked by Nel's conviction that "she had 'done nothing'" despite her feelings of condemnation (*S* 65). This is a belief which she would use for the rest of Sula's life as an attribution of guilt towards her friend to the detriment of the duo's Sisterhood and in a relinquishing of all marginality and, therefore, of selfhood built around Sula – a relinquishing which became fully realized upon the simultaneity of her marriage and Sula's flight from Medallion.

Ultimately, both Stephen and Sula's capacity for ironic perception stems from recurrent traumatic experience of confrontation with the systems of domination planted on their communities along with their self-perceived marginality. The characters are subdued by their communities and are unable to develop ironic perception over their traumatic communal dynamics before their realization of marginality – only afterwards may their detachment be created and developed upon, leading to a further immersion in the periphery, both intellectual and material. The constituents of the communities, despite being inside dynamics which perpetuate traumatic subjugation and similarly to Nel, in their capacity for maintaining "a ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109), refuse to acknowledge the trauma and possibility for marginality that would grant them access to an ironic perception over the systems under which they exist, consequently maintaining the expected centrality and its patterns.

Nevertheless, as traumatic experience afflicts the protagonists' perception over communal experience, the second stage of Sharpless' considerations grows into existence: Stephen has "learned, not detachment, but a measure of concealment and control which protects his emotions from the world's sight" (1967, 325). The kinetic response becomes controlled by the protagonist on the outer layer, but this control does not yet allow Stephen to be fully distanced nor ironically responsive, instead concealing the inner kinetic level of his response and solely partly managing it while maintaining outer calm. Indeed, as the memory of "a delicate and sinful perfume" (*P* 135) is brought to Stephen's mind as a result of the machinations developed by the director, who requested the protagonist's presence in order to convince him to join the Jesuit order, Stephen is capable of perceiving and understanding that the joking reference to women's clothing with regard to the Capuchin garments "had been spoken lightly with design" (*P* 135). Manipulations such as this are recurrent in both *A Portrait* and *Sula* as a means through which domination may be applied to any perceived divergence, and the protagonists' responses become further controlled as they develop their distance.

Stephen proclaims to Davin, a colleague of his, that "When the soul of a man is born in [Ireland] there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight" (*P* 180) in response to Davin's nationalistic attempts at subjugating Stephen to the dynamics of secrecy –

"When you told me that night in Harcourt Street those things about your private life, honest to God, Stevie, I was not able to eat my dinner. I was quite bad. […] I wish you had not told me" (*P* 179). Here, Stephen is highlighting a recognition of patterns and systems of domination because he has already experienced traumatic suffering caused by the subjugation promoted by Western systems and has dwelled in a marginality which allowed him critical distance. In turn, Davin is maintaining a centrality in secrecy which is not only evident of a non-ironic kinesis in his response to information about Stephen's experience, but also in his defence and maintenance of the *status quo*. Davin preferred that Stephen had not communicated his divergence from dominant expectations because to do so is to display an alternative mode of experience that is disapproved of by the dominant centre of binary acceptability/rejection. Stephen's ironic perception, even if not yet fully detached, as is made evident by his "cold violence" (*P* 180) in conversation, already presents a distance that was not available to Stephen as a child, nor is it available to Davin in his incapability of moving past the dominant centrality.

In Sula and Nel's Sisterhood, however, there is an oscillation between the two different stages of detachment that is not present in Stephen's experience as a sole unit. Sula lacked consistency, as "[s]he was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments – no ego. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself – be consistent with herself" (*S* 119), especially as a result of discovering that "there was no self to count on" (*S* 119) after the Chicken Little's death. Despite Nel's capacity for regularity being slightly more defined than Sula's, "both were unshaped, formless things" (*S* 53) that defined and grew through each other (*S* 52). In their lack of definition but constant mutual support (both in the aiding and foundational denotations of the word), the duo of young girls was capable of navigating through an oscillation between detachment and approximation to the systems of domination that informs their presence in the intellectual margins of the community of the Bottom. If, upon hearing that her mother does not "like her," Sula experiences intense kinetic reaction, it is Nel's presence that draws Sula "away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (*S* 57) that

echoes the control of the inner realm for self-protection that Sharpless locates in Stephen. If Nel is afraid of a taking a simpler itinerary in returning home from school due to the presence of threatening Irish boys, Sula, in apparent control resulting from concealed fear, cuts her own finger in order to provide marginal safety for the duo's Sisterhood (*S* 53-55). In this episode, Sula can be understood to have undertaken the second stage of ironic disengagement provided by Sharpless (albeit regarding Stephen's experience), as she perceives the Irish boys' approach "as part of a preconceived performance" (1967, 326). Similarly to how Stephen possesses an "awareness of the gestures of the director as detached from their true motives," so is Sula capable of perceiving beyond superficial demonstration in an "objectifying distance which is a step in the direction of stasis" (326): as the Irish boys "sauntered forward as though there were nothing in the world on their minds but the gray sky," it is revealed that they "stopped short, exchanged looks and dropped all pretense of innocence" (*S* 54) at Sula's display of a knife. Additionally, the boys grew astonished by the superficially-collected self-severing carried out by Sula, which assured the girls' safety.[21]

As is explained in the narration, "[i]n the safe harbor of each other's company [Sula and Nel] could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things" (*S* 55), the duo's oscillation and compensation of ironic perception grants them a safe marginality that is both material and intellectual in its configuration, in rejection of the established systems and dynamics of domination. Sula's cutting of her own finger is an act of self-mutilation in favour of one's own protection and survival. However, such an act, when compared to Eva Peace's self-mutilation – also in favour of survival – cannot be understood as a concession of selfhood to the Western domination dynamics present in the Bottom, instead being an

[21] This episode finds even further specificity in regard to F. Parvin Sharpless' considerations of Stephen's irony if one considers that Sula's self-mutilation produces the effect expected by the third stage of ironic detachment present in Stephen's journey: an overpowering of the protagonist of those attempting to manipulate him (1967, 327-328). Sula's action, however, cannot be considered fully static and detached insomuch as it is later revealed by Nel to have been in mere concealment of a kinetic response – Sula was "so scared she had mutilated herself" (*S* 101). As Sharpless claimed regarding Stephen's second detachment stage, "[a]rtifice controls kinetic response" (1967, 327), therefore establishing Sula's action as present in the referred second stage.

act of revolution against them. While Eva's mutilation grants her a security which is placed inside the systems of domination prevalent in the (Western and patriarchal) community of the Bottom of Medallion, Sula's mutilation places both herself and Nel as exterior to these systems by a communication of detachment and marginality that is mainly bodily over verbal or textual. In the limited condition of womanhood conceded by Western and patriarchal experience, Eva and Sula's bodies are instruments through which safety may be found, but their use of the bodily results in different levels of security – Eva's survival and Sula's safety. One must consider, however, that Sula's existence and expression of marginality is solely possible because of the survival of the Peace family resultant from Eva's self-mutilation, and that the protagonist's capacity for irony means that she, like Stephen, has been in contact with a centre which she is, then, capable of rejecting.

The protagonists' movement inside their own circles and capacity for ironic experience is a reflection of their experience of leading "experimental [lives]" as is described regarding Sula's interactions with her community (*S* 118). Sula's chasing of intellectually stimulating experiences through bodily satisfaction becomes a reflection of the traumatic experiences which distanced her from communal experience, but also of selfhood, and such processes can be similarly located in Stephen, in his need for experimentation – which, in his youth, is followed by fiery regret when confronted with his sins in the Belvedere retreat, leading to Stephen's confession (*P* 125-126).

Interestingly, both Stephen and Sula perceive an exploration of sexuality as one of the main means through which a divergent selfhood may be achieved. The orgasmic experiences of both protagonists can be correlated to what is known as *la petite mort* – 'the little death.' This factor may prove to be an attempt at compensation on the part of the protagonists, a replacing of previous death-riddled experiences for a pleasurable and self-exploratory liberation and awakening. Sula's finding of selfhood in this climax is accompanied by a crying "for the deaths of the littlest things" (*S* 123) – the littlest of all one can consider to be Chicken Little –; similarly, "[t]ears of joy and relief shone in [Stephen's] delighted eyes and his lips parted though they would not speak" (*P* 89) in the protagonist's sexual interaction with a prostitute, as a sign of his dying compliance

with domination and subverted faith. Orgasmic experience, in many ways, resembles a quasi-religious discovery for the protagonists, as their ecstatic intellects move into a plane of transcendental abstraction due to bodily stimulation in which another presence is required. However, the manifestation of the transcendental experiences differs between the protagonists: while Stephen's finds that transcendence is possible in convergence with the prostitute, Sula immediately shuns her partners in order to relish in her profound solitude – only to find, by the end of her diegetic life, that she needs Nel for a creative and creational experience.[22]

This quasi-spiritual and intellectual self-discovery is accompanied by a primordial attempt at a self-defined vocalization, as the prostitute's ambiguous lips "pressed upon [Stephen's] brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech" (*P* 89) and Sula "leaped from the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling in a stinging awareness of the endings of things" into a "silence [that] was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning" (*S* 123). The lack of definition – regarding meaning as well as delimitation – present in the climatic experiences of the protagonists aligns with the obliteration of the rigidness of the systems of domination that is the ultimate goal of Stephen and Sula: as they propose, through their "experimental [lives]" (*S* 118), an undefined collective experience, the speech through which this experience may be conveyed proves to be (yet) undefinable.

Stephen and Sula's actions of divergence from dominant norms become a need for stimulation of material and intellectual selfhood that they must trigger in favour of self-realization. Both protagonists use such experimental acts as a means through which irony may be developed in light of the adoption of a selfhood which stands against the dominant forces – yet their ironic perception remains insufficient, as their involvement in these activities is still partially kinetic.

Despite the presence of a developing detachment in the perception of Stephen and Sula, the same tendency for perpetuation of patterns of domination remains in this

[22] See Chapter 3, pages 97-101.

stage of ironic perception, even if without acknowledgement on the part of the protagonists. As a result of having been born into these patterns, both Stephen and Sula often adopt a stance which considers their own detached perception as hierarchically superior to that of those who, in unacknowledged subjugation, fail to fully understand their own role inside its dynamics, despite being victims to it. When in interaction with a mocking trio of colleagues – namely, Boland, Heron and Nash – Stephen displays a literary knowledge which surpasses that of the normative considerations of such figures of compliance to the Western system of valuation and hierarchy in intellect. Stephen is, then, met with violence for his divergence, but he is, himself, applying the Western systems of hierarchizing considerations by, once more, placing himself as intellectually and hierarchically superior to those who comply with the limited Irish knowledge, as he did towards his mother and siblings by considering them in "fosterage" (*P* 87).

Similarly, when in confrontation with Eva, Sula's reaction towards her grandmother's imposing patriarchal patterns is equally informed by those same patterns of violence and attempts at domination which the protagonist rejects. As hooks comments regarding the erring tendency to equate violence with male experience in the feminist movement,

> This type of thinking allows us to ignore the extent to which women (with men) in this society accept and perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable for a dominant party or group to maintain power over the dominated by using coercive force. It allows us to overlook or ignore the extent to which women exert coercive authority over others or act violently. (2015a, 118)

Accordingly, despite rejecting any imposition of dominant order, Sula's interaction with Eva is marked by threats created by both participants. The use of fear into coercive adaptation was mutually applied, and its results felt by both Sula and Eva – as "Eva locked her door from then on" (*S* 94), Sula admitted to being scared of Eva to Nel (*S* 100-101). In this interaction, one can understand that the mutual mutilation perpetrated by both women undermines a collective struggle, in its reflection of the systems of domination perpetuated in Western patriarchal society.

However, the violent expression of rejected patterns cannot be present in the protagonists' perception in order to achieve full stasis, as the perpetuation of violence requires a degree of involvement which is incompatible with the third and final stage of detachment proposed by Sharpless regarding Stephen's experience. Such a stage is marked by "a parrying [of the manipulative gestures], but from superior strength which […] confuses its antagonist and causes Stephen to feel pity, the final mark of the objective posture," (1967, 328) as is characteristic of Stephen's stance when in conversation with the university dean of studies and his long-term romantic interest (albeit without fruition), Emma Clery, as analysed by Sharpless (326-328).

Ironic pity, as can be perceived in both novels, constitutes a self-aware detachment created by the protagonists over the dynamics in which they are inserted, being capable of intellectually overcoming the constraints proposed by these systems and dynamics. As Sharpless defines, "[p]ity is an emotion which drains away kinetic passions which, while they may be painful, constitute the vital springs of the average sensual man's basic motivations, particularly his ability to relate to and love objects and people" (328). In full manifestation, pity becomes the death of the senses "into a lifeless formality" (329). Yet the existence of a series of differently-shaped and sized "circles" (328) which make up Stephen's perception of varying dimensions of experience, ranging from the personal to the cosmic, allow for the maintenance of kinetic experience in differing domains, which Stephen and Sula navigate differently. Whilst Stephen's perception moves him outward towards exterior intellectual and material territory, supposedly becoming ironic towards himself and his community, he remains kinetic with regard to the rest of the world, towards which he intends to advance. On the contrary, Sula's confinement – also material and intellectual – to the Bottom of Medallion directs her perception inward, specifically towards her love for Nel, whilst the protagonist is ironic towards the rest of the world and of her own community.

The ending of *A Portrait* displays Stephen as having seemingly become fully detached from his communal experience, setting out towards a promise which, in its critical distance, longs for the creation of an identity which is independent from the systems of domination the diegetic community had suffered from. As Stephen writes

"[w]elcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (*P* 225), there is a creational and revolutionary intention which proposes to generate an unspecified collective experience whose origin is located upon individual experience. Stephen manages, in his journey throughout the narrative, to turn the individualism that marks his Western patriarchal experience into an individuality that endorses collective identification. Stephen's marginality, in allowing him to develop ironic perception over the Catholic Irish communal environment, concurrently allows for him to leave the community in search of the essence of the "green rose" (*P* 9) he believed impossible inside territorial domination in youth, as the protagonist feels the call of his kinsmen for liberation in their "shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth" (*P* 225).

By the end of the novel, the factors and constraints that Stephen faced during his growth become faced with ironic perception, as Stephen's intense inner struggle regarding his feelings for Emma Clery are quickly dismissed in the possibility of "[sleeping] it off" (*P* 225). Stephen's critical and ironic distance allows the protagonist to embody his Daedalian namesake in embarking on a journey of creation of a possibility for material flight into complete liberation of intellect and identity from labyrinthine exploitation and limitation, in a manner that favours collective release. What Stephen desires to create, ultimately, is an Irish community and identity which bears no foreign systems of domination and through which individuality may thrive.

Sula, on the other hand, having drifted into solitary divergence in her 10-year hiatus from the Bottom and later experiencing separation from Nel as a result of coming into sexual contact with Jude, is solely capable of developing ironic perception in her death, after having her last conversation with Nel. The conversation is marked by the dichotomy between the performativity exercised by Nel – "[Nel] had practiced not just the words but the tone, the pitch of her voice. It should be calm, matter-of-fact, but strong in sympathy – for the illness though, not for the patient [Sula]" (*S* 138) – and Sula's third stage of irony. As Nel attempts to convey to Sula what she had absorbed inside the gendered dynamics of the Bottom, that Sula "*can't* do it all. […] can't act like a man" as regards independence and power in her conditioning as an African American

woman (*S* 142), Sula is able to counterpoint Nel's argument by highlighting the arbitrariness of such limiting distinctions – "'You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?'" (*S* 142).

As the conversation continues, there are further echoes of the one Sula developed with Eva upon her return to Medallion, as the protagonist proclaims that Nel's "lonely is somebody else's. […] A secondhand lonely" (*S* 143) in her full recognition of Nel's subjugation by Western systems of perception – something Sula had not been able to perceive before, due to the illusiveness in distinction and the Sisterhood shared between the two. After making evident, once more, the frailty of the Western binary system of "either/or" (hooks, 2015a, 31) by questioning Nel's certainty over her own goodness and, consequently, Sula's evil – "'How you know? […] About who was good? […] I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me'" (*S* 146) – one can understand Sula's intention of transposing her own liberation from Western and patriarchal perception. This transposition is directed at Nel, and, by extension, the community of the Bottom, as an alternative mode of perception in which communal experience values itself instead of the liberal individualism condemned by hooks (2015a, 9), which is, in turn, informed by Western binary systems of domination. As Sula discloses that "there'll be a little love left over for me" (*S* 146) to Nel, the protagonist presents a disruptive proposal for the world is one in which there is a full liberation of communal dynamics from Western dichotomous modes and patriarchal structures of domination, perception and valuation, a proposal which Sula can perceive in her critical and ironic detachment from her community of origin. It is the full detachment created in an ironic mode of perception that allows for Sula to conceive such a self-valuing and self-justifying path which fully rejects domination.

As Nel leaves Sula's company for the last time, Sula, once more, maintains her presence in the third stage of detachment theorized by Sharpless' approach to Stephen's experience, as Sula acknowledges that Nel

> will walk on down that road, her back so straight in that old green coat, the strap of her handbag pushed back all the way to the elbow, thinking how much I have cost her and never remember the days when we were two throats and one eye and we had no price. (*S* 147)

This realization is accompanied by a full recognition of the designed gestures pervading the Bottom's community as "just something to do" (*S* 147) in their performative, superficial and manipulative conception, as well as a self-recognition that is capable of perceiving even Sula's own distanced and interested perception of her mother burning (*S* 147). Finally, Sula's ironic detachment grows to such an extent that the protagonist is even capable of ironically facing her own material death. Her detachment, however, always refers back to Nel, as its origin was located in the duo's Sisterhood and marginality. Sula's wish for sharing her knowledge of an experience of death with Nel – "Wait'll I tell Nel" (*S* 149) – makes evident, once more, not only her and Nel's unbreakable foundational bond of Sisterhood, but Sula's wish for a transposition of knowledge which would liberate all from the dynamics of pain perpetuated upon the community – as Sula realizes that dying "didn't even hurt" (*S* 149), she is, even if unwittingly, destroying the painful constrictions which bind all in Western experience.

This destruction is what the protagonists hope to achieve through their individual irony in favour of collective identity expression. There are, however, characters who, despite possessing some degree of ironic perception, are unable to diverge from the expectations of Western experience. Nel, similarly to Sula, exists in the margins of Medallion as a child, and they share each other's experience as a means through which they may develop their own – "they used each other to grow on" (*S* 52). However, in the moment of Chicken Little's drowning, Nel's observance is deflected by herself into a blaming of Sula due to her material involvement in comparison to Nel's intellectual participation – as Nel refuses to accept blame in the situation, she is, consequently, refusing traumatic experience and marginality, thus creating the dividing "closed place in the water" (*S* 101) which marks their Sisterhood perpetually, having started with Chicken Little's fall.

One can consider, then, that the "closed place in the water" (*S* 101) is an imagery pertaining to Western experience in between Sula and Nel. As Sheldon Brivic argues using Luce Irigaray's work, there is a fluidity belonging to water that does not coincide with Western rigidity (Brivic, 1998, 163). This becomes especially relevant once one

considers that the word 'sula' means 'water' in the Twi language of Ghana (162-163). As the "closed place" (*S* 101) suggests a solid definiteness that is incompatible with the fluid movement of water, so is the rigidity of the West incompatible with the Sisterhood shared between Sula and Nel, as the two girls were indefinable and quasi-indistinguishable in their marginality; a lack of definition which cannot overlap with Western individualizing expectation. Additionally, the promise of a "sleep of water always" (*S* 149) in Shadrack and Sula's interaction is revealed through this consideration to be a promise of a self-recognition in blackness, as the one Shadrack develops when looking into a toilet bowl (*S* 13). However, and similarly to Stephen's considerations over the English language when talking to the dean of studies, because the characters interacted in a language which is "an acquired speech" (*P* 167) that rejects them despite their usage of it, the meaning of the interchange is subverted into the previously-mentioned promise of marginality.[23] Nel, however, remains incapable of perceiving this until the end of the novel. Nel proved incapable of developing ironic expression of a critical standpoint towards the community of the Bottom of Medallion, therefore succumbing to its domination dynamics.

It is solely when confronted by Eva Peace on her lack of differentiation from Sula in their Sisterhood, by telling her that there was no difference between Nel and Sula (*S* 168) that Nel understands that she had not merely observed Chicken Little's drowning, confessing her interest in such imagery to herself – "'Why didn't I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall?'" (*S* 170) – as Sula had felt when watching Hannah burn. Nel's capacity for an aesthetically interested gaze in her and Sula's mutual compensation of each other's detachment, similarly to Sula, allows for her to develop a distanced perception upon existence, but her lack of traumatic experience and established marginality in her withdrawal from Chicken Little's death does not allow her perception to become ironical and, therefore, critical of the dynamics of the Bottom. It is necessary for Nel to undergo the process of the loss of both Jude (in his Western configuration) and Sula (in her liberating presence) for her to recognize the traumatic

[23] Specifically, in pages 56-57.

experience necessary for liberation in convergence with her capacity for a distanced gaze – yet she denies it once more. As Nel, upon discovering Sula and Jude's sexual interaction and seeking an emotionally safe location in the relevantly "white" (S 108) bathroom, as opposed to the "dark" closet (*S* 107), recollects regarding "the women at Chicken Little's funeral. The women who shrieked over the bier and at the lip of the open grave" (*S* 107), that

> [w]hat she had regarded since as unbecoming behavior seemed fitting to her now; they were screaming at the neck of God, his giant nape, the vast back-of-the-head that he had turned on them in death. But it seemed to her now that it was not a fist-shaking grief they were keening but rather a simple obligation to say something, do something, feel something about the dead. They could not let that heart-smashing event pass unrecorded, unidentified. It was poisonous, unnatural to let the dead go with a mere whimpering, a slight murmur, a rose bouquet of good taste. Good taste was out of place in the company of death, death itself was the essence of bad taste. And there must be much rage and saliva in its presence. (*S* 107)

At this moment, Nel realizes through ironic perception the performativity regarding pain that must accompany death. Nel, in a moment of traumatic engagement (as the one she refused to feel upon Chicken Little's death), immediately develops a fully detached experience as regards her own condition and her perception over the mourning women. Nel, in her detachment from pain, perceives that, in Western patriarchal systems of domination and dynamics of pain and secrecy, pain can only be disclosed if it matches the expectations imposed on subdued communal experience – as she discloses, she "hadn't even felt anything right or sensible" (*S* 106), contrary to what was expected of her in such a situation. As Nel understands that "[i]t was poisonous, unnatural to let the dead go with a mere whimpering, a slight murmur, a rose bouquet of good taste," she is echoing her own youthful perception over Chicken Little's death, and the poison is the same present in the community's perception over Sula's sexual interaction with white men. As is disclosed by the narrator, "for a black woman to be willing [to sexually interact with white men] was literally unthinkable. In that way, they regarded integration with precisely the same venom that white people did" (S 113). The toxin relating both to Sula's sexual experience and to "good taste" (*S* 107) in the presence of death – meaning,

an appearance of static perception – reveals the manner through which the community of the Bottom perceives any manner of ironic distancing and divergence: with a disdain which echoes that of the dominant and destructive forces from which they suffer. Nel is, then, capable of perceiving the performativity of expressions of interiority developed by the community, but, once more, retreats from embracing irony, instead choosing to maintain her own centrality in the lack of acknowledgement of her "gray […] ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109) – thus distancing herself from Sula even further, as she had upon Chicken Little's death.

Shadrack, on the contrary, is overwhelmed by traumatic experience as a result of having participated in World War I, but lacks an aesthetically interested and distanced perception over himself and the community. Shadrack's self-recognition was achieved in incarceration, as, after being discharged from hospitalization following his war experience, Shadrack meets a world in which "[t]here were no fences, no warnings, no obstacles at all between concrete and green grass, so one could easily ignore the tidy sweep of stone and cut out in another direction—a direction of one's own" (*S* 10). Moreover, "[o]nly the [previously described as 'undeviating'] walks made him uneasy" (*S* 11) as the character avoided them, exclusively walking upon grass and road gravel. Shadrack's perception, however, is intercepted by "the unchecked monstrosity of his hands," (*S* 12) in which "[t]he four fingers of each hand fused into the fabric [of Shadrack's shoe laces], knotted themselves and zigzagged in and out of the tiny eyeholes" (*S* 13), in a manner reminiscent of Nel's "ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109).

After growing tormented by the previously forcefully-unacknowledged disarray of his hands, Shadrack is solely capable of breaking away from mental unrest when facing his own blackness in the toilet bowl of the cell he had been placed in by the police. By facing his "grave black face. A black so definite, so unequivocal, it astonished him" (*S* 13), Shadrack is thrust into mental tranquillity. Upon coming into contact with his own racialized reflection, Shadrack develops an understanding of his conditioning as an African American man in Western society, a perception which, in its self-referential experience, detangles the oppressive hands Shadrack possessed into a positive and stabilized self-valuation, independent from dominant hierarchical perception. This

resulted in Shadrack "want[ing] nothing more" than his own blackness (*S* 13). In this light, Shadrack's tangled hands and Nel's "ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109) display the effect of dominant existence in subjugated experience – the objects of this domination are forced into a self-destructive rejection of self-recognition.

Thus, Nel's moment of revelation after visiting Eva Peace by the end of the novel gains specific significance, as "[n]ot watching where she [Nel] placed her feet, she got into the weeds by the side of the road" (*S* 170) in a state of confusion echoing that of Shadrack's following of a self-established path. If Shadrack actively avoids the "undeviating" and "tidy" stone pavement in favour of (liberating) grass (*S* 10-11), then Nel's adult existence in accordance to Western expectation is solely diverged from when she is confronted with the truth about her refusal to acknowledge her "ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109). As she instinctively undertakes "a direction of [her] own" to the detriment of the "undeviating" pathway (*S* 10) established for her as a black woman in Western society, she is led to Sula's burial site, where she finds the repeated surnames "PEACE" as "[n]ot even words. Wishes, longings" (*S* 171), echoing Nel's restless avoiding of selfhood: "these old thighs […] will never give me the *peace* I need to get from sunup to sundown" (*S* 111, emphasis added).

It is when Nel and Shadrack cross paths after her visit to Sula's grave that Nel comes into full realization of Sula's absence and the essence of their Sisterhood. The closing moment of the novel reveals a liberation of Nel from the entangled and twisted self-perception also present in Shadrack's non-recognition of his hands, but, in its delayed quality, Nel's irony can only cause her "circles and circles of sorrow" (*S* 174). As she had recurrently refused a recognition of her marginality and trauma, she became so deeply engrossed in a cyclical destruction of selfhood in favour of the systems of domination that her liberation fails to retroactively repair and regenerate the identity she shared in Sula's now-irretrievable Sisterhood.

The majority of the characters in *A Portrait*, whilst always aware of the fragmentation present in the Irish experience, are incapable of establishing a marginality which could possibly evolve into ironic perception – Stephen's family, friends and mentors all promote a centrality which is solely rejected by Stephen, a developing artist.

It may prove important to consider that, due to the whiteness that is shared by the dominant forces and the subjugated experience in the hegemonic perpetuation of racialized identities, the majority of the community may find it difficult to develop an "awareness of the factors that alienate them" (hooks, 2015a, 10) in their exclusion from power and recognition. The lives of Stephen and Sula, and, in part, Nel and Shadrack, are "experimental" (*S* 118) because there is a refusal of the implemented systems of domination, even if momentarily. In *A Portrait*, it is not evident nor implied that any other character besides Stephen undergoes this process and perception.

Thus, in light of the diegeses, divergence can be considered to be composed of the manner through which expectations and impositions created in one's environment are rejected in favour of an independence which is liberating from and destructive to the structured system undermining one's community. This divergence, as regards the protagonists' common experience, is based primarily upon the traumatic creation of an ironic detachment towards communal dynamics, which allows for the marginalization of the protagonists to become fulfilled in the intellectual realm. Such distancing and detachment result in an open rejection of the systemic roles and expectations, as well as a severing of all ideological and hierarchical differentiation in the protagonists' experience. The relationships between all characters inside the diegetic communities are marked by an uneven distribution of power, as conveyed in the previous chapter, and it is these power struggles and binary expression of over/underpowered that the protagonists attempt to erase in favour of an independent selfhood which may be translated into refreshed and independent communal experience, free from Western systems of domination.

Ultimately, divergence appears as an alternative to the Western and patriarchal *status quo* provided and promoted by the communities which are, themselves, subject to exterior imposition and force. Thus, divergence is an alternative communal expression which emphasizes community-developed values to the detriment of a structured exterior control which enforces hierarchical inferiority and submission. To be divergent is to refuse the systems of domination adopted by/forced onto the communities, in favour of an expression of authentic, non-controlled communal

experience. Similarly to how Stephen wishes "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*P* 225), Sula wants to make herself, as expressed against Eva's imposition of the Western role of womanhood (*S* 91-94) and in defending that "there'll be a little love left over for [her, Sula]" (*S* 146) to Nel. Stephen's "race" (*P* 225) is to be given a full self-aware and self-referential experience that does not rely upon hierarchic systems of domination, but upon an identity which is created for the community through an "artificer" (*P* 225) who originates from that same "race". Similarly, upon proposing a fully disruptive and apparently chaotic version of life and love, Sula is proposing not necessarily a consideration of existence that is in line with her proclaimed chaotic world, but rather an existence which is devoid of the Western binary limitations that enclose the Bottom of Medallion and the rest of the Western world. This perception allows for the protagonists to express their own individuality against the established Western systems of domination as a way of promoting the abandonment of said systems in favour of ones created by and for the communities they inhabit.

Through this individuality, a communal identity may be created, one marked by the possibility of self-referential identity without domination and in favour of their constituents' cultivation. It is within this collective identity that individual experience may thrive without consequently obfuscating and exploiting other constituents of this same experience. Despite the protagonists' proposals to their community not being characterized or specified, these proposals exist through rejection and because Stephen and Sula are capable of critiquing and ironically perceiving the manipulation and dynamics of pain and secrecy present in the communities, then attempting to transmit them into their respective communities. However, this transmission directly clashes with the established Western perception, in turn fortifying the dichotomy between the existing conditions and the proposals of Stephen and Sula.

Taking this opposition into consideration, one must remember that, despite Stephen and Sula's similar proposal of abstract alternative experiences of liberation, their own experiences inside the systems of domination, their conditions and their limitations are not similar in their configuration nor degree of intensity. One can

perceive this in the protagonists' different undertakings of the same ironic experience, as analysed in the present chapter. Indeed, while Stephen is a white middle-class-turned-working-class man whose individualism is promoted (an individualism which he turns into individuality in collective), Sula is a black working-class woman whose expected role is one of submission and passivity, and these factors inform their potential not only for divergence in irony, but also for a common artistic tendency, the fulfilment of which is dependent on the obstacles the protagonists find in their respective journeys.

Chapter 3

Through the Looking Class – Artistic Gaze and Intersectionality

A common factor in Stephen and Sula's experiences is their need for outward material dislocation from the communities in which they have been integrated their entire lives. As they realize that they exist inside systems which are unfavourable to their individuality and divergence in the systemic domination of the communities' constituents, both Stephen and Sula take flight into a location of seeming opportunity and supposed freedom from the exploitative dynamics they know. However, like Icarus, the son of Stephen's namesake whose overambitious flight proved unfruitful, the protagonists fail to achieve their goal, as Sula returns to the Bottom of Medallion after ten years, and Stephen displays an inner adherence to superiority which undermines his closing wish.

The protagonists, similarly to the figure of Daedalus in Greek mythology, in attempting to provide for an alternative mode of experience, devise through artistic craftsmanship an apparent escape from the labyrinthine oppressive and exploitative dynamics present in their communities of origin. In their ironic perception and artistic potential, the protagonists conceive ways through which liberation from this web of hierarchic domination may be achieved. Yet this Western myth is paralleled with another within the African diaspora – that of the Flying African. Having located Freudian and Jungian's symbolic association of flight with transcendence as representing the "Western white male," Gay Wilentz argues that the flight present in this myth "functions not merely as an individual or 'universal' symbol of transcendence, but as a collective symbol of resistance by a specific group within a socio-historical context" (1989, 21), specifically that of slavery. Wilentz adds that, in these legends, "[c]aptured Africans who arrived on slave ships realized their position in the New World, so they flew back to Africa rather than submit to slavery" (21-22), in a similar manner to that of Stephen and Sula's recognition of their conditions in marginality, which entails their own flights from their respective communities. In considering Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*

and Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Wilentz characterizes the myth of African flight as "a life-giving force to build community strength and resist oppression," as "[i]t is through the acknowledgment of one's African heritage and the learning of the power of the ancestors that the African American community can achieve wholeness" (28). By further recognizing their own conditions, the protagonists of *A Portrait* and *Sula* are capable of perceiving their own heritage as essential against the systems of domination.

Moreover, to engage in flight, in both novels, is to proclaim an intellectual and material independence which is incompatible with the oppressive and exploitative community one is a part of. It is through this flight that one may escape from one's oppressive origin, yet the deep-rooted experience of domination maintains its grasp on the protagonists by forcing them to return to a ground-level attempt at liberating their communities. Nevertheless, Wilentz connects the Icarian and Flying African myths in recognizing the importance of failure and fall: in considering Ralph Ellison's Todd from "Flying Home," Wilentz argues that "[l]ike Icarus, [Todd] has tried to fly too high. But his fall is fortunate since it helps him to begin to break away from the internal slavery that haunts him" (24). It is the process of refusal of one's conditions, regardless of the result, that determines the success of those engaged in flight: indeed, as Wilentz states in using Julius Lester's work, "whether the slaves actually returned to Africa or drowned was not important" in the legend of African flight, as flight already implied a rejection of the conditions of enslavement (23). Stephen and Sula's refusal and consequent independence, as previously explained, is directly linked with the transformation of marginality and traumatic experience of subjugation to dominant force into an ironic perception. However, and additionally, there is a convergence of these factors with an artistic predisposition that informs and transforms ironic vision into an artistically interested gaze in the protagonists' differing conditions of exploitation.

Wilentz recognizes the difference in possibility of flight between men and women, insomuch as the former group engages in liberating flight, while the latter "[h]istorically, in Africa and the diaspora, […] have been the heritage bearers" (28) in transmitting the stories of flight to their communities. However, in recognizing that "women have little to do with the legend or with the propensity for flight" themselves

(28) and highlighting that the relevance of women existed in the maintenance of the myth, Wilentz glossed over the fact that the supposed flight of men, in being inaccessible to women, resulted in abandonment and reinforcement of Western systems of domination in placing the opportunities of men above those of women and in maintaining the role of care allocated to women, specifically those in slavery.[24] It is Sula who questions this dichotomy in placing the male and female as equivalent in capacity (*S* 142), herself having flown during Nel's wedding – Sula was perceived by Nel as "a slim figure in blue, gliding, with just a hint of a strut, down the path toward the road" (*S* 85), approximating the protagonist to bird-like movements and features. Even if "Part Two" of the novel begins with "a plague of robins" announcing Sula's return (*S* 89) that results in the dissemination of excrement and dead birds, and despite her accentuated limitations as a black working-class woman, the protagonist still engaged in a flight of her own.

Intersectionality, as a concept, stems from Kimberly Crenshaw's article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," which considers legal experiences of "double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" (1989, 149). Crenshaw adds that "sometimes, [Black women] experience discrimination as Black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women" (1989, 149). Crenshaw's legal recognition of established, limiting standards into existences whose exposure to discrimination is heightened by a convergence of factors is also considered theoretically by hooks. The latter author argues that "[r]acism is fundamentally a feminist issue because it is so interconnected with sexist oppression. In the West, the philosophical foundations of racist and sexist ideology are similar" (2015a, 53) in their binary, dichotomous quality. It is under the scope of Western binary and patriarchal experience that a convergence of interwoven factors creates specific sets of vulnerability that affect individuals who fall into those categories. As both authors defend, the convergence of

[24] For more considerations on the difference between male and female flight, specifically in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, see Conclusion, page 110.

racist and sexist motives create an experience of discrimination that is specific to black women, and its configuration remains inside the systems of domination and hierarchic differentiation that mark Western patriarchal existence.

Moreover, hooks adds the factor of class to the aforementioned convergence. Class appears in hooks' theoretical framework as a further distinction that makes evident the impossibility of the concept of "common oppression" – which implies an equal experience being shared by all women – due to the existence of a deep hierarchic gulf between the experiences of individuals in different socioeconomic classes, despite the possibility of shared gendered and racial experience (2015a, 6-7). Once more, such an idea is perpetuated by bourgeois white feminism in favour of oblivion and belief "that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc. do not create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women" (5). However, these factors create specific, layered and overlapping limitations towards characters who are black, characters who are women, characters whose socioeconomic standing is one of difficulty in the working-class, and the convergence of these factors in the exploitation of characters who are black working-class women. The constrictions imposed on characters who do not share these characteristics remain existent, and do not imply a hierarchical scale of vulnerability – instead, there is a rendering of added susceptibility to the imposed systems of domination and pain that grows further in depth in the convergence of the aforementioned factors.

One can understand, then, how Stephen and Sula are forced into situations of discrimination and exploitation, even inside their respective Irish and African American communities. In the forced transmission of Western valuation and systems of domination, the subjugated communities themselves absorb hostility towards their own constituents. It is inside this experience that the role of the "strong, superhuman black woman" (2015a, 15) explained by hooks is created in opposition to the submissive role of women in Western dichotomous society: as Sula, a figure of strong presence, continuously demonstrated this strength against dominant rule, she was perceived as lacking the victimhood and subjugation experienced by all other women in the

community of the Bottom of Medallion. Sula's strength directly opposed the absorbed experience of "victim identity" (hooks, 2015a, 45) that figures such as Nel embrace. This identification equates womanhood with victimhood and proposes a Sisterhood based upon "shared victimization" promoted by patriarchal experience in favour of the maintenance of the *status quo* (45), as explained in Chapter 2.[25] Consequently, the protagonist was placed as part of the dominant "evil" to be avoided and survived (*S* 89-90) by the community, as this was the only viable alternative existent inside the Western "either/or" binary perception (hooks, 2015a, 31). The configuration of this "evil" (*S* 89) and the community's relation to it, however, merely replicated the established hierarchical superiority – "[the community of the Bottom of Medallion] didn't stone sinners for the same reason they didn't commit suicide – it was beneath them" (*S* 90). The community, in vilifying Sula for her opposition to imposed standards, applied the same rejection verified in their white/black relations. As hooks discloses, "assertive, self-affirming women were often seen as having no place in feminist movement" (2015a, 45) because the strength exhibited by these women was "an indication [to white women and, consequently, dominant forces] that black women were already liberated" (47). Such considerations make evident the hostility of the community of the Bottom to Sula's sexual experience; while Hannah and Eva contributed to the communal dynamics in their conceding to an identity based upon victimhood, therefore being accepted, Sula, in possessing self-assertive strength, is perceived not only as not being a victim to white domination, but as its enforcer in her sexual interaction with white men.

Thus, Sula's wilful marginality whilst simultaneously being a part of the most vulnerable group inside the dominated experience of the Bottom as black working-class woman becomes self-reinforced. As hooks considers with regard to the creation of the aforementioned stereotypical image of superhuman black womanhood in the relationship between white and black women, the construction of this depiction allows the community of the Bottom "to ignore the extent to which black women are likely to be victimized in this society, and the role white women [and, in the diegesis, the

[25] See pages 49-50.

community itself] may play in the maintenance and perpetuation of that victimization" (2015a, 15). As the community of the Bottom undertakes white perception, as explained by Fanon in Chapter 1,[26] it refuses to perceive its own attempts at subjugation of black womanhood.

In *Sula*, black women are, indeed, made specifically vulnerable due to a convergence of gendered roles and racial experience. Yet the distinction between the experience present in the Peace family and the Wright/Green familial environments remains in its class-shaped expression. While Eva Peace's experience is severely limited by the absence of BoyBoy – which translates into the absence of economic power and stability, – Helene Wright (née Sabat) married her cousin, Wiley Wright, securing economic power whilst fulfilling all standards of acceptability set by her grandmother. Helene, being the child of Rochelle, a prostituting mother, was raised by her grandmother in hopes of excising all possibility of "wild blood" from the young girl (*S* 17), replicated in how Helene herself muffles Nel's admiration of Rochelle (*S* 27). The experiences of the Peace and Wright families make evident a further division inside the African American community of the Bottom, one marked by Helene's attribution of a "sooty […] slackness" (*S* 29) to Hannah, Sula's mother – a description which echoes that of an exterior (and implicitly white) attribution of "slackness" (*S* 90) to the black community of the Bottom. Both "sooty" (*S* 29) and "slackness" (*S* 29; 90) represent characteristics which originate in the dominant white perception and control over black experience. For Helene to attribute such properties to Hannah, even if Sula's existence as a child counterpoints it (*S* 29), is to adopt the white perception and consideration of acceptability that is divisive of the community of the Bottom, in a manner similar to that which Helene's grandmother promoted, and which employs racial differentiation as a concealed factor inside the experience of class difference and acceptability.

In the African American experience of the Bottom, to fail to correspond to the standards of white adequacy (even if one favours the prevailing systems of domination) is to be allocated a classed inferiority which is attributed by the exterior white

[26] See pages 24-25.

dominance to all of black experience in a convergence of the racial and class properties of subjugation. As the foundational "nigger joke" (*S* 4) created by white domination is transposed into the dynamics of the community of the Bottom, the patterns of acceptability assimilated by its constituents unknowingly associate the dirtiness carried in Helene's attribution of sootiness to Hannah to a hierarchically inferior experience of blackness, of being the "nigger" (*S* 4) in the white domination systems. This betrays a lack of understanding of the common attribution of inferiority through economic power and ownership to all African Americans by the white people of Medallion, in a cyclical experience dating back to the origins of the Bottom in slavery. As a white bargeman retrieves Chicken Little's body from the river shore, he creates an associative link between animalistic (and, therefore, inferior) life forms characteristically owned for labour with black existence, maintaining that black existence is located beneath animals on the (Western) hierarchical scale defined by his own white experience: "When, he wondered, will those people ever be anything but animals, fit for nothing but substitutes for mules, only mules didn't kill each other the way niggers did" (*S* 63).

Inside this inferiority attributed to blackness by the dominant white experience and systems of domination, womanhood is to fall into the intersection of racial, classist and sexist oppression explained by both Crenshaw and hooks. As the Peace family fully falls into the factors of intersection, their experience becomes one of full subjugation to the systems of domination present in the community. Despite Hannah and Eva Peace's contribution to the communal dynamics of the Bottom, subjugation on the levels of class and gender pervades their existence. As hooks argues when considering the role of black women inside white households through Lillian Hellman's work,

> The black women Hellman describes worked in her household as family servants, and their status was never that of an equal. Even as a child, she was always in the dominant position as they questioned, advised, or guided her; they were free to exercise these rights because she or another white authority figure allowed it. (2015a, 15)

As Eva Peace is perceived as a figure of black female strength, she is, in fact, allowed by white governance to develop her familial experience through monetary aid, and her

stimulation of the intellect of the Bottom's men is allowed to her by those same men – the figures of authority, even inside and from a subjugated environment, are the ones who grant permission for those in deeper subjugation to express their experience. Additionally, considering that Eva also shames other women into compliance with patriarchal standards and Hannah complements satisfaction dynamics, there is an oversight on the part of the male figures of these characters' subjugation because it augments their own domination: "The men, surprisingly, never gossiped about [Hannah]. She was unquestionably a kind and generous woman and that, coupled with her extraordinary beauty and funky elegance of manner, made them defend her and protect her from any vitriol that newcomers or their wives might spill" (*S* 44-45).

Inversely, Sula's experience of disruption in the Bottom's dynamics is met with a hostility that is ultimately defined by men – "it was the men who gave her the final label, who fingerprinted her for all time" (*S* 112) in accusing her of having sexual interaction with white men. Even if considered inferior by white people, black men are capable of finding in black women an "institutionalized other" (hooks, 2015a, 16) upon whom to enforce oppression and exploitation. As the figures of (relative) hierarchical power brand those in submission according to the reinforcement of their own supremacy, Eva and Hannah's distance from Sula is established, as the protagonist's use of strength is orientated into divergence from the systems of domination and in favour of her individuality. Meanwhile, Eva and Hannah's sense of individuality is intermingled with the role of care attributed to women in Western and patriarchal settings – as Sula considers regarding Nel's subjugated experience, their "lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to [them]" (*S* 143) as a response to the men who wish for women "to care about [their] hurt, to care very deeply" (*S* 82).

In turn, Stephen, as a white man inside a patriarchal Irish community, is granted possibilities which are not made available to the women of his environment. Inside his own familial structure, his mother is responsible for both emotional and household care, whilst Stephen's father maintains dominance, even after becoming unemployed, as

explained in Chapter 1.[27] The other female figure of care present in Stephen's experience – Mrs. Riordan, who was his family's governess – despite being a figure of education for Stephen, is an employed figure in the Dedalus household, and this status is also contemplated in hooks' quotation regarding Hellman.

Similarly to Eva and Hannah Peace, Mrs. Riordan is capable of demonstrating her own experience inside the economically dominant household because such a display is allowed to her by those in economic authority. Even when in confrontation with Simon Dedalus, her employer, who clashes with Catholic perception during the Christmas dinner, the exposition and defence of her perception is allowed because she is defending the dominant force of Roman Catholicism's dogmatic considerations. Additionally, she is allowed a voice due to her attribution of positive traits by male existence – "both [Stephen's] father and Uncle Charles said that Dante was a clever woman and a wellread woman"; nevertheless, "Father Arnall knew more than Dante because he was a priest" (*P* 8), an occupation denied to female experience. The attribution of such traits implicates a supposedly common lack of these qualities in womanhood, along with a rigid hierarchic scale which refuses to consider the possibility of women achieving a position of priesthood that equates knowledge with power – as perceived continuously in Stephen's experience. Despite women supporting the Western systems of domination which impose on their own existence unwavering roles, due to the binary and dichotomous quality of these systems, women's experience is defined as inferior and subsidiary, as the power which is allowed to dominant male experience is never fully allowed to them. As one can perceive by the existence of other servants attending the Dedalus family Christmas dinner (*P* 23-24), Mrs. Riordan is allowed by the dominant family a voice and to share dinner with her employers – matters which are not allowed to any other servant.

Moreover, the Dedalus family is portrayed as having an unspecified number of servants in addition to Mrs. Riordan, ones which are even further in hierarchical (economic) inferiority to the proximity Mrs. Riordan shares with the nuclear family. The

[27] See page 30.

existence of these servants as employed figures further illustrates the socioeconomic dominance maintained by Stephen's family in the diegetic community of the protagonist's youth.[28] As hooks conveys in regard to bourgeois white feminists taking liberal advantage of the movement, these figures of power would "repudiate the role of servant to others" (2015a, 35). Such consideration makes explicit, then, the constant application of hierarchical binaries of domination and subservience that is maintained even inside the subjugated groups. This is similar to how middle-class women relegated household work to black women in the latter group's added susceptibility to Western systems of domination, as does Stephen's mother (and the entire Dedalus family) allocate work and consequent subjugation to figures of an inferior class through economic domination, even if they are, themselves, victims of systemic domination. Nevertheless, one must consider that, especially with regard to hooks' theoretical framework (and, specifically, the quoted argument), Mrs. Riordan shares racial experience with her employer, and such a factor does not contribute to her experience of exploitation, as happens in the community of *Sula*.

As Stephen grows and his family declines in economic power, his oscillation between selfhood and the patterns imposed on his existence is intensified, but both sets of experience are marked by the power of the protagonist's environment and by the figures of authority Stephen comes into contact with in his life. The main figure of authority and influence, once more, is his father, who, in introducing Stephen to the dynamics of pain and secrecy, also injects class superiority into the young boy's perception. Allan Hepburn, in considering the effect Simon Dedalus' defence of gentility has on an impressionable Stephen, argues the following:

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[28] It is additionally relevant that, in Stephen's imaginarium, servitude is associated with womanhood – the imaginary construction of the word "servant" is used in convergence with a possible "she" that Stephen imagines when accompanying the delivery of milk in the evening (*P* 55). This comes into contrast with the diegetic reality of Stephen coming into contact with both a male servant (*P* 49-50) and a female one (*P* 217). However, and counterpointing this argument, one can also consider that the servants imagined by Stephen as a result of shared stories (*P* 15-16 and 49), those present during the Christmas dinner (*P* 23-24) and those present in his childhood house (*P* 57) – which are likely to have been the same figures granting service during the Christmas dinner – are referred to neutrally, without reference to gender, with the exception of Brigid (*P* 8; 20). Nevertheless, the imaginary association of service with women made by Stephen is revelatory of the recurrent occupation of this position by women, informed by the patriarchal association of womanhood with care providing.

> The gentleman, no matter how shabbily dressed, retains the manners of a different class. Just as Stephen later copies the gestures and movements of priests in an effort to know if he has a vocation for priesthood, he is urged also to copy the manners and gestures of a class to which he no longer belongs [after leaving Clongowes Wood College]. Class is therefore a question of self-identification. It is possible to be genteel, yet impoverished, aristocratic in temperament, yet depleted of funds. (2004, 203)

In the author's enlightening analysis of poverty in Stephen's experience, the consideration of class as "a question of self-identification" displays how the socioeconomic shift on the Dedalus family goes beyond materiality and into the realm of behavioural. Similarly to what hooks explains as the choice of white bourgeois women of supporting "ruling groups of white males" for their "strength, confidence, assertiveness, and decision-making ability" (2015a, 88) despite these same qualities being shared by working-class women, so does Stephen admire and attempt to emulate the patterns verified in the same ruling group of his community because he equates economic power with the exercise of strength, domination and control over others. As hooks argues in using Rita Mae Brown's writing to explain the correlation between class and racial struggles, class corresponds to a set of behavioural experiences, modes of perception and expectation which shape the individual and their interpersonal relationships (2015a, 3-4). Stephen, who belonged in birth and childhood to a middle-class bearing economic power, became guided by his own class and privilege of origin in perceiving others and himself, and is especially gravitating towards this group because he resembles them in all factors but that of his declining socioeconomic class.

To this distance, the fact that Stephen was never fully able to exert economic domination himself is added: in being a child when immersed in an environment of economic favour and domination, the protagonist remained subjected to the parental domination present in patriarchal familial environments. This consideration is renovated when taking into consideration the previously-analysed encounter Stephen has with a prostitute. If Stephen was unable to embrace his promised future of domination, the transaction he creates is not only an attempt at assertion of his dominant experience in

the gendered realm, but also in the realm of the socioeconomic by being capable of affording and, therefore, providing financially for the prostitute. However, and once more, his efforts are halted by the temporary monetary basis for this encounter, resulting in a frustration of the protagonist's intentions and in an emphasized sense of being in "a maze of narrow and dirty streets" (*P* 88) performing his attempt at establishing a realization of selfhood in dominative superiority.

Yet, to consider class solely as a matter of "self-identification" (Hepburn, 2004, 203) becomes reductive in recognizing the set of differing experiences which mark the distinction between socioeconomic groups. As Hepburn argues, since the protagonist wins "debates over language or petitions, Stephen can prove his intelligence, which exists irrespective of his diminished economic fortunes. His poverty thus becomes circumstantial rather than an indicator of his potential to succeed in an intellectual arena" (2004, 205). While Stephen does "prove his intelligence" regardless of his socioeconomic condition, it cannot be said that his experience of intellectual perception is not influenced by his initial status of economic power nor that the decline in class did not reinforce his own capacity for ironic understanding of his community in having been part of different socioeconomic groups and, therefore, having had access to and contact with differing realms of experience. While in Clongowes, Stephen solely came into contact with figures who shared his middle-class dominant experience, so his family's shift from a position of economic power to one of vulnerability and submission also granted Stephen the possibility of ironically perceiving that which was taken from his past experience of wealth. Sula, however, was not allowed this class mobility (even if downward) and, despite gaining access to college education, her foundational experience is one of subjugation in Medallion. As the previously-mentioned Rita Mae Brown makes explicit in her article "The Last Straw", working-class experience is not erased by access to higher education:

> Just because many of us [comprising the working-class] fought our way out of inadequate schools into the universities and became "educated" in no way removes the entire experience of our childhood and youth – working class life. A degree does not erase all that went before it. A degree

> simply means that you have submitted to white, male, heterosexual, middle class educational standards and passed. It doesn't mean you accept those standards. (1974, 16)

Despite Sula having gained access to higher education – and, therefore, having become "'educated'" – her past experience of class, in convergence with her gendered and racial limitations, does not undergo an erasure which would convert her into acceptation of Western standards of acceptability. As Sula had already been exposed to situations of traumatic violence in both the material and intellectual realms, she had developed ironic perception to a small degree. However, the contact with education in what she describes as a "big Medallion" (*S* 99) – making evident the permanence and continuation of the Western "white, male, heterosexual, middle class" (Brown, 1974, 16) standards and systems of domination in Nashville, where the protagonist attended college – grants her the intellectual stimulation upon which to further develop her ironic perception and individuality. As hooks explains in considering the need for the sharing of information and education by oppressed women who have gained access to such resources, these women "understand the value of intellectual development, the extent to which it strengthens any oppressed person who is seeking self-recovery and radical political change" (2015a, 115).

In this light, the access to theory – as "the development of ideas" (hooks, 2015a, 113) – that Sula receives, even if inside an environment which is hostile to her learning in opposition to her expected role as a woman providing care, echoes the development that hooks considers in using the writing of Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs to maintain the alignment of theoretical analysis of the systems of domination with subsequent revolutionary action (2015a, 114). By gaining access to an education which is shaped in favour of those in dominance and which places her in the margins, Sula becomes capable of intellectually and theoretically developing critical perception over the dynamics undermining her community and to make this intellect available to others while simultaneously recognizing and refusing to overlook her own experience of class subjection. Moreover, Sula can only produce ironic perception in intensity and in individuality after having access to intellectual stimulation. Before her contact with higher education, Sula remains partially submerged in the dynamics of her community,

being “no less excited about [Nel’s] wedding” (*S* 84) than Nel herself. Only after her return to the Bottom *a posteriori* to receiving adequate education, which is easily accessible to those in power, does she understand the limitations of women’s experience entailing marital contracts and is capable of actively rejecting them along with the Western systems of domination.

Thus, one can understand that, despite Stephen’s intelligence and intellectual capacity existing regardless of his socioeconomic environment, as defended by Hepburn’s comment, the possibility for developing and subsequently displaying his intelligence originated in Stephen’s experience inside the dominant middle-class. Even if his intellect was inherent and his ironic perception a result of his trauma and marginality, his critical and intellectual capacity over the class system is not solely a result of his decline in the system, and his poverty cannot be considered solely “circumstantial” (Hepburn, 2004, 205) because his education, from childhood, was one which was not “inadequate” (Brown, 1974, 16) to the protagonist’s experience but one moulded for and by the factors of domination he incorporated and represented.

Despite having become intellectually critical, in adulthood, of the systems which he originated from, marks reminiscent of the grasp of these binary and patriarchal systems remained in Stephen’s perception, particularly regarding women, with whom Stephen maintains a distanced objectification. When Stephen is young, his contact with the care provided by women allows for him to absorb the Western hierarchical and patriarchal scale which marks his community’s dynamics and which defines his male experience as one of domination over women. Yet, in his youth, Stephen is subjected to the parental dynamics of domination toward children, therefore being subject to the power in his mother’s existence. However, as the protagonist grows and ironic distance is created between him and his community, Stephen remains incapable of recognizing both the manner in which women are further exploited by said systems, and what his own role inside these systems is in his attribution of pre-shaped voices in his relation to women despite recognizing systems of communal oppression and exploitation.

As Stephen develops his ironic perception, the distance exacted between the protagonist in relation to male figures is less than to female figures – in Stephen’s

journey, women (including the fictional Mercedes) are not granted a vocalization of experience that is present in Stephen's contact with men, because the boys and men Stephen encounters are, in their majority, on an equal or superior standing of socioeconomic power to him. Women, in Stephen's experience, constitute objects to be observed, wondered about and overpowered (through intellectual and ironic distancing, as happens with Emma Clery) into roles which mimic those imposed by Western patriarchal experience in their submission to men.

Moreover, as Stephen displays a fatalist perspective over Irish experience to Davin in saying that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (*P* 180), Stephen attempts to make it clear that, inside this experience, there is a convergence of factors which are contributing to the domination of the population by forces that are, simultaneously, exterior and interior: British imperial force and Catholicism and their influences on Ireland's self-perception mark the former, alongside matters of hierarchized social structure, economic class and (even if unwittingly) gender mark the latter, albeit both considerations are mutually informing and reinforcing. Stephen's perception of the English language as "an acquired speech" (*P* 167) betrays, as commented previously, a self-alienating inadequacy of the English language in the Irish experience, but, simultaneously, it makes explicit a quasi-bodily experience of rejection of the invading presence. If one takes into consideration Ireland's recurrent portrayal as female and British imperial experience and anxiety as characteristically male in its Western configuration of domination, one can perceive a forced impregnation of the Irish territory, language and imaginarium with an experience which, despite becoming part of its composition, is fully foreign and, therefore, develops dynamics which imply a rejection of the Irish body by itself. Stephen's Ireland has been a victim of this invading process and has been forced to complete the coerced gestation into birthing an experience which reflects the maintained presence of British existence – thus, the Irish "old sow" (*P* 180) bore farrow who are a product of said forced insemination. However, in rejecting Ireland's self-mutilation in its consumption of its own progeny, Stephen fails to perceive such a metaphorical situation as a possible attempt of Irish existence to cleanse itself of the continuation of a British imposed presence.

Darby Lewes locates in 16th century Britain the beginning of "an entire pornographic genre that presents women's bodies (or more accurately, a generalized female body) as a pseudogeographic site of male pleasure: a utopian sexual landscape" (2000, 2), to which she attributed the nomenclature of "*somatopia*, derived from the Greek *soma* (body) and *topos* (place)" (2-3). These texts were written and oral expressions of the metaphor that "woman is land; new life emerges from a seed planted within her" (15), and the ambiguity of Lewes' nomenclature comprised the fact that "a 'body place' could be a place either composed *of* a body or designed *for* a body (as in providing bodily pleasure). Yet the term works both ways, for the places are simultaneously composed of female bodies *and* designed for male bodily satisfaction" (3).

Having examined a number of utopian works in which women were represented as land, landscape, hunted game, ship, among other reductive figurations, Lewes argues that imperial "narratives make clear that in a world where male might determines what is right – indeed, what is true – the powerful and manly determine not only who is in charge but who is fully human" (123). In the hierarchic systems of domination, women are transformed into an object of male gaze and, in combining Laura Mulvey's concept of "the monolithic gaze" in which "anything looked upon is reduced to the status of an object" with Michel Foucault's "concept of the objectifying gaze – gaze connected to power and surveillance," Lewes argues that "the person who gazes (that is, the person whose point of view is central) is empowered over the person who is the object of the gaze" (45). In the object's incapability for expression, a transformation ensues in which the attribution of human characteristics is withheld by the dominant force, a process of reification that "is an ideological act with decided political overtones, and it is a fundamental basis of both pornography and empire. Neither can exist if its subjects are seen as fully human" (123).

Once one understands this, Stephen's attribution of animal qualities to an already generalized female figuration of Ireland – and its specificity as land that bears no opportunity for expression – becomes clear in its attempt at establishing a hierarchy in which the protagonist is ruling. Stephen, in being a growing artist, is capable of

perceiving the systems which limit him, but his view of Ireland as an "old sow" (*P* 180) is symptomatic of what Lewes finds in the works she examines: that "[t]he poet both sees and speaks; as the viewer, he now holds the commanding view of the prospect, and the voiceless object cannot resist representation" (2000, 45). If the "sow" (*P* 180) is Stephen's representation of Ireland, it is a representation which maintains the domination systems the protagonist denounces, and this same process occurs whenever Stephen encounters any female figure, especially because his interiority is central to the novel.

hooks, in considering white women's perception over black women and in line with Lewes' considerations, discloses the following: "They make us [black women] the 'objects' of their privileged discourse on race. As 'objects,' we remain unequals, inferiors" (2015a, 13). Despite the critical distancing Stephen undertakes in considering his own community as an object to be understood through what John N. Duvall characterizes as a "disinterested interest" that Nel reveals to Sula (2000, 54), his perception over women in his gendered dislocation from them stems from his role as potential dominant figure. This distance leads to the creation of an objectifying gaze which is cast over the female characters of the narrative, causing Stephen to relate in a superficial and often oppositional manner to them. As Stephen considers his mother "foster" (*S* 87) in her attempts at imposition of Western experience, he fails to perceive how her existence is one of subservience to his father and his family, especially in the family's degraded socioeconomic environment.

On the other hand, Sula is not allowed this silencing of others because, as hooks argues, black women "are allowed no institutionalized 'other' that [they] can exploit or oppress" (2015a, 16), while both white women and black men, despite being victims of systemic oppression, are able to exact said oppression onto other groups of added vulnerability. Stephen, being a white man, is reversely granted additional oppressive power, even if he attempts to distance himself from it. Thus, Stephen's third and final stage of ironic perception cannot be considered to be fully developed as Sharpless argues, because he cannot become thoroughly and exhaustively distanced from the original "concentric circles" (1967, 328) that are himself and those of his community.

Despite his perception becoming pitiful in its textual expression, as can be perceived by the end of the narrative in Stephen's encounter with Emma Clery (*P* 224-225), such ironic pity is pervaded by a sense of superiority that remains in Stephen as a result of his positioning of power over the woman (and his romantic feelings toward her). The pity inspired by irony, ultimately, makes evident a perception of superiority that is not available to those in the then-inferior experience – effectively reducing the degree of irony of its applicant.

The ironic perception of the protagonists, in its distanced, but interested configuration, also entails an aesthetic contemplation over the objects which the characters are aesthetically interested in: Stephen's constant distant observation of his surroundings – particularly those of extreme poverty and marginalization – is similar to Sula's observance of her mother burning. As John N. Duvall characterizes in relating Morrisonian considerations over Faulkner's writing and relating such observations to Sula, "[i]t is [the protagonist's] looking and refusing to turn away that links Sula to artistic consciousness" (2000, 57). By directly gazing into images of common repulsion, Sula's "disinterested interest" is marked by "a paradoxical attitude that leaves the viewer largely disinterested in the pain or suffering witnessed as pain and suffering yet keenly interested in the aesthetic possibilities represented by that pain" (57).

The protagonists' experience of marginality largely supports their artistic capacity and gaze as the foundation upon which their ironic and detached perception was initiated. It is by being located on the material and intellectual margins that the protagonists are capable of creating aesthetic distance from the objects of their gaze – both their communal dynamics and specific recipients. As the peripheral creation of individuality favours a recognition of one's limitations, there is, simultaneously, the development of a recognition of aesthetic possibility carried out by both protagonists in becoming aware of the constrictions that permeate their respective communities; a transformative individuality which carries an aesthetic streak. Stephen's imagining of a "green rose" (*P* 9) to be found in exterior territory amidst the classroom's oppressive environment directly exemplifies this. As Stephen is faced with an overwhelming competitive and hierarchical experience of imposition of exterior imagery, he develops

an imagery of his own through the associations present in his Irish experience with green colour. As the protagonist grows, his distance from centralized experience allows for him to further engage with an individuality which enriches his own perception against the systems of domination present in his community – which similarly happens to Sula.

Sula's growth into adulthood is marked by an indulgence in the protagonist's own sexuality and sexual interest as a means through which self-discovery and empowerment may be created. Sula perceives sexual contact as a means through which self-assertion may be achieved: "there was utmost irony and outrage in lying under someone, in a position of surrender, feeling her own abiding strength and limitless power" (*S* 123). It is in sexual contact that Sula is capable of developing and maintaining her own individuality, whilst also coming into contact with artistic imagery upon which Sula is portrayed as using the first person – "I" – to maintain her own existence, similarly to how Stephen's use of the first person is to be found primarily in his writing. By maintaining a marginality which promotes the protagonists' individuality against Western individualism, both Stephen and Sula are capable of coming into contact with imaginative images of independence and self-fulfilment which reflect a convergence of their artistic capacity with self-discovery.

The permeation of artistic capability with ironic perception is based on Stephen and Sula's detached gaze onto their object(s), considering that the protagonists' perception shifts into progressive stasis after undergoing traumatic experience. By developing a critical perception and recognition of the superficial machinations developed by Western society, both Stephen and Sula are capable of imbuing this critical detachment with aesthetic interest.

Adding to Duvall's argument regarding Sula's "disinterested interest" (2000, 54), one can consider that the distanced enjoyment is figured through Sharpless' definition of ironic detachment. If "[t]o be an artist, or even an artist manqué, may mean that one is beyond good and evil" in linking "amorality and artistic production" (Duvall, 2000, 51), then such a surpassing exists because one is "apprehending without judgement" (Sharpless, 1967, 321) the object of one's perception. Additionally, it is through detachment that, in pity, one is capable of turning one's objects of perception "into

suitable forms for aesthetic ordering" (328), as F. Parvin Sharpless argues regarding Stephen's differing distance with regard to different levels of experience, but Stephen and Sula's failure to fully relinquish hierarchical experience contaminates their capacity for "aesthetic ordering".

Although this distancing is what allows for the development of a "disinterested interest" (2000, 54) as John N. Duvall expresses regarding the experience of Sula and Nel (and Toni Morrison), the protagonists cannot produce an interest that is fully disinterested and detached in their living experience – albeit Sula's observation of her "dancing" burning mother (*S* 76) is aesthetically interested, her relation to her mother and her familial environment is marked by Western experience of domination, even if inversed upon Sula's arrival. Considering that "the identity of the novel's most artistic consciousness, Sula, is constituted through her attempts to manipulate (as well as her manipulation by) the social codes that prescribe and proscribe her sexual pleasure" (Duvall, 2000, 49), one can understand that a constitution of identity expression in individuality exists because the protagonist's ironic perception over the gestures which configure "social codes" is marked by a similar attempt at domination. In this light, both Stephen and Sula are capable of developing their own identity and artistic perception as a consequence of their ironic detachment from the superficial gestures and manipulative dynamics of Western experience – but, once more, because their detachment is not complete in its configuration, neither is their artistic capacity.

Taking into account Duvall's considerations, one can understand a mutual informing of intertwining and overlapping marginality, irony and artistic gaze that is present in both protagonists. Such intersecting dimensions which constitute full divergence are also linked to a characteristic amorality that is present both as the "distanced gaze […] of disinterested interest" proclaimed by Duvall in his connection of Morrison's authorial experience to Sula's artistic perception (2000, 57), as well as inside Sharpless' considerations of "static apprehension" – which, in turn, regards both critical contemplation of Stephen's experience and Stephen's own critical posture (1967, 321-322). However, both characters fail to become truly amoral. Stephen and Sula, even inside the critical realm, are permeated by considerations of imperfect ironic and artistic

divergence that echo their own experience inside communities which deny and attempt to limit the manifestations of this deviation.

In light of Nel's suppressed capacity for marginality and ironic perception, one can understand that Nel herself is capable of artistic divergence, but, in her conceding to and fulfilling of centralized communal expectations, she drifts away from said possibility into Western material comfort and patriarchy. Her role as "teacher of disinterested interest" (Duvall, 2000, 67) to Sula is overtaken by her permanence in Western acceptability, and places Nel as "the novel's most displaced embodiment of the artist manqué" (54), displaying the incompatibility between artistic divergence and systems of domination. Yet, despite Nel's failure to endorse her own artistic possibility, even if one aligns with a marginal and ironic experience, artistic divergence may be truncated by the degree of one's intersectional experience of oppression and exploitation, as occurs with Sula.

Despite sharing similar modes of ironic perception and artistic gaze, the protagonists turn their perspectives to different focal points due to their asymmetric journeys. Whilst Stephen maintains a nurtured intellectual perception through aesthetic insight over his own experience and that of his community, Sula's insight rather focuses on the bodily, as the result of Western dynamics of pain being additionally material in the community of the Bottom of Medallion, while a mostly intellectual severing is applied to the diegetic Irish community of *A Portrait*. If Irish subjugation to British and Catholic experiences is made explicit by Stephen as being ideological and linguistic in their configuration, the African experience of the Bottom of Medallion is construed with an added layer of bodily constriction and limitation.

The distinction comes into realization as one considers the racial differentiation between the African American community and the dominant white experience that diegetic slavery practice has brought upon the Bottom of Medallion: as the white farmer needed labour from the black slave and it was through labour that (apparent) freedom was bought, the value attributed to the bodies of African Americans was established from its origin by the dominant presence. As Western systems of domination maintained a binary of hierarchical power, black bodies became the trading currency through which

African American experience could be valued by white power, as is the case of Eva Peace.

Stephen's experience of ironic perception, considering his understanding of "gestures" (Sharpless, 1967, 327) in their manipulative expression being primarily ones of intellectual normative experience, is based upon a revolutionary attitude conceived through intellectual expression – Stephen's experience is marked and informed by a cultivation of intellectual development limited by authoritative figures. Due to Stephen's contact with a cultivation of the intellectual realm inside the dynamics of his community, Stephen's capacity for artistic expression is manifested in that same manner. As Stephen is heir to an intellectual tradition which ranges from political to aesthetic, in his desire to "forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*P* 225), he is treading into intellectual territory which, while having been overtaken by foreign forces, remains existent. Despite Stephen's claims of an "uncreated conscience" (*P* 225), the diegetic relevance of figures such as Charles Stewart Parnell makes evident the existence of an awareness of systems of domination which, while limited and truncated, provides a foundation upon which Stephen could rise.

As Stephen receives and retrieves knowledge from figures of authorial creation in aesthetics, the protagonist is facilitated into a world of expression that preexists his own experience of aesthetic discovery and made readily available to him. By being both witness and heir to the effects created by figures of intellectual and aesthetic importance, Stephen is capable of engendering a manifestation of aesthetic theory and expression which carries the intellect into the possibility of a new-found and newly-created identity for his community. This results in an experience based upon an artistic textual expression through which an identity can be created and established. Stephen's wish is implicitly undermined, however, by attempting to fully reject his community of origin.

Sula, on the other hand, is not allowed any tradition upon which an artistic expression may be fulfilled, being witness, instead, to a sexuality as a means through which one may find satisfaction and realization – learning from her mother, Hannah, that "sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (*S* 44). Considering

that the basis that the protagonist absorbs from her community is primarily bodily, and that her familial environment emphasizes the body's sexual configuration, Sula finds it impossible to transpose her aesthetic gaze and perception into an artistic expression of selfhood and individuality because no textual or aesthetic expression has been allowed to her. As is disclosed in the narrative:

> In a way, her strangeness, her naïveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous. (*S* 121)

Sula's seeking of selfhood in sexual encounters can, in this light, be considered a circumvention of her lack of possible artistic expression. Sula's lack of aesthetic foundation resulted in frustrated imaginative conception, regardless of her access to academic theory, and in an incapability to fully access selfhood without the presence of another figure who would try to fulfil sexual realization. As Sula configures this need for a second presence into Ajax, and their sexual interactions are marked by a convergence of material and intellectual stimulation, an orgasmic experience becomes equivalent to an intellectual climax through which Sula is capable of approaching selfhood, but not fulfilling it. Sula's imaginative de-layering of Ajax into a quasi-discovery of mud (*S* 130-131) makes evident the lack of artistic tradition upon which Sula could maintain expression, causing the protagonist to be unable to achieve an essence of individuality and identity that is fully expressed. As Sula's adding of individual "water" to Ajax's "soil" does not fully combine into an essential "mud" (*S* 131), this element remains unachieved in an out-of-touch close distance, similarly to how Nel's "ball of muddy strings" (*S* 109) remains unacknowledged in its proximity to its holder.

One can find, then, in Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Love*, a possible answer to Sula's yearnings. Sula's creational attempts are frustrated because she needs a second presence, yet immediately casts away said presence in favour of full solitude. Even Ajax,

with whom she comes close to developing an action of creation – which echoes that of artistic predisposition, as expressed in the above quotation, – fails to grant Sula with the original "mud" (*S* 131) she needs. The mud-like frustrations not only of Sula, but of Nel find resemblance in their absence from each other's lives: Sula's "craving for the other half of her equation" (*S* 121) exists because "[i]n every love, there are at least two beings, each of them the great unknown in the equations of the other" (Bauman, 2003, 6). By failing to recognize the necessary presence of Nel, whom she originally loved (albeit not necessarily romantically or sexually) and in whom she found both herself and an Other, Sula is incapable of finding an expression of selfhood through aesthetic perception. As Bauman argues by using Plato's *Symposium* in considering the relation between love and the aesthetic:

> it is not in craving after ready-made, complete and finished things that love finds its meaning – but in the urge to participate in the becoming of such things. Love is akin to transcendence; it is but another name for creative drive and as such is fraught with risks, as all creation is never sure where it is going to end. (2003, 6)

All of Sula's lovers grant her solely "ready-made, complete and finished things" which do not allow Sula to create. Ajax, specifically, being an object of Sula's desire, grants her gifts, such as bottles of milk (*S* 124-125), in what becomes an almost contractual exchange of material goods for sexual intercourse and comfort – the latter of which being granted by Sula inside the systems of Medallion, echoing Stephen's encounter with the prostitute (*P* 88-89). Sula herself recognizes that "[s]he had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be—for a woman" (*S* 121) in the domination systems of Medallion.

As is disclosed in narration, engaging in sexual intercourse was the only way for Sula to "find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow" (*S* 122), feelings which, initially, were not recognized by the protagonist, who instead believed them to be "the creation of a special kind of joy" through "[l]ovemaking" (*S* 122). However, if one considers Bauman's argument that "[t]o love means opening up to that fate, that most sublime of all human conditions, one in which fear blends with

joy into an alloy that no longer allows its ingredients to separate" (2003, 7), Sula's sexual interactions with men in search for absolute solitude become mere encounters, while her Sisterhood with Nel is perceived as "love" – an "admission of freedom into being: that freedom which is embodied in the Other, the companion in love" (7).

In their Sisterhood, Sula and Nel are capable of withstanding and sharing the experiences of fear, joy, and the convergence of these into a mutual support which allows the girls "transcendence" (6) not only of the systems of domination they are enclosed in, but also of the limitations imposed on their artistic potential. Potentially, it would be in the love shared by Sula and Nel that their mutual nurturing of a "creative drive" would become possible, one which informed the creation of a new collective experience for their community – "as all creation is never sure where it is going to end," so would the undefinable speech of Sula's sexual interactions become transposed into the possible "art form" (*S* 121) that the protagonist is lacking, were the women to return to their Sisterhood. While the narration implies an oppositional standing between Sula's "craving for the other half of her equation" and a possible artistic expression and identity – meaning that the presence of one would be incompatible with the presence of the other, – Bauman's argument contradicts this perception, viewing the creational (and, thus, creative) power as equated with the presence of love.

Yet Bauman's argument also understands that erotic love, "Eros," both relies on and is destroyed by duality (2003, 6), and that "[a]ttempts to overcome that duality, to tame the wayward and domesticate the riotous, to make the unknowable predictable and enchain the free-roaming – all such things sound the death-knell to love. Eros won't outlast duality" (7). However, this nullifying process is not present in the Sisterhood shared by Sula and Nel, not only because there is no attempt at domination in their interactions, but also because they do not share erotic love for one another – at least, not explicitly. The Sisterhood bond in which Sula and Nel take part sees not a shared Eros, but the sharing of a discovery of sexual interest by the two girls, as demonstrated by their sexually-charged ice cream trips (*S* 49-51) and playful penetration of the ground (*S* 57-59). Thus, their fusion is not one fatal to love in its overcoming of duality (Bauman, 2003, 7-8), but one which is enriching – together, they are capable of overcoming the

oppositional systems of Western and patriarchal domination exposed by hooks into developing their own complementary, compatible experience (hooks, 2015a, 31) of creation.

Yet Sula and Nel do not return to their previous Sisterhood after the "closed place in the water" (*S* 61), and, therefore, both women remain incapable of artistic expression. The process described by Bauman, instead, happens in Stephen's attempt at harnessing dichotomous and dominative power in his encounter with the prostitute. Stephen is trying to create an alternate mode of reality in which, while relying on the systems of domination he is inserted in, the prostitute is conceived of as the opposing figure of feminine care, considering that "[t]he challenge, the pull, the seduction of the Other render all distance, however reduced and minuscule, unbearably large" (Bauman, 2003, 8). But the convergence of differentiating factors between the two, particularly that on the realm of socioeconomic domination, emphasizes this distance, and, therefore, "[f]usion or overpowering seem the only cures for the resulting torment. And there is but a thin boundary, all too easy to overlook, between a soft and gentle caress and a ruthless iron grip" (8). In his attempt to achieve a loving state of creative transcendence interwoven with dominant experience, Stephen fails to realize that the contractual nature of his encounter halts all possibility of love as creational and "creative drive" (6). Duality, an overbearing characteristic of the Western systems of domination (hooks, 2015a, 31), remains in what proves to be Stephen's attempt at fusing with (and, unwittingly, overpowering) the prostitute through socioeconomic dominance, even if Stephen, himself, lacks the economic power his family once had.

Hepburn argues, regarding Stephen's experience, that "[p]overty […] might actually enable artistic development because the artist, who resists the pressures of the marketplace, sets himself outside the circuits of money exchange and commodity production" (Hepburn, 2004, 205). Through such a removal of oneself from the economic centre, the protagonists are capable of, once more becoming aware "of the factors that alienate them" (hooks, 2015a, 10) in their classed marginality which informs both their irony and their artistic perception. Thus, the placement of Nel inside the

Western capitalist expression of the Bottom of Medallion further justifies her incapability of indulging into her artistic perception. Hepburn continues by writing that:

> In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, insolvency, coupled with a personal sense of humiliation, inspires Stephen Dedalus to write poetry. Creativity literally becomes the flip-side of economics: Stephen pens poems on the backs of moiety notices or bills. As the Dedalus family loses its prestige and money, Stephen, by a dialectical process, discovers his vocation as an artist. (2004, 197)

There is a direct correlation between the absence of money and the presence of artistic expression, but Allan Hepburn also proceeds to argue, in commenting on Georg Simmel's work, that "[m]oney catalyzes possibilities and value, including the value that inheres in aesthetic production. It ensures the value of having those possibilities in the first instance and, in the absence of money, the possibility of making, selling, and purchasing goods vanishes" (2004, 198). In the association between economic power and artistic possibility, one can understand, then, that previous monetary power is necessary for artistic discovery in poverty, thus the absence of monetary means in Sula's life contributes to her prohibition from directly engaging with an experience of artistic creation. Due to Stephen's initial socioeconomic domination, the protagonist is capable of developing his creative capacity in ironic and marginal perception of his community into an expression that is artistic and textual in its configuration.

Sula's permanence in working-class conditions throughout her life, despite her academic degree, does not configure in her experience a possibility of economic power in her role as a woman, consequently frustrating the lack of expression of her creativity in her ironic marginality. As Sula possesses no economic value except for the one granted to her grandmother in a bodily transaction with white domination, the value of "aesthetic production" (Hepburn, 2004, 198) is not available to her. Thus, the difference between Stephen and Sula's artistic capacities is delineated: the former is capable of expression in economic power allocated to white male experience, while the latter's confrontation of enforced subjugation as a black working-class woman, even if apparently surpassed, results solely in frustration.

Returning to the opening considerations over flight, one can perceive that, ultimately, the attempts at full divergence from the protagonists' respective communities is not available to them – at least, in living experience. If Stephen and Sula are incapable of achieving irony in its full extension due to their unwitting maintenance of Western hierarchical systems of domination, so does their artistic expression become truncated by those same systems and dynamics. Even if Stephen's convictions "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" display awareness of communal oppression, his flight is based on the fact that his "[m]other is putting [his] new secondhand clothes in order" (*P* 225) while she attempts, once more, to promote subjugation to Stephen – evidence that, while Stephen had dissolved the limitations imposed on him by his community, his mother's sacrifice for communal dynamics remains, as does the protagonist's unawareness of it.

The irony present in the protagonists' respective journeys, however, cannot be fully invalidated because of this: Stephen's struggle against Western systems of domination remains, and so does Sula apply the dynamics of domination often in her return to the Bottom, prior to her death. Considering what hooks declares in using Jeanne Gross' writing regarding the creation of women-centred experiences (either intellectual or material), rejection of past experience as entirely negative can become a mere inversion of the same systems of domination present in Western society: "After assuming a 'feminist' identity, women often seek to live the 'feminist' lifestyle. These women do not see that it undermines feminist movement to project the assumption that 'feminist' is but another pre-packaged role women can now select as they search for identity" (2015a, 29). By fully rejecting the systems of domination they were born into without regard for positive developments, Stephen and Sula both fail to fully rid their proposal of revamped experience of systemic oppression because they are claiming a superiority which is solely available to them, effectively replicating those same systems.

Sula is the sole figure of the two novels capable of overcoming this superiority and achieving full ironic perception, as is made evident by her capacity for critical distancing without judgement, even regarding her body, but her intellectual presence in

the third stage of irony is sacrificed by her love for Nel. As Sula dies, she grows capable of perceiving not only the Bottom's oppressive dynamics, but also Nel's erasure in favour of acceptability and dominant pattern and, ultimately, her own death. As disclosed in narration,

> [Sula] noticed that she was not breathing, that her heart had stopped completely. A crease of fear touched her breast, for any second there was sure to be a violent explosion in her brain, a gasping for breath. Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead.
>
> Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel." (*S* 149)

In being capable of perceiving from a critical distance the manner through which her bodily experience – which is the main factor of compliance with the dominant experience in the community of the Bottom – is dissolved, Sula finally achieves full intellectual independence. Nevertheless, even in death and full ironic perception, Sula maintains her reference to Nel as an ultimate companion. As Sula's origin of intellectual experience of individuality was located in their Sisterhood, Nel is the figure with whom Sula wishes to share her discovery of a full individuality to be transposed into communal experience. By maintaining this loving perception, Sula may be perceived in Sharpless' considerations to have receded from the third stage of irony, but this apparent retreat is compensated for by an expression of full experience of love and, thus, creativity – even if it is solely possible with the protagonist's death.

To consider Stephen and Sula's progression in perception as invalidated due to the protagonists' failure to fully integrate irony into their living experiences would be to concede to the "either/or" (hooks, 2015a, 31) binary system that attempts to nullify divergence. Indeed, the protagonists remain in their divergent experience of ironic perception in attempting to alleviate the oppression and exploitation imposed by Western systems on their communities of origin and, in maintaining a lightly kinetic experience, they avoid the "lifeless formality" (Sharpless, 1967, 329) that is a risk entailing complete irony and pity. If Sula manages to be ironic in even critically

perceiving her own death, but remains in loving consideration of Nel (*S* 149), Stephen's incapability of abandoning all superiority grants him humanity and emotion – which are the essential features to aesthetic and artistic expression. Thus, the incapability of fully embracing irony and pity is revealed as a positive capacity for maintaining passion and experimentation, and their flights, complete or not, become successful.

Conclusion

Both Joyce's *A Portrait* and Morrison's *Sula* portray characters who attempt to diverge from the systemic domination present in characteristically Western environments, and the protagonists' struggle, albeit flawed at times, marks a progression towards diegetic communal possibilities of freedom from hierarchies and socioeconomic overpowering. If the diegetic communal experience of both novels favours social structure based on domination and individualism, the protagonists, in their attempts at individuality, maintain the potential for a communal identity which is not incompatible with individual development. If secrecy is the means through which pain is quietly kept, Stephen and Sula actively vocalize and materialize evidence of such maintenance of secrecy to those immersed in these dynamics. If the familial realm is an environment through which Western values are inherited, the protagonists become distanced through traumatic ironic experience and shine a light on the processes of communal and familial constraint. Even if the protagonists are not capable of achieving full independence from their subjugated communities into a (re)created collective identity, theirs are journeys which move them beyond Western experience into, at least, partial liberation – as Sula's influence over Nel makes evident.

Moreover, if the backgrounds as well as the political and identity landscapes of the authors and their respective diegetic creations are radically different, the novels indeed find possibility for convergence through bell hooks' theoretical framework, as analysed throughout the present dissertation. Despite the common theoretical consideration of the novels inside their respective cultural environments, the specificities located in each one become even more revealing when considered in light of hooks' work. In comparison to one another, these environments are granted a reference which, while exterior, is not diminishing nor overpowering; instead, it creates solidarity and recognition of the specific conditions pertaining to their particular subjugation which echoes that of hooks' Sisterhood. The present dissertation has investigated the possibility of there being room for criticism to go beyond Western limitations and imposed structural barriers – which echo the binary expression of its

hierarchical experience – into a shared recognition of specificity in human experience, enriching and emphasizing each community's particular grounding.

Exterior Western systems are imposed into the diegetic communities' experience through deceit and truncation, becoming part of communal (self-)perception which leads familial environments to become centres of domination and systemic oppression for all its constituents through dynamics of pain and secrecy. These dynamics develop forcefully-unacknowledged communal "[balls] of muddy strings" (*S* 109) that characters are shaped into accepting and, thus, suppressing, in polarizing binary perceptions of selfhood and otherness which occlude the exteriority of the imposed patterns.

As Stephen and Sula grow traumatized in contact with these patterns, they revel in a marginality which configures a possibility for ironic perception that the protagonists develop in their material and intellectual maturation. In rejection of the patterns imposed by their communities, they, instead, favour a collective individuality which openly opposes Western individualism and power struggle. In the mutual rejection between the protagonists and their communities, Stephen and Sula attempt to display to those in their circles the possibility for divergence as opposed to the manifestations of Western systems of domination, but the characters to whom they present such an hypothesis maintain their alignment with dominant expectations, to the detriment of their relationships to the protagonists – which, in turn, reinforces the protagonists' marginal movement inside their own communities.

Nevertheless, and despite the proximity in their divergence from established patterns of experience, Stephen and Sula differ in socioeconomic status, gendered experience and race – factors which contribute to their asymmetric ways of dealing with Western experience. As Stephen finds his artistic expression to be a charged divergence from his community's dynamics due to his middle-class origin, Sula's sexuality as a means of selfhood reflects an absence of socioeconomic power which marked her family's experience from the moment of BoyBoy's desertion, making her artistic capacity frustrated in its lack of expression. As the protagonists deal with different degrees of

oppression and exploitation in their experience, their ironic perception is consequently affected, as economic power (and its absence) manipulates artistic expression.

Ultimately, the achievement of a complete distance and irony in Stephen and Sula's experience cannot be considered fully successful, because their experience originates in (and is, therefore, perpetually connected to) the patterns they attempt to reject, but an incomplete distancing does not correspond to failure. As they wish to create anew an experience of identity for their communities, they must rely on an existence which cannot be erased, and a successful achievement of flight and identity creation is made possible due to their involved mobilization against domination.

In this regard, one can consider that Stephen is granted a second opportunity at experience in *Ulysses* if one concedes to a diegetic continuity being presented between the two novels by Joyce, while Sula is not. If Sula's defiance of Western systems is conveyed through sharpened aggression, she grows approximate to Icarus insomuch as her ambitious flight exhausted the protagonist's life in her narrative – however, hers was not one of over-ambition, but one in which fire and water were much too close for navigation. In the intersection of oppressive and exploitative factors, Sula becomes Stephen's black sister – as Woolf considers "Shakespeare's sister" (1977, 55) – in her lack of "money and a room of her own" (7) inside the labyrinthine Peace house of patriarchal control which removed solidarity from her. The achievements of the protagonists are asymmetric because their own experiences are unequal.

The present analysis, however, leaves untouched a number of themes which should be investigated in further research, one of which is the impact of religion, religiosity and the figure of God upon the compared communal environments in their controlling and dominating effort. As both Eva Peace and Mary Dedalus reproach the protagonists, theirs is a language riddled by Christian evocations, displaying the manner through which religion can be treated as an additional factor to be considered in intersectionality. As the overwhelming presence of religious figures in Stephen's experience reveals, religion becomes a means through which power may be exerted in favour of intellectual subjugation in a manner similar to the moments in which God as overpowering frightful essence, equating Western domination, is called upon by the

community of the Bottom of Medallion, as the community of the Bottom believes "the only way to avoid the Hand of God is to get in it" (*S* 66). If Stephen's Catholic God punishes through fire, as Stephen fears upon receiving Father Arnall's sermons (*P* 95-118), how can Eva Peace's burning of Plum maintain (supposedly) purifying qualities when compared to Hannah's fiery death? Is Hannah's death punishment for Eva's harnessing of God-like power in the murder of her son? If "[t]he torment of fire is the greatest torment to which the tyrant has ever subjected his fellow creatures" (*P* 106), how does Stephen recurrently perceive fire through waves in his youth (*P* 22; 91; 109), including in his considerations over the Daedalian myth (*P* 148), as Icarus is destroyed by both fire and water? And how is Stephen capable of moving from fiery destruction to water's "soft liquid joy" (*P* 200), while Sula's divisive "closed place in the water" (*S* 61) is perpetuated as a promised "sleep of water" (*S* 149)?

Yet another theme which was not approached in the present dissertation is the possibility of considering Stephen and Sula as quintessentially modernist characters – while such argumentation of Modernism has been created regarding the protagonists in their own diegeses, a comparative analysis in this light remains to be created. If Joycean writing is perceived as characteristically modernist and Morrison argues that African American discourse in slavery is modern in its reconfiguration of experience (Gilroy, 1993, 178) – as considered in the connection of the authors through modernist heritage and creation in this dissertation's introductory notes[29] – how do Stephen and Sula's journeys demonstrate a modernist attempt at reconstruction through their de-stabilization of Western systems of domination? Is hooks' theoretical framework applied to Stephen and Sula's experience incompatible with a modernist reading of the texts? What are the modernist features present in the protagonists, and in what ways can their relationship to their respective communities be reconsidered?

The different aspects and facets of the methodologies and theoretical framework present in this dissertation are not, however, prevented from being located in differing degrees in other works by James Joyce and Toni Morrison. For example,

[29] Specifically, in pages 11-12.

while Morrison's *Song of Solomon* accompanies the journey of Milkman Dead, who can be recognized to possess what hooks considers an "institutionalized 'other'" (2015a, 16) in the female presences of his family, who all deal with his experience of manhood and aid him in his discovery of selfhood which originates in his middle-class domination, even if to their detriment,[30] *A Mercy* displays female experience in colonial experience, in which the bodily economy of white over black and male over female fully truncates the experience of the oppressed and exploited characters.

Moreover, Joyce's *Dubliners*, in creating a series of short stories in consideration of experience in Dublin, recurrently makes evident that the presence of Western systems in the community's functioning contributes to a recurrent frustration of its inhabitants' anxieties and longings. "Eveline," for example, displays a young Irish woman whose systemic oppression and exploitation imprison her inside an Irish landscape as she is caught between the care she is bestowed by her then-dead mother in her role as a woman – the "promise to keep the home together as long as [Eveline] could," the same promise that led her mother to "that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness" (*D* 258) – under the jurisdiction of a physically overpowering father, and the possibility of a life of supposed freedom inside a marriage (and its expected Western dynamics) to a man whose trustworthiness is marked as dubious. Additionally, "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" displays the communal subjugation and division brought upon by an exterior dominant existence, represented by mentioning "a foreign king" against

[30] Characters such as Milkman's sisters, First Corinthians and Magdalene, and Hagar are recurrently undermined in favour of Milkman's progression in self-discovery – as Magdalene confides to Milkman, he is the reason for the limitation of the women in the Dead household, his "hog's gut that hangs down between [his] legs" (Morrison, 2004, [177]) being the factor which allows for him to overtake his father's domination of the family: "You were taking over, letting us know you had the right to tell [Ruth, the Dead family's mother] and all of us what to do." ([178]). Moreover, Milkman confides that "[w]ithout ever leaving the ground, [Pilate] could fly" ([271]), but her flight is never fully achieved, leaving her to die from her (S)inging life. Converging with the novels analysed in the present dissertation, the (Western) female bodies and intellect in *Song of Solomon* are to be sacrificed in favour of male emancipation, care and, ultimately, flight.

Contrary to Gay Wilentz's statement that mothers are an "overpowering" presence in the novel (1989, 30), mothers (and all women) are an underpowered group which is subservient to the men of their communities, especially those of their families. Even if Pilate leads the way for Milkman's discovery of selfhood, ancestry and flight, the protagonist's discovery leaves a trail of destroyed women in its wake: his sisters, his mother, Hagar and Pilate must all suffer in order for Milkman to achieve the same flight Solomon did – yet another flight characterized by both liberation and abandonment.

which “the honour of Dublin” (*D* 329) is measured, commanding a subjugation which, in turn, grows further in the tension between middle and working-class.

As Joyce’s *oeuvre* primarily focuses on Irish experience, the author’s incidence upon imperial presence as having negatively shaped Irish existence and population, so does Morrisonian writing recurrently emphasize the negative effects of colonial white presence upon black existence. As both authors endorse an analysis of truncated identities into the possibility of newly-constructed experiences with which their communities of origin may relate independently, their writing may be considered as integrating an experience of opposing and refusing exterior domination. This is characteristically associated with imperial and colonial ambitions cultivated in the West – the manifestations of said opposition at times highlighting separate factors, as aforementioned, while in other times rejecting the different factors composing intersectional subjugation all at once. The authors’ canonical presence is one which, in its marginal origins, rejects the centrality proposed by a Western literary canon perpetuated upon material and intellectual domination of its constituents. This makes visible the attempts of Western experience to convey its presence as inherent while its domination unfolds: by including its opposition in its configuration, canonical presence attempts to portray its existence as “*apolitical*” (Morrison, 2019, [187]).

However, the theoretical considerations discussed in the present dissertation through hooks are in no way limited to the literary creations enumerated here – there are innumerable novels, stories and artistic creations in which these systems can be located beyond Joycean and Morrisonian work, and their examination is always of great importance. The previously quoted *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf, for example, highlights the manner through which womanhood was limited, as the hypothetical sister of Shakespeare, similarly to Sula, would be granted no possibility of artistic relevance due to her gendered experience, in the author’s recognition of the need for economic stability. Echoes of these limitations recurrently brought upon women resound and find their chronological ancestry in the same Greek mythology in which Stephen’s Daedalian craftsmanship finds its mythical origin. The possibilities for application of such themes are endless, as the systems of domination, while shifted, changed, improved, remain in

their structural foundation – if hooks locates the origin of these systems in Western philosophy (2015a, 36), the creations derived from Western thinking are marked by the valuation dynamics of their origin. These theories and considerations are imprinted into Western experience (and one could argue that Western centralization also influences other modes of experience into reproducing its patterns), thus locating them shouldn't be difficult – the difficulty lies in recognizing their deep-rootedness and their entanglement into everyday experience. Canonical and non-canonical writing alike, investigation of such thematic and systemic experience should be applied to different works. While relevance and visibility are to be taken into account following the investigation developed, these must be perceived without undertaking Western hierarchical considerations of value – to do so would be to become contradictory in one's experience of research.

The aforementioned possibilities for interpretation are but a fragment of the realm of infinite potential for analyses to be developed. These investigations are fully supported by the present dissertation, even if they disagree with the argument defended here – as bell hooks disclosed, "[m]ost people are socialized to think in terms of opposition rather than compatibility" (2015a, 31), and in application of such theoretical framework, the creation of diverging knowledge does not present an obliteration or invalidation of previous work, instead complimenting and intellectually enriching it by developing more facets through which it can be considered.

If experience of subjugation may lead to a suppression of intellectual thought and artistic potential, its counter can solely be the maintenance of solidarity and communication from all parts. bell hooks' closing remarks in *Feminist theory: from margin to center* are as follows:

> The formation of an oppositional world view is necessary for feminist struggle. This means that the world we have most intimately known, the world in which we feel "safe" (even if such feelings are based on illusions), must be radically changed. Perhaps it is the knowledge that everyone must change, not just those we label enemies or oppressors, that has so far served to check our revolutionary impulses. Those revolutionary impulses must freely inform our theory and practice if feminist movement to end existing oppression is to progress, if we are to transform our present reality. (2015a, 166)

Stephen and Sula's radical action and postures in their questioning of imposed realities is replicated in the process of developing criticism – to perceive an object from a distance through ironic considerations and to evaluate its functioning despite the subject's relation to it is a potentially revolutionary act; to draw insight from experience – both material and intellectual – is to become a catalyst toward change. The two novels, despite having been insisted upon heavily in critical development, still present new opportunities and new lenses through which they can be considered and through which radical change can be exacted. Their potential is unlikely to run dry as long as oppressive and exploitative systems remain – and their relevance shall remain even with regard to those which might come to be in posterity, if anything, as an example. May Stephen and Sula's revolutionary acts inspire further criticism, and their souls forge anew cherished identities.

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