

Ethnic Identity in 20th Century American Literature

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Introduction

The present paper attempts to demonstrate various means by which ethnic literature responds to the questions of identity formation, self-definition, and visibility in the multicultural American literary and social reality. To illustrate the above notions I have chosen five novels. My goal is to combine the depiction of Asian American, African American, and Native American ethnic affiliations in the novels in question with secondary sources and my observations and to harmonize these three.

The reason for choosing this topic is that though a great deal of attention has been paid to multiculturalism, enough questions are left for discussion. I examine the pieces of fiction as separate entities in separate chapters, only binding the first two together, this way of thinking helped me to remain in one macrocosm of one novel at a time.

I aim at relating different terms to the notion of ethnicity, positioning these in time and space and giving a historical outlook to it. There are many overlapping themes that (almost) all works depict; folk, myth, the supernatural, religion and other systems of belief, interracial connections and a multiracial background, the function and presentation of female “supporting” characters and womanhood in general. With self-identification comes naming and anonymity. The question of silence or not-telling and their opposite, voice-giving, audibility and visibility proved to be common features.

My goals in Chapter 1, titled “Life among Ghosts” are to detect thematic elements as structure, the general historic background, the seeking of the *self*, not-telling, suicide, a mythical approach, biracial heritage, bureaucracy is also depicted.

Mixed ancestry in “Silencing the Bird”, the portrayal of silence, preconceptions, social movements, Gothic undertone, the function of religion, the narration, the role of female characters, law and the central metaphor is discussed in the next chapter.

In “Invisible Criticism” I start with a visualized approach to the novel *Invisible Man*, then I discuss a clashing set of interests in it, the concept of anonymity, the protagonist’s helpers, the narrative technique, female figures, sentimentalism, and characters and organizations that undermine the protagonist’s effort of self-seeking are given a detailed description. Then comes the theme fluidity of the personality, the inhuman and mechanized

feeling of the everyman, the concepts of locality and musicality, the American vernacular, different literary allusions, slavery times and relics, the notion of visuality and picture-taking, Harlem and urban life, rhetoric and audibility, an alternative means of visibility, religion, compared with a previous chapter, and socio-political activism are discussed in this section of the paper, too.

In “Space and Marginality” I attempt to describe culture and space interconnected, analyze how a community can survive actual diseases and epidemics metaphorically speaking, humor, a possible cure or “love medicine”, uprooting, dividing the land, intraracial relations, the notion of “otherness”, language and naming practices, the common tribal consciousness is depicted. A different notion of time and space is portrayed, mistrust leads in the next paragraph to the trickster mindset and to gambling, social ills and inequalities, fabulizing, religion and sainthood, masking, concealing the minority status comes after that and the concept of water closes the chapter and the thesis.

For the sake of economy I will sometimes use shorter variants of titles, for example *United States* for *United States: Reviewing American Multicultural Literature* or simply *Mockingbird* for Harper Lee’s piece of work *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Life among Ghosts

This chapter focuses on the novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Woman Warrior* by Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, since the Chinese American experience for the characters populating Amy Tan's book seems to resonate with those of Maxine Hong Kingston's. I would also like to aim at covering relevant issues as structure, history, language and womanhood within a cross-cultural framework of the two works.

As for the structure of *The Joy Luck Club* all the smaller essay sections create a whole together with that of the younger generation's segments that correspond to the four mothers' confession, giving ten stories to the former and dedicating six to the latter, to the mums when it comes to the physicality and the layout of the book, but also without precise outlines and with constant overlapping. Adams finds the expressions *quilt*, *tapestry* and *patchwork* the best to illustrate this fragmentation and mingling of the pieces of writings, as America is often described the same way. The older generation's, the mothers' life in the novel revolves around their split identity as being one foot in the past, to perpetuate Chinese customs, transmittable values and words of wisdom for the daughters to memorize and live accordingly if possible, and one foot in the present, their recently surfaced and formed American mindset and cultural history.

The Joy Luck "blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction" (Adams 2). Speaking about factuality, the novel when not presenting bedtime stories, dreams and superstitions, gives us a considerable insight into the historic background of the era when concerning the homeland with its Japanese imperial presence and occupation of Kweilin to railroad building, racism, even exclusion from the new home-country, immigration stations and also paints a typical picture of the concerns of the average U.S.-raised middle class kids or young adults, the second generation Asian American baby-boomers with the small domestic matters of the female world : marriage or divorce, anorexia and calorie counting, sessions with the therapist, as Adams elaborates it, "the masculine working class past and the feminine middle-class present" (3). The question is how far should the story go back to

the past? Taking all the interrelations into account, it is by no means a mistake that Adams refers to the Asian American minority group as either the most silent and passive or the most neglected when it comes to *interracial* relations when quoting Yamada: [the white Americans] “understood the anger expressed by the Blacks and Chicanos and they ‘empathized’ with the sorrows and frustration expressed by the American Indian. But the Asian Americans?” (Adams 3). The 60s is the time of emerging racial awareness, the reappearance and a new form of ethnic writings along with the growing number of Asian American Studies in college departments as a result. As the male-female qualities are expressed when depicting the nature of the tiger or the yin and yang symbols as much as in the oppositional ways of naming –for instance “Brave Orchid”, this concept also comes into existence with the publishing of *The Woman Warrior’s* twin “issue” titled *China Men*. Oppositions and overlappings become essential part of the novel which, inter-mediatingly, [is] an auto-bibliographical” one (*United States* 48) with the same intensity; past and present, East and West, a doubleness of life, “yellow-white gaps, [...] the realness of reality, time and space, family and gender, or eating an even the loudness of talk”, as Lee reflects on this (*United States* 48).

Bringing up questions about oneself, breaking the silence after many years, searching for long lost (left behind in the home-country or carried to the grave by ancestors) or new-found self-integrity in the New World makes these two Asian American writers try to write themselves into existence. They seem to give away their secret journey on these intimate journeys of diary, commonplace book or memorabilia writing. Tan’s and Kingston’s insightful observations about the self may come from their exceptional and out of the ordinary identity, their double minority status described in both gender and ethnic writing; the female self among Anglo-Americans and of being a *woman* of color at the same time-which is the second root of the “conflicts, tragedies and difficulties,” (Adams 4) they also have to find their place and womanhood in the Chinese men’s sex-segregated world and that is what Adams describes as “triple vulnerability” (Adams 4). This writing of the foreigner’s concept of selfhood in the mainstream society, the female self among the Caucasian Americans leads us to the possibility which could be described as the fourth factors in this means of making distinction, since some of the characters in *Mockingbird* and in *Joy Luck* are of biracial heritage, I plan on giving a detailed description of their position in society later on.

Suicide and womanhood are a recurring motifs in these discourses of both Tan and Kingston, an alternative to self-seeking. The sad reality of finding sometimes only this desperate way of voice-giving and this single indicator of self-will and power possibly comes from the idea that when a woman's position is definitely less than secure and even fragile and is only fixed by others and not herself call for desperate measures. Let us record the possibilities of a woman described above in the era and in the circumstances that are given by the authors: household slaves of the father, then of the abusive husband and later on of the old mother-in-law, obedient daughters of a domineering mother, tamed relatives of other self-important and more appreciated male kin, living incubators of a society and household required to produce sons as heirs. "A boy can run and chase dragonflies, because that is his nature." instruct the mother Ying-Ying to behave herself. "But a girl should stand still" (Tan 72). In "No-Name Woman", the first chapter in the book *Woman Warrior* by Kingston the aunt's violent and fatal decision of taking her own life and that of the newborn's puts a curse figuratively and also literally on the family and villagers by staining the drinking water as a last autonomous act. Mothers in Tan's narrative also admit considering such act more than once, in "Magpies" the mistreated widow abandoned by her family upon her "shameful" lifestyle (without a choice given) and with her son taken away and being only the fourth wife or the third concubine she subjects herself to complete self-destruction, the only way of rebelling against her status becomes a vengeful ghost haunting her abusers to settle the "scores", planning her death by the calendar, creating a heightened effect by that.

The opening line of *The Woman Warrior* ("You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you" (Kingston 3)) gives the reader a sense of duality, if not contradiction all along the novel, giving the quintessence of the fiction of Tan, too. Women in the similar microcosm of the two works are mostly Christ-like figures suffering from the burden of knowledge and a vow of silence at the same time, not being able to tell and communicate it regardless of however important it would be, sometimes the secret eats them away. This happens in the Woo essays, at least that is the reason for the mother's recent and sudden death given by the daughter, since weeks before finding her lost half-sisters a blood clot makes her collapse unexpectedly. The mothers' generation belongs to the not-tellers or half-tellers giving only hints to the daughters for them to decide to break the silence, getting into further investigation, searching for the most talked about "ghosts,"

family myths and even travelling, a kind of pilgrimage to the starting point, back to China, as Jing-Mei does in this instance. As for the narrative technique, in a lot of cases sentences are cut short by this undecided way of not telling and creating suspense, but frequently this lack of ending, this pause holds greater information quality.

The mythical approach to this life story introduces different gender roles, one is becoming a woman warrior while the little girl grows into a woman raised by her two old trainers in the mountain to survive in nature and even fight the tiger, which blends the realities of the empowering phenomena of reconciling with her American self and the Chinese folk tale of Hua Mulan. The tiger is mentioned on several occasions, as for pretensions, the mythical Moon Lady who in the backstage turns out to be a “he”. Tan records myth and superstition in name-giving, too; “baby milk name” is the idea of naming in the story which superstitious idea of naming was designed to discourage ghosts from stealing children by disguising the infants.

Tan notes on commonly known preconceptions attached to the imaginary co-authors of her book, such as the submissive “China Doll”, the image of the fragile Lotus Flower corresponding with the Chinese adaptation of the suicidal Madame Butterfly, are brought up twice in the novel. This two-way understanding of womanhood, this binary opposition becomes conceptualized in conflicting bias like the dangerous female warrior, the evilly inscrutable and egoistic social climber. Two other fables come next in the list, one of a woman avenger, and one of a poetess embodying swordswomanship and Kingston’s “writerliness” (*United States* 50).

A secret fellowship brings speakers of Chinese together in the narrative, that gives a special outlook on life separate from the mainstream ways of thinking, may it be the meaningful nature of name-giving, constant sign-writing in the air or in sand, practicing the science of calligraphy or even distinct dialects differentiate the speakers of the same language.

Intermarriage and biracial ancestry that comes with it was more welcome overseas than in mainland China. Nevertheless, to a lesser extent, it was still frowned upon by both sides even in the States, due to the former or ongoing war(s) with Asian countries as it appears in “Half and Half”. The age-old presuppositions retold and reinforced in an apologetic manner. For the unwatchful and insensitive eyes of a foreigner the subtle

differences between Asians are too small to detect, like in the case of the soon-to-be mother-in-law of a Chinese girl in the aforementioned piece who when expressing her wishes to his white son not to marry her because the situation is too delicate now when the nation is at war with Vietnam, not bothering herself too much with differentiating the two countries. Arranged marriage is frequently referred to as just as an old-fashioned and tyrannical institution as foot-binding is, even if less gender-specific. The latter can be viewed as the manifestation of the historical subjugation of the female in the Oriental world.

Tan gives an account of the long waiting process at the immigration station and how one of the mothers who left China for America was classified as one of the members of the existing labels War Bride, Student, a Displaced Person (104), even though she did not belong to any of the categories. “She had to fill out so many forms [in Angel Island] she forgot why she had come and what she had left behind.” (Tan 17).

Ghosts are half-mythical, half real creatures mentioned by parents for didactic purposes. Presents and offerings, physical embodiments of spiritual nature are offered to relatives to bring good fortune, to future relatives as dowry and also to pacify fearful gods. Jade substantiates Confucian values as one of the most precious stones, mentioned on many occasions as heirloom coming from the mother’s side.

This chapter attempted to give an account of my perceptions of the two works discussed above with a keen eye for naming, the female perspective, myth, religion and interracial encounters.

“Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you
can hit ‘em, but remember, it’s a sin to
kill a mockingbird.”

Silencing the Bird

My chapter presents Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an example of multicultural voices. A quotation by Bennett used by Virágos to portray the time of the Jim Crow laws states the following: “The cornerstones of the wall were two taboos: interracial eating and intermarriage. Anything which might by any stretch of the imagination lead to intermarriage was interdicted. One law led to a hundred.” (Virágos 60). Here I am going to characterize the notion of biracial heritage briefly. The rather well-off white man fathering kids with a black woman in Maycomb remains a strange soul, for the community cannot come to terms with the fact that he prefers colored people to associating with his own “kind.” They justify his commonly known position as the town drunkard with personal problems and also with the consequence of living with “colored folks”.

The lesson of Atticus’s history of shooting is parallel with his motivation to serve justice for all, including the black man in court, he gives up “being the deadliest shot in the county [shooting weaker creatures]” (Lee 109) just as unselfishly as he decides not to take advantage of his situation as an educated white Southerner to *use* and not to abuse the power and special treatment he was born into. The metaphor of the mockingbird as a useful songbird to be spared and protected from the maltreatment of the shooting kids becomes complete only by the illustration of gentlemanly behavior. Miss Maudie points to this for the lawyer’s kids to understand it by saying: “I think maybe he put his gun down when realized that God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things” adding that it must come without vanity because [someone like him] “never takes pride in his talents” (Lee 109). This is the description of a gentleman, and after this incident and explanation, his son, Jem, decides to pursue the same path, in his father’s footsteps.

It is depicted in a scene how easily racial tension and mob rule can end in lynching, but the lawyer father turns out to be generous and forgetful about the mindless raiders after the near-lynching scene and explains the spirit of the mob with the same leisurely manner when he excuses them, noting that Mr. Cunningham is still a good man just with a so-called “blind spot,” since he acted only as a part of a greater force, in the name of the whole. This leads us to the notion of lynching.

Hidden knowledge, silence and not-telling comes into play once again when the town’s fool reveals to the kids that in fact he leads a sober life, pretending to be a drunkard only to make the town feel better about itself, and giving a false reason for his extraordinary lifestyle in a mix-raced environment. This truth can be a weapon hard to deal with at times. That is why Calpurnia “led a modest double life [...] had a separate existence outside our house” when “not knowing better” and using a different register, speaking (what we would call half-scientifically) Black English with the African congregation in order “not to be out of place” (Lee 138-39). She tones down her hidden talent of speaking close to standard American English only at the Finchs’, unintentionally mediating between the two races. As she puts it “It is not necessary to tell all you know. It’s not lady-like- in the second place, folks don’t like to have somebody around knowin’ more than they do. It aggravates ‘em. You’re not gonna change any of them by talking right, *they’ve got to want to learn themselves* [...]” (emphasis added). Secondly, when lecturing on gentlewomanly ways, she echoes Atticus’ instruction about what ability should one keep to himself not to become vain and self-assured but instead to show empathy for others instead in a more gracious manner.

Virágos lists different images attached to race; the image of the content black slave who does not desire the “anxieties” of Emancipation *and* the stereotypical depiction of the brutish Negro are different outlooks but stem from the same root, and these were fabricated and designed in order to keep the “discrete entities”, as he points out (57), of the different races separately, naturally with Caucasians on the top of this imaginary value system.

As the shooting of mockingbirds serves as a metaphor of racial persecution, so does operate the parable of the dispossession of blacks of their right for knowledge, for literacy, regardless of whom it happens to, whether to the little girl in the grown-ups’ world or to the illiterate descendants of slaves. Scout’s teacher, Miss Caroline tries to prevent her from

opening her eyes to the realities of the world, to empirical knowledge and to her own interpretations thereof as [Caroline] “looked at her with more than faint distaste” when finding out she was literate even as a first-grader since “she’s introducing a new way of teaching [...] to begin with a fresh mind” so while trying to “undo the damage” of her “crime” she tells her “to tell my father not to teach me anymore, it would interfere with my [school] reading” (Lee 19-20).

There are similarities in the schoolmistress’ pedagogical beliefs, possibly summed up as “you can learn to read but only the way *I* want you”, attitude towards minorities when condemning Nazism, yet cherishing its local milder or watered down form in the States. This paradox is not self-evident for everyone, hence the question coming from Scout lamenting on hypocrisy: “Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an’ then turn about and be ugly about folks right at home?” (Lee 272).

Virágos lists various theoretical or actualized ways of taking pride in one’s own black heritage amidst the oppressive atmosphere of the first half of and mid-20th century: the New Negro movement, *escapism* with the promise of staying on American soil and cultural grounds, too, *separatism* as another way close to the ideology of Garvey with its motto of “back to Africa” (Virágos 60) or a similar possibility mentioned previously as an example given by the same author of creating a purely black state within the U. S. in a Utopian manner. Remaining within second-rate citizenship or peaceful coexistence in a Gandhian way are other possibilities worth mentioning.

The Southern background provides the reader with a historically rich and special atmosphere since the novel is populated by former slaves and ex-plantation owners and at a place where a certain amount of tension is still almost always present. It is described as an “awkwardly inland” and an ancient town where racial segregation is everyday experience. Southern mysticism, folklore and superstition are all blended into one, adding Boo Radley’s Gothic figure to the picture. Crow in Bendixen’s work attempts to detect the necessary or typical components of American Gothicism. He notes that “the hero and the villain is often the same man” (129), as it happens in the case of the overtly mystified Radley, adds that not too diverse of a physical representation of the genre is available on American soil and here he compares it to its European roots, but goes on and declares that

what it lacks in terms of ruins and haunted castles has in other respects; instead of these it puts emphasis on what is not there, “what is left out, or *repressed*” (130).

Religion functions as a tool to glue people together. Ever since the black diaspora, the forced entry to the country and the peculiar institution that left them divided, a common spiritual experience was needed. The church scene gives the little girl an insight into Calpernia’s other world and to the so-called black English. It is hard to tell whether one can go as far as to call Tom a black Christ figure or just another subject of a hate crime.

By having been presented with Scout Finch’s narration throughout the story one is given the possibility to stay away from the corrupt adult world and see the occurrences through the eyes of an innocent youngster. However, it is hard to say whether it is really the rather precocious motherless girl or an older character’s memories that we rely on when we immerse into the universe of the books. It is important on more than one level, due to her age at the time the events take place, an early interaction with “otherness” and complex sociological issues would make her understanding of the world more critical than a one-dimensional way of thinking. Providing the reader with an example one may mention the schoolteacher’s hypocritical attitude towards Hitler and the black population with different measurement, hating on the one which ideology probably roots from her inherited American values attached to democracy and judging the other at the same time by victimizing her own nation’s particular ethnic minority, black people. So this piece of work also serves as a coming-of-age experience, losing innocence and getting bitterly disillusioned but gaining a hard-earned knowledge on the other hand: “People up there set ‘em free, but you don’t see ‘em settin’ at the table with ‘em” (Lee 258).

Let us take a closer look at the ways how female characters –a black, a white, a kid and a grown-up- take the roles of cultural mediators and embody cross-cultural interpreters. These ladies of various backgrounds in the story embody the Southern values and traditions that should “remain unbroken” (Lee 4). Aunt Alexandra represents this mentality and tries to tame Scout’s restless and tomboyish ways to recreate the Southern Belle. Social stratification is a crucial matter in a microcosm like this, even the kids try to find out why one family is of a higher social standing than the other. Is it background, land, money, education or race exclusively that makes an “Old Family” or the combination of all these?

It is noteworthy to mention the different ways one can tackle such injustice and politics. The way Bob Ewell does in the novel is one extremity, threats, physicality and blood revenge should never be the answer. The lawyer tries the only legal and possible way, he is the man of reason in the story. Right at the beginning he knows that he cannot win the case, but just as the journalist who helps the black boy avoid lynching because of his belief that a disabled person should not be hurt. Atticus also leaves the knowledge to his kids “I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know you’re licked but you begin anyway, [...] beholden to nothing and nobody” (Lee 124).

Robert “Boo(gieman)” Radley is like a mythical creature in the story, stepping into the light only for a brief period of time, though contributing to the most important part, the climax and going back to his hermit’s lodging just as swiftly: “We had almost seen him a couple of times[....] It was only a fantasy. We would never see him” (Lee 267).

It is interesting to see how the legal system worked at the time. Although Atticus seems to be critical of the system, he upholds and works within, still, it is tradition that makes it stay alive and it is not only the jury to blame for the horrible outcome of the court hearings, sometimes a due process given to a suspect is not enough help against such highly biased people as the community of Maycomb proves to be. Politics is the most prominent and significant way of voice-giving for minorities, without a voting right, without representation by their own people, with knowledge withheld from the oppressed group –that is, literacy- this small community remains in a schizophrenic state of mind.

It is hard to avoid pointing out the curious occurrence of a finch defending a mockingbird. The analogy of the goodhearted and disabled black boy, who probably has a bigger potential than the role he is destined to take by his age and the society he lives in innocently walks into the trap of a poor, uneducated and frustrated white family and the valuable songbird, the mocking bird frequently hunted down by the children of the town works well. This very idea is both shared by the local lawyer and the journalist and then recited by the little girl towards the end. Even after a few truthful Alabamans’ seemingly futile effort “Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell [the accuser] opened her mouth and screamed” (Lee 266).

I this chapter I attempted to critically evaluate this piece of fiction.

Invisible Criticism

To begin with, I will comment on Blair's visualized approach to *Invisible Man*. She recognizes picture-taking as a form of artistic "imagery" equally indispensable to folk elements. She goes on to illustrate how essential vision is as a way of showing

commitment to the case of the “hard-fought humanity” (Blair 58). Expanding this chain of thought she exemplifies her point by presenting blindfolding and unveiling at the fight, the bindi-like third eye at the lobotomy scene, Brother Jack’s glass eye and I might add the paint “Optic(al) White” for our consideration as allusions to unseeing eyes and invisibility.

The anonymous narrator tries to get to the bottom of his invisibility. The intriguing case of invisibility is manifold enough to allow multiple interpretations. For one, it serves as the novel’s focal point. He would like to see the big picture, since from society’s standpoint he is invisible. This irreconcilable conflict of being and being non-existent needs to be resolved in order to put an end to his self-denial. As paradoxical as this transparency seems, not until he realizes that he based his whole existence on the wrong premise of visibility would people grow powerless against him. Bledsoe, similarly to the general attitude of “the great white father[s]” does not appreciate the individualistic aspirations of the protagonist.

While the Brotherhood deserves credit for raising awareness for the black issue, they only wish to do so by also acting in unison, by surrendering personal ambitions to the collective interest. The protagonist soon discovers the different set of their priorities, and tries to break away from this special syndicate, since he enjoys their ardent support only until he does not violate its rules previously laid down. The Invisible Man’s embittered path, his rite of passage is set out and envisioned by him in the following fashion: “Let the white folks worry about pride and dignity [...] get yourself power, influence [...] the race needs good, smart, *disillusioned* fighters” (Ellison 121). The veteran leaves for France in his utmost disappointment, too: “I was forced to the utmost degradation because I possessed skilled hands and the belief that my knowledge could bring me dignity and other men health” which echoes Dr. Bledsoe’s inquiry about the mental patient’s background: “I’ll have to investigate him. A Negro like that should be under lock and key” (Ellison 117). Not only light attributes to his visibility, but also namelessness. We learn that the physicians have his health history and his name in the file, he also comes to terms with his new-found self similarly to “Douglass came north, who, like me, had taken another name [...] ‘You start Saul, and end up Paul,’ my grandfather had often said” (Ellison 308). But there is a difference between self-proclaimed names and ones given by others, the

name-giving practices of the Brotherhood are only slightly better than the new identity he is provided with after the electroshock. He is called a fink, rabble rouser, the extremist leader of Harlem criticizes his backward ways and assigns the name Uncle Tom to him for not helping the “cause”.

The protagonist runs into numerous characters, some of them become his ideological fathers. The disillusioned war veteran who had seen much better days in his time voices his insightful beliefs, so that he would not delude himself with Norton’s purely philanthropic intentions. Even though Norton takes the boy into his confidence, the trustee’s position enables him to purchase his “indulgences” in this very special way, and by also maintaining the other party’s subordinate position in a milder, more enlightened form of master and attendant relation, to this paternalistic” attitude the “vet” calls our attention to when saying: “neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark of your achievement, a thing, not a man. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force” (Ellison 82). Presumably, this also evokes the thought in the reader that there’s a fine line between altruism and one’s purposefully muted conscience.

Before the prime of the Civil Rights movement, “the Negro question” appeared to be convenient, “fashionable”, even, according to Virágos (94), along with tokenism (92), but he argues that these two effected only restricted academic and political spheres of black life. This great deal of sensationalist publicity given to the “cause” at least lured some attention to the inequalities of American public life and had given way to the formation of activist groups and the founding of African American Studies programs from the 60s on. While all the brotherhood and the university faculty members try to make sense of “the *ex post facto* lessons of history” (Ellison 442), they keep rejecting the urgent issue of facing the legacy of slavery. Another then-contemporary issue is the aftermath of the economic slow-down: “a Hooverville shanty of packing cases” (Ellison 272).

The protagonist’s determination to keep track of what is happening around him induces a less than heartily welcome from the fellow activists and all his efforts he channels into self-invention seem to go up in smoke until the very end or beginning, as it is not only how the narration works, the novel’s microcosm itself moves like a “boomerang” (Ellison 9). As for narration, what readily engages the reader’s attention is the thought

process mirrored through both half-voluntary and utterly subconscious inner monologues that Gregson regards as a “polyphonic style” (13): the introducing of the stream of consciousness and dreams, distinguished by italics, which comes handy for the reader, as right away after waking up, dreamland and the physical world is hard to tell apart.

Although the black male protagonist probably shares a lot with the subjugated and neglected female figures of the novel, both being second-class citizens of the 60s on their way to finding their own voice in society and politics, the woman remains just as much distant from his imagination and interest as relevant to it. After a malicious proposal and following the brotherhood downgrading him, he does not like his new district, neither does he find gratification in the “woman question”. Still, some unknown force draws the narrator to the adulterous ladies who appear to be insiders in brotherhood affairs with quite a lot of information to share with the Invisible Man. Yet, they remain hollow and one-dimensional characters as the object of desires and experience only the victim position in the footsteps of a powerful husband or live in the shadow of a father as in the case of the incestuous Trueblood girl. Eroticizing the African-American male does not help much, the projection of this deep-rooted preconception is at its peak when a sad caricature of the rape fantasy is acted out. The very same notion that seems desirable and appealing from the white woman’s perspective creates the central conflict and leads to turbulent dramatic actions in *The Mockingbird*. The only figure who provides him with guidelines and encouragement and who is deeply concerned with his self-development is the motherly Mary, the landlady who apparently bears a resemblance to the Holy Virgin. Hill remarks that these women give assistance “along his course of freedom” (162), similarly to the well-intentioned helpers of the Underground Railroad with the necessity of remaining anonymous.

There are countless references in both Lee’s and Ellison’s novel about “the good ol’ times” made by white supremacist whites or mistaken, intimidated blacks. Virágos gives background information to this mentality (156), the antebellum sentimentalism was popular at the time, every shift from one regime to another can be painful at first, as Woodward further explains the idea: “the temporary anarchy that followed the collapse of the old discipline” and the black and white population did likewise when “clung unwaveringly to the old doctrines” (Woodward 12). In the same fashion, the evicted old couple described as “the old ones, [the] agrarian types (Ellison 238), his foreman of the

engine room described as “slavery-time, mammy-made” (Ellison 185). The psychological imprinting of inferiority seems to be a post-Reconstruction state of mind, victim mentality, to play safe. Brockway holds the remnants of a backward outlook on black life, but the narrator tries to find justification for this: “Perhaps this old Brockway was protecting himself from something [...] Maybe he was dissimulating, like some of the teachers at the collage” (Ellison 172).

Other than his helpers, there are a great number of characters who accelerate further hardships for the Invisible Man and undermine his efforts to achieve his hard-earned self-integrity. Trueblood’s folkloric, yet disgraceful reminiscence turns him into a college dropout, Bledsoe’s intricate scheme leaves him out of work, he also abuses his power and has no intention of finding a job for the protagonist, but the doctor’s opportunistic means are justified by “the hypocrisy which alone means survival for the natively talented Negro” (Hill 150). Others are the catalyst of his actions in a good way, so he is backed by helpers, too; if we put aside such reading of young Emerson’s character as being member another kind of minority, as we can/could see in the case of the female supporters, he stands as a helper of the Invisible Man on his own.

Others offer an alternative for him, an imago, like the grandfather and the war veteran do, and the fluidity of Rinehart’s personage echoes this as well: “he could be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rineheart the Reverend? Could he be both *rind* and *heart*? What is real anyway? [...] The world in which we lived was without boundaries.”(Ellison 401). It synchs with Gregson’s notion of “ontological hybridity” and “his (Ellison’s) fascination with ‘masking’”. It is here that Ellison most explicitly differs from the realist assumptions about the stable self, because he not only regards the self as inevitably fissure and plural, but celebrates that plurality” (13).

The smallness of the half-dead narrator is enumerated by many examples; when he catches one of the doctors proposing castration, towards the closing chapter, an italicized passage is dedicated to his fear of dismemberment. Other than two short relatively insignificant phallic references of impotency and the opposite whereof, the hallucinated castration and the imagined assault scene, his body is struggling more with invisibility, transparency and its indefinite, blurry outlines are also marked lexically; “Where did my body end [...]”, “lost in the vast whiteness”, “lost all sense of proportion” (Ellison 194).

Absurd as it seems, he feels like a cog in the big wheel, part of someone else's plan: "We are the machines inside the machine" (Ellison 177), which invokes the line "I am no hero and I'm far from the top; I am a cog in the machine" (Ellison 320), after an escape from the Brockway episode, now he is in the hands of the factory doctors: "transformed into amiable fellows, [...] and what is even better, society will suffer no trauma on his account" (Ellison 193). Callahan looks at the matter of traits of inhumanity closely and identifies the "mechanized, rigid, life-denying, comical" [...] mass ideology" (227) of the Euro-American mainstream in the novel. Preoccupation with scientific accuracy underlines the same mechanical idea: "other terms, other more accurate ways [...] after all, we all call ourselves scientists here[...] we are all realists, and materialist" (Ellison 248-49) of collective, close to Socialist understanding "the *new* Washington shall work for the poor" (Ellison 248).

Hill identifies the American literary canon, folk tradition, and a touch of modernism as the three main means of "Ellison's formal experiment" (Hill 159), this draws a clear distinction between the last two when supporting Lynne's argument stating that the modernist technique turns its back on "the social and economic [...] oppression" (Hill 159). Callahan points out a transition from "the feudal-folk forms of the South to the industrial urban forms of the North" (24), the Invisible Man recollects a taste of the South, one instance of identification is the following: "Yam is what I am", on another occasion he is called "the very mud of the region" (Ellison 81).

The diction, the puns, the double meaning, slavery-time songs and spirituals like "There's a Many Thousand Gone", "Go Down, Moses" and "Pick Poor Robin Clean" and the incorporating the Uncle Remus circle of stories all constitute to the touch of folklore. Brockway embodies the qualities of Tar Baby: "something too filthy and dangerous [...] is cooked" (Ellison 173 and 175) "...the goo with which he was covered and I thought, Tar Baby" (Ellison 185), Brockway's "stickiness" and contagious leprosy with false stick-in-the-mud ideals is at its peak when calling the union members "ungrateful backbiters" (Ellison 186). These jokesters, tricksters, always in disguise, without a grounded personality playing havoc with him, as Nadel remarks on that they may be connected to earlier animals of myth and fable, or the tricky slave of Roman comedy" (32). Ellison gives reason for the portrayal of his literary folk connections: "I use folklore in my work, not because I am a Negro, but because writer like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the

literary value of my folk heritage. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual [...] I knew the trickster Ulysses just as early as I knew the wily rabbit of Negro American lore [...]" (Ellison, *Shadow and Act* 162).

Ellison's resourceful handling of language enables him to dwell on music and the rich black American vernacular. The notion that the book is a symbolic journey of self-development is justified by Callahan when he calls it a picaresque and a rite (223), but challenges the idea of a more Odyssean heroism when calling the journey more comical than elevated and he places the Invisible Man in the position of a "mock-mythical hero" (Callahan 226) who is incapable of standing up for his rights. Under such extreme circumstances as the battle royal, his words fail as a tribute to the Atlanta Compromise Speech, similarly to the tragic-comic escapade with the drunk white member of the Brotherhood who asks the narrator to sing the slavery-themed spiritual "Go Down, Moses" based on the popular belief that challenges the Invisible Man's integrationalist tendencies and mocks the policies of color-blindness in the Brotherhood. "That night [...] I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths" (Ellison 11). The same rhyming implication plays a role at Clifton's death: "this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed "'trigger,'" (Ellison 346) other than cussing and racial slurs, is a hint that can also be a milder example of the oftentimes outspokenly profane and concrete usage of spoken language in the novel. There was a Southern institution known under the name of Jim Crow that skyrocketed at the time of the publication and affected almost all areas of Southern life. The origins of the verbal form of this expression, to Jim Crow is tracked down by Virágos when considering Woodward's terminological findings partly "lost in obscurity," but one literary reference to it can be pinpointed in Richard Wright's prose (Virágos 58) and also in Ellison's own wording in the novel. The process of transition to desegregation is slow, the countryboy remains fearful of and alert to the white authority, and he recalls his first encounter with a colored policeman "shocking". As for symbolic names Trueblood's, and Rineheart's pass as such, Bledsoe's figure and that of the Founder's can be easily identified with Booker T. Washington (Virágos 62).

Numerous literary allusions to Dante, Melville, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, Twain and the Bible, the latter with the underground whale metaphor, evoke the spirit of literary masters and famous speechmakers. In the "Prologue" the narrator distinguishes his invisible

existence in literature from a novel featuring his namesake by Wells and also from a ghastly, ghostly hero of Poe, as a starting point, this negation brings the reader closer to the possible genre of this piece of prose. Nadel in *Invisible Criticism*, the source of this chapter's title, notes on James Joyce's impact on the "Ellisonian" thinking as the narrator shouts the same phrase at the blond man as young Dedalus' nursery rhyme plays upon (34).

The story of the runaway slave stands well in its own right as a tale of the plantation heritage, especially when giving an account of nineteen years of servitude and captivity in an office where Douglass' picture hangs on the wall. The remnants of slavery, slavery relics displayed in Emerson's office date back to these times, as the leg chain with the memory it evokes, vanishing into a common, obscure past and the "free papers" at the eviction scene (Ellison 220).

Hill loans Blair's idea when pointing out Ellison's real-life and literary "interest in picture-taking" (161) and camera-eye technique. On this note, the narrator is examined through glass aquarium and through thick lenses, the shop window is another prism through he looks at himself. Going all the way with the metaphor of vision, Brother Jack, with all his good intentions turns a blind eye to the real needs of black people, which gives a whole new meaning to the expression knowing that he has a glass eye. Another example of visual art is when he becomes the eyewitness of his fellow Brotherhood member's death which in the tumult of this overtly-politicized event makes him not only a by-stander, but a documentary photographer in a guerilla war situation. And finally, the main artistic endeavor is African art, for instance, the narrator studies the Sambo doll with a keen eye, "such an obscene flouncing of everything human" (Ellison 350) carries it around in his prized briefcase, the "self-mocking image" (Ellison 258) of a grinning black penny bank, but also a few treasured pieces of traditional African art piece in the office of the professor and the Brotherhood.

Much earlier than locating his position in the social-anthropological sense are we informed about his physical whereabouts; in a cellar bordering Harlem. After a fresh start, he finds himself in Harlem as a civil rights spokesman, and the locale is by no means coincidental, it gives ground to strikes, sit-ins, nationalism and non-violent resistance,

separatism, back to Africa, race riots, protest slogans (Virágos 81) as “dispossessed”. The district is the breeding ground of such Harlem-based movements as the Black Renaissance and the newly emerging class, culturally speaking, the New Negro. For the black diaspora of various backgrounds it is notable attraction especially since the Great Migration, even Ras the Exhorter strikes the reader as a real-life West Indian leader of a separatist association.

Public speaking and religious affiliations can affect one another in many cases throughout this piece of prose, pastors make good political activists in real life, too. Rhetorical devices open up a new alternative for the Invisible Man’s political carrier, “*politics* is his passion, ritualized and romanticized” (227), as Callahan puts it, “you were enormously moved, your anger [...] had eloquence” (Ellison 275) as one of his “Brothers” remarks. The Invisible Man’s aims at becoming a skilled orator, partially as a means of revenge against everyone who tried to hold him back, he builds his aspirations on words, not only to uplift his race with “dazzling eloquence” to be the “black Aristotle” (Ellison 275). But his ambitions in rhetoric stem from his compassion towards the less fortunate, the downtrodden, too, more so when his oral discourse is improvisatory, and, consequently, sincere. He is present at events of African American history that are of crucial importance at the time in Harlem, which is convenient in one way, but ineffective in another, since it does not bring him closer to the Caucasians, nor helps him in his intraracial relations in his underground seclusion. He attempts to invoke the spirit of the turn of the century by alluding to the famous line “cast down your buckets where you are”. With his training in speechmaking comes the crucial element of “appeal to emotion” and factuality is soon sacrificed for the sake of persuasiveness. Reverend Barbee succeeds in engaging his audience with the help of the vivid details of the Founder’s larger than life persona and his apostolic mission for the betterment of the black community, so remarkable an act that the pastor goes as far as making a creation myth out of such heroic deed for the young audience to internalize the founding myth of the all-black college.

In the case of *The Mockingbird*, the church service is elevating and electrifying, whereas here the narrator enters the chapel with a heavy heart, the atmosphere and the surroundings are rustic and morose, the sky is moonless and doom-laden, and steps out with the same feelings, only deepened by a note of shame and inferiority, which serves well as an illustration of an authoritarian deed of a punishing God. Another resemblance to

Harper Lee's work is the importance of *The Holy Scriptures* as a then-primary source used for educational purposes as it happened in both Calpurnia's and the Founder's case. Biblical imagery in many ways is the "only accessible ideology" (Virágos 199) at the time, another example of the religious undertone is Tod's personae who can be seen as a self-sacrificing apostolic figure, since his death and the narrator's exquisite eulogy triggers the Harlem riots. Bendixen states that the "call-and-response pattern" (71), usually utilized by pastors, is evoked by the narrator as well, and with the help of catchphrases as "dispossessed" and "law-abiding", he does more than animating the crowd, as if he could channel their enthusiasm and bottle their energies the way the Brotherhood wants. The latter slogan from the two makes the reader recall the *Atlanta Compromise Speech* once more. As a last note, Bendixen discusses the variability of the African American church service and concludes that "black church or black Christianity may appear in fictional works, underscoring the fact that this tradition is not restricted to one pattern of religious structure" binding together African, Native American, European, multiracial, evangelical and 'organized' dimensions. However, he also differentiates a "distinctive ethnic flavor [...] rooted in black expression" both wanted by "the individual and collective identity" (Bendixen 275 and 274).

The protagonist is on his way to underground entrapment since for some he is see-through, for his people he needs to change; membership in all of the organizations he takes part in requires a necessary compromise, it involves "sacrifice" as Brother Jack puts it, it also involves some hypocrisy and deceiving of the public and he has to subject himself to "training", too, in order to "be guilty of no further unscientific speeches to upset" (Ellison 284). He heads for his necessary fall, the ultimate escape; to the subway there he is determined to create an independent existence by casting off all social constraints, isolationism. His very last ambition left to fulfill is to find inner peace which is finally achieved in this meditative, hypothermic state, by waiting for the next move, no wonder his solitary ways are akin to that of the similarly unnamed "Underground Man". His retreat is described as "crammed, trapped" (Ellison 131), and as a "whale's belly" (Ellison 11), Jonas' biblical solitary confinement amplifies the allegorical, prophetic state of hibernation. In his dreams time loops and the change of space gives a unearthly quality, "suspended motionless", out of touch with the real world, detachment from reality, in a nauseous condition.

As Virágos points out the “cultural duality” (130) of the American literary canon, Ellison’s artistic endeavor of self-seeking is expanded to a trinity. The unnamed man ponders on the real message of the dubious gesture of the Founder’s bronze statue: “[...] unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding” (Ellison 34). W. E. B. Du Bois’ imagery of the “veil” and his concept of “double consciousness” in the opening part of his work correlates with this: “[...] the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, [which] only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world”. Further events are yet to come for us to decide whether his underground retreat is a necessary downfall or with the social-political upheaval wearing off on the surface world there is a chance of going up and reinventing himself once again.

In conclusion, Ellison laments on how the Eurocentric literature and culturally diverse fictions complement each other as it was discussed when mentioning his literary forefathers and the impact they had on his worldview: “the necessity of determining my true relationship to that body of American literature to which I was most attracted and through which, aided by what I could learn from the literatures of Europe, I would find my own voice [...]” (*Shadow and Act* 267).

Space and Marginality

The aim of this paper, besides episodes of discussing motifs and patterns of the life of the North Dakotan Ojibwe-Chippewa nation in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, is to highlight the importance of the spatial aspect of identity formation. Krupat and Elliott call

one's attention to this by noting that "from an indigenist perspective, it is not the nation but the 1earth' that is the source of the knowledge and values that constitute resistance to colonialism" (129). Lee sees multicultural thinking the following manner: "bifocal cultural citizenry... [has] its own compelling paradox: that of having put into the imaginative being the America the nation barely knew itself to be, the America delivering notice of an end to its own exclusion" (Lee, *United States* 43). The novel is "non-chronological, multi-narrational" (Schmidt 3) which, structurally speaking, contributes to its circularity with its frame provided by the death of June.

Schmidt's interpretation of the novel is based on the title and remains close to the ideational base of healing and medicine making. What comes next is the detection of the disease, disability and misfortune as a broader sense of reservation life. Moving along and taking her assumption one step further, it is the recovering of the remedial Indian customs and utilizing the therapeutic intentions of writing through the healing process and self-help. The novel is narrated in solemnity an enchanting sensitivity at the same time and is written in a way that helps the characters to regain the common and communal cultural consciousness. It is s depiction of survival and wounds that mark historical changes after the formation of crusts on top of them happen and a healing touch, and writing, on one hand a way of making sense, on the other the ultimate weapon, to borrow Bell's words "I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen" (Lee,*Multicultural* 116).

Schmidt draws parallels between the focal point of the novel, that is, healing and the actual historical happenings and that would be transmitting epidemics, though no explicit references in the analyzed piece of fiction back this up, if not a hint in the form of a quotation does "that first sickness (that) thinned us out", but according to her argument, knowing the historical connections of the two groups' encounter is enough for the assumption (3). Moses argues for "the medicine ways," (Erdrich 73) later comes back dressed in ragged skins of cats as if he were a shaman, the description of "the woods were in June" and she was "as if she really was the child what the old people called Manitous, invisible ones [...]." (Erdrich 87)

The next subject of inquiry is style, the collision of the tragic and the comic, humor in the novel. The fact that the cousins almost hang June on her own insistence while playing in the woods is tragic event in itself. It probably has something to do with her being an

orphan left behind in the woods just as her savior, Marie is with a wish for death, but the rationalization of the hanging is rather comic, her insistence of punishment for stealing the imaginative horses when “playing Indian” with the others and it is strange to see that she sides with the white “cowboys”, a socially imprinted and more likeable group of people than that of Native horse thieves. It is a form of twisted humor, he introduces himself to others as a white man, only with a good tan and the swastika flag on a Native American war hero’s casket is rather ambiguous for it can both be a manifestation of racism and an ancient Indian symbol.

The authority of the mainstream in the novel maintains two separate policies in connection to the Indigenous people, to extinguish and wipe them out as on a theoretical level being the root of mutual feeling of uneasiness or to simply displace them and safely localize their whereabouts in the form of institutions and restricted territories; reservations, boarding schools and penal facilities likewise. An example of the imagined manslaughter combined with entertainment creates the cheap effect of infamy rather than or short-lived heroism, whether Nector dies a hundred times in motion pictures or poses for a traditional canvas-based one, half-naked, in accordance with the usual old-time depiction of a Native American. “Remember Custer’s saying? [...] ‘The only interesting Indian is dead.’” He cannot relate to the image and he would like to take a different role in a Melvillean fashion: “Call me Ishmael [...]. For at least he survived the great white monster” (Erdrich 125). Lee gives account of the depiction of the Native American “through canvas and photography to Hollywood” (Lee, *United States* 94) and television, reinforced visual patterns of Indigenous life, reasons why Nector’s acting career remained short-lived and stereotypical and why kids’ play end in hanging the “horse-thieving drunk” (Erdrich 62) of an Indian American.

As it was highlighted so far, the characters of the novel live in separation, voluntary or accepted. The only exception from this is the case of plurality of racial background in the form of mixed marriages and relationships. But these are of limited importance, the French Christian background in one side of the family remain untold and only touched upon, King and Lynette live unhappily, the marriages to Bjornson and Swede Johnson is ridiculed by the Indian relatives and the mentioning of the Mexican seasonal worker is only an episodic half-sentence, he too remains unaware of his paternity.

To make sense of the clashing ideologies from the two sides and a possible theory behind the self-righteous differentiation I will partly use Homi K. Bhabha's "The Other Question", since most triumphant colonizers from any nation tend to mystify and portray their newly encountered subjects and their otherness in a feminine manner, if the dominant Anglo-American culture's past colonist's mentality can be applied here, even if the primary concern of the usage of this rhetoric are the "Oriental" people. Beverly hates his girlish name and he is willing to do everything to compensate for that from tattoos to the building of bulky muscles. Femininity and passivity associated with even more if regarding the fact that some indigenous nations are gynocentric in many of their social systems. Turning back to the discussion of colonial discourse, Bhabha's matter of interest, he finds its efficiency coming from the fact that anxious reinforcement after a while "needs no proof" which can be applied to any historical and literary environment if needed (95), but instead of merely criticizing the practice of marginalization, he analyzes the process and mechanism thereof. The discourse with its political base and social objective seeks license from the members of the dominant society to introduce "systems of administration" and ruling to "justify the conquest." (Bhabha 101) Different bureaus and educational facilities for the Native Americans took this role, the Nanapush girl in Erdrich's prose remembers her residential school experiences in the following fashion; "I lived by bells, orders, flat voices, rough English. I missed the old language of my mother's mouth" (68).

Part of the oral tradition are naming practices, as for these "'the original earth-based' (Erdrich 307) language of the bush" (Erdrich 46) and Anglo-Saxon names are equal in importance. The aging Lulu Lamartine's insistence on old traditional ways and her project to repopulate buffalos, these massive "old-time stubborn animals" (Erdrich 306-7) Lipsha is in a quest for both identity and a name, in his loss of a father, he takes his mother's name, a tradition otherwise not alien to American Indian customs. Moses was renamed by his mother to trick to spirits who would claim him with the spreading of the illness, but ever since the villager treat him like an otherworldly creature and he lives alone on a one man's deserted island. Henry Junior calls his real father whose identity is kept in secret Uncle Hat, and other times as well Beverly's feminine name "turned him to acquiring nicknames," (Erdrich 106) Nector identifies himself with the figure from his boyhood readings, the captain from Melville's work. "Placenames, from Chicago to Manitoba,

Connecticut to Seattle [...] serve as mere word-shadows of the intricate tribal life histories behind them.” (Lee, *Multicultural* 92)

Good examples of the remaining common tribal consciousness are that the abandoned children as June and Marie are taken in and raised by distant relatives or complete strangers, even in a close-knit family surrounding and that land and ownership sometimes remains indefinite open to various interpretations exactly how the lodgings of many people under the same roof is described: “[the house] was like a communal property for [all] the Kashpaws.” (Erdrich 29) This old-time practice starts to decline since the common land is parceled up and handed out as allotments and its new-found owners, the twelve siblings of the family mentioned above for instance, became divided and scattered physically through the formal and centralized governmental practice of remapping. Other than space, time is a different issue for old Nanapush, the stepfather of the orphaned Lulu shares his concept of time when being asked about his love medicine: “No clocks. These young boys who went to the Bureau school, they run their love life on white time. Now me, I go on Indian time” (Erdrich 71).

The older generation feels that they cannot trust the white men even in their death: “bury me high in a tree, Lulu, where I can see my enemies approach in their government cars,” (Erdrich 71) “reservation roads are like government promises- full of holes ,”(Erdrich 188) mistrust vocalized once more. An alternative to this is tribal self-government and political activism, Nector’s and Lipsha’s way, but at the point where advocacy just is not enough comes gambling, “the only leverage” to make use of into the picture, a new means of fighting the system within a legal framework.

Taking his piece of the pie and turning a loophole in the law to his advantage, with a trickster’s mentality Lyman decides on running a casino. He finds gambling a question of future paved by greed and luck, and it can also mediate between the old traditions of powwow guessing events, it “appeal[s both] to the Gods of Chance” and to the retired white people who would bring back their money made by using “Indian hunting grounds”, what he calls history’s irony (Erdrich 326-7). Lyman in the novel notes that he contributed to the legal grounds of gambling, “anticipating some sort of Indian gaming regulatory act,” (325) assumably the one with capital letters from year 1988. An encyclopedia entry points out that due to its significance gaming was described as the “New Buffalo” movement and

notes the occurrence, that even before wide-ranging gaming practices Native American characters were connected to gambling in short story fiction, though usually penned by non-indigenous writers, with the “motivation of cheat[ing] whites”. However, this source remarks that dependency on its profits can be “another trap”, baring in mind that casinos and bingo parlor can be run only in accordance with governmental activities (McClinton-Temple and Velie 128-29).

Social ills that affect the American Indian are also openly discussed by Erdrich: alcohol abuse, residential schools, scarcity of commodity food just to name a few. Lee gives account of post-war troubles on the reservation from other pieces of fiction by Erdrich in which the same characters appear, though warfare and the trauma it causes is not necessarily a peculiarity of the Native people, one in such condition may feel twice as much left alone fighting for a nation which does not take proper care neither of its veterans whose mind is bent by the war, nor its indigenous inhabitants and blending these two states heightens the effect. Henry Lamartine is a victim of what is described above, “for him it [war] would keep on going,” (Erdrich 185) a fact that contributed to his death, accidental or suicidal.

Fabulizing, like that of the factory products imitating Native artifacts in the novel can be described as relating appealing fables to the so-called “ignorant” and, according to the popular belief, converting the wild children of Mother Nature in the need of conversion, that is what the nuns do with Marie: “Humility of the spirit. So rare in these girls.” Marie is similar to the Nector, the extra in her longing for fame outside the reservation, but instead of the entertainment industry she chooses another way to make her name known and climbs up to the mountain, the symbolic Calvary, where the missionaries live. But she is recognized as a faithful Catholic only through the sacrifice of self-mortification, since the hypocritical Sister Leopolda’s only way to cover up child abuse, her act of injuring Marie’s hands is to declare her a saint with the false stigmata [to] “be carved in pure gold” (Erdrich 43) with the further promise of beautification through a rigorous life and drawing her blood, similarly to the case of Kateri Tekakwitha.

Another figure who outgrows the boundaries of the reservation and breaks free is Gerry, a restless spirit and a national hero of some sort, who is always on the run from the police, and manages to beat the system, so his people take his side, which indicates a deep-

rooted lack of trust in governmental action and jurisdiction once again. His quest for freedom and his illegitimate son's pursuit of identity are interconnected, Lipsha finally meets his biological father, "the politicking hero, dangerous armed criminal [and] escape artist" (Erdrich 341), a Pillager whom no prison can hold too long. When being asked about murder that he is convicted of, though the son is provided with a sufficient answer, he still does not share it with the reader, only takes into consideration both possibilities, if he is a murderer and if he is not. The same unspeakable answer is the source of Moses Pillager's mystical personae in "The Island", when he remains unnamed and living dead from the tribe member's viewpoint, and her lover, Lulu does not give away his real name, only says a dozen names to trick the spirits once again in order to keep him alive.

Marie Lazarre does not only take Catholicism to integrate into the white-dominated society, she would also like to conceal the other side of her heritage to pass as a European American since on the outside she is "white as a fish" (Erdrich 72) with an aspiring politician of a husband who is chairman of the tribe, sometimes invited to Washington and she visits her former abuser, Sister Leopolda with revenge in mind or to show that her life changed to the better at least, "for by now I was solid class" (Erdrich 148) as she puts it. The same half-pretentious ways does Beverly choose to hide his minority status due to his aspiration to climb the social ladder; with "the need to get ahead and considered Indians quite backward" (Erdrich 109). For his white girlfriend the idea of the "other" can only be accepted if exoticized, and the question of hybridity and multiracial background comes up again when he claims only French and Black Irish ancestors and his heavily pigmented skin is rationalized in a bitter yet comic statement that he has got a nice tan.

The representation and symbolism of water both in the novel and in American Indian cosmology generally, and most of its forms, appears to be a deadly element. Spatially speaking it borders the reservation, and though protects the island of Moses from smallpox, it also takes the life of Henry Junior and it is emphasized that death by drowning is the worst of its kind, because it never lets the deceased one's spirit rest. June's death, the novel's structural frame is described by a euphemistic elegy connected to water: "the snow fell deeper [...], but June walked over it like water and *came home*" (emphasis added, Erdrich 7). In "Crossing the Water" the closing scene of the novel geography is connected with the tribal present; "this river was the last of an ancient ocean [...], that once had

covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land” (367).

As a last note, I conclude that space seems to be crucial in the process of self-development.

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