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INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, literature has been perceived as one of the most effective ways of expressing feelings and emotions, thoughts and beliefs, traumas or dreams. Whether the result of a *mimesis* process aimed to offer an illustrative social, cultural or political fresco of the reality realm, or on the contrary, the result of a *phantasia*, one which highly challenges our general understanding of reality, literature has always granted the human condition an exquisite place able to shelter its multilateral nature.

In the context of contemporary literature, which seems to be freer than ever in its expression, we cannot help noticing the utmost importance offered to the individual's superior levels of existence, mainly with emphasis on the consciousness seen as a complex and inexhaustible human mechanism. In his work titled *Contemporary Fiction*, Jago Morrison clearly affirms that "contemporary fictions are anything but homogeneous" (7), adding that "they are interesting precisely for their ability to locate themselves in the interstices – the spaces between national cultures, genders and histories" (7). We are also inclined to believe that one of the most gripping features of contemporary fiction is that it seems to function as a heterogeneous macro space where cultures not only meet, but also clash, sometimes to such an extent that they produce a highly aporic effect on the individual who gets his position as a restless *in-betweener*.

The *literature of in-betweenness* is one of the sections of contemporary fiction which largely focuses on the complex processes of the consciousness. Seen mainly as an artistic expression of the cultural clash that its authors experienced, this fruitful section of literature successfully manages to offer a thorough insight into one of the deepest and darkest valences that one's consciousness can reach: torn, ambiguous, chaotic, but still strong in its nature.

Considering the literature by in-betweeners as the traumatic dimension of the individual's consciousness at its most, we ground our research on two of the most intriguing branches of this type of fiction, namely African-American and Mexican-American, the latter being also known as Chicana fiction. The main aim of the present research is to analyze the extent to which the concept of space, understood in its double acceptance as physical (social) and mental, can lead to aporic states of

impasse, paradox or restlessness at the level of consciousness. And how else could we do that if not by focusing our analysis on the fictional works by two outstanding contemporary authors – Toni Morrison (African-American) and Sandra Cisneros (Mexican-American) who themselves represent cultural, social and gender clashes. Therefore, at the conceptual center of the present research there will lie our suggested phrase *space of aporia*, which we consider appropriate to be used in the attempt to explore spaces, be them physical (social), mental or hybrid.

In order to effectively reach our aim, we will organize the present research into five chapters. Before proceeding with any practical and critical analysis of literary works, we feel it is essential to dedicate the first chapter to the concepts which lie at the basis of our investigation. Consequently, in order to offer consistency to the phrase intended by us to represent the conceptual epicenter of the research, we consider it mandatory to dedicate the first chapter titled “Theoretical Background” to the exploration of two conceptual poles: *space* and *aporia*. Each gravitates around other related concepts, such as *time*, *mestiza consciousness*, *identity* and *self-knowledge*, all essential to the final accomplishment of the present doctoral research.

Space will be approached from the perspective of recent views. The investigation of this concept will start with Henri Lefebvre’s valuable work titled *The Production of Space*, in which the concept is attributed biomorphic and anthropological semantics that help us use it in physical implication. Moreover, we will also emphasize its social externality by referring to Edward Soja’s *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, which sees space as an intrinsic part of the human being who gets engaged in a continuous process of creating spaces in the generic form of *habitats* and ends up being influenced by his own spatial product. After focusing on its strictly social and physical function, we will try to push the physical boundaries and adopt a more transcendental perspective which we recognize in the same work belonging to Lefebvre, the moment he brings into discussion the power of consciousness to cut patches from the physical realm and transfer them to the mental level. Once reaching the mental valence that space can embrace, we will try to answer the following question: *In its transcendence, does physical space look for mental space or does the quest occur the other way round?*

While proceeding with our investigation on what we consider to be a conceptual metamorphosis of space, we will also bring into discussion the term of *tight space*

conceptualized by Herman Beavers in his work dedicated to Toni Morrison's fiction, *Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Beavers defines the term as mental and psychological seclusion from the social realm with which the individual finds it difficult to build a relationship. The reason for choosing to integrate this concept within our spatial metamorphosis lies in the ability of the term to strengthen the mental valence that space can reach, and consequently to contribute to the conceptual consistency of our suggested phrase – *spaces of aporia*. Since Beavers' option goes for the determiner *tight*, the idea of a space in which the individual experiences an uncomfortable feeling of mental and spiritual pressure opens up.

Furthermore, what we consider to stand for the climax stage within the conceptual metamorphosis of space is a state of hybridity resulted from a blending of the physical and the mental. Thus, we will support our view on space as a hybrid concept by referring to Michel Foucault's theory of *utopias* and *heterotopias*, which he successfully conceptualized in his work "Of Other Spaces." We consider this theory to be a challenge to the concept of space, an invitation to give up the traditional approach of space generally determined by social coordinates and adopt what the present world requires for: spatial thinking. We consider utopias and heterotopias one of the most intriguing forms that spatial hybridity can embrace, due to the way in which both concepts juggle the physical space. Therefore, we will investigate the way in which the physical and the mental inputs interact within these two hybrid spatial forms, at the same time aiming to answer another question of the present research: *Is it possible for space to keep a balance between the physical and the mental within its hybridity, without the risk of one stifling the other?*

Since we also opted for a hybrid perspective on space, we cannot overlook another essential concept whose presence we consider more than mandatory, if spatial hybridity is to be reached. Because both utopia and heterotopia are about transcending physical boundaries, the concept they are both correlated to – *time* – must also acquire more flexibility. Consequently, the perspective on time that we find the most appropriate to match Foucault's utopias and heterotopias belongs to Henri Bergson in his seminal work *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* in which he feels the need to distinguish the objective of the social time measured by the pendulum and the subjective time that only consciousness is able to generate. By bringing together Foucault's and Bergson's

theories, we aim at finding an equivalent of Foucault's heterochronies in Bergson's concept of subjective time.

As regards the other term that we employ in our conceptual phrase, we will consider the concept of aporia as denoting any kind of mental, psychological and spiritual impasse or blockage caused by dichotomous factors which plague the consciousness with the paradox they lead to. Therefore, we will start from Nicholas Rescher's *Aporotics: Rational Deliberation in the Face of Inconsistency* and we will frame the concept as a cognitive state of blockage caused by the coming together of individually consistent, but collectively incompatible, frames of reference. We will also take into consideration Andrea Nightingale's pleading for the necessity of one being aware of his aporia expressed in "Plato on *Aporia* and Self-Knowledge," as well as the type of aporia pointed out by Stephen D. Ross in his work *Metaphysical Aporia and Philosophical Heresy*, which relates to the situation in which multiplicity may divide identity.

Generally considering aporias as paradoxical situations leading to spiritual and psychological blockage at the level of consciousness, we will attempt to investigate the extent to which this tense concept could be associated to the highly problematic concept of *mestiza consciousness* conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldúa in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Since Anzaldúa's concept is about a type of consciousness plagued by contradictions and paradoxically fed by the same contradictions, we believe in its aporic dimension. An entire section of the first chapter will be dedicated to our attempt to offer a thorough picture of the concept. Thus, we will start from Anzaldúa's theory which portrays the mestiza consciousness as a space where contradictory cultural voices speak simultaneously and result in a chaotic and disorienting effect on the mestiza who remains stuck somewhere in-between all these intrinsic contradictions. When defining the mestiza consciousness, we will also try to see it as the perfect inhabitant of what Homi Bhabha calls the *third space* in his *Location of Culture*.

The reason why we opt for the mestiza consciousness as the type of consciousness to be matched with what we call an aporic state is justified twice. First, Anzaldúa attributes this type of consciousness to mestizas generically seen as people of mixed ancestries, which is right the case of Cisneros' Chicana protagonists who share this mixture of roots: Mexican and American. Second, we regard this type of consciousness as the idea of paradox at its peak since it is made up of contradictions and needs to reach consensus, aims at stability while feeding itself

with flexibility. Moreover, taking into account the fact that besides being a war of the flesh, it is also an inner war which takes over the psychic, we will also attempt to extrapolate Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza consciousness* by introducing the phrase *mental mestiza* to be applied to any non-mestiza individual who, despite not sharing the condition of having mixed roots, proves to be stuck in the same aporic state of mental and spiritual blockage which prevents him/her from moving on. We believe that the physiological race mixture of the mestiza may be transferred at the mental level of non-mestizas under the forms of mixed frames of reference generated by factors other than strictly racial ones.

Therefore, as an addition to our overall aim, we will also try to challenge the concept of *mestiza consciousness*. Taking into account the fact that it seems to fit the Chicana consciousness the best, by dealing with both Toni Morrison's (African-American) and Sandra Cisneros' (Mexican-American) fiction, we also attempt to prove that *mestiza consciousness* is a much larger and deeper concept which has the power to exceed the limits it was intended for (the Chicana consciousness). We believe that spaces of aporia may be applied to a larger category of individuals and determined by a wider range of psychological aspects, not strictly cultural or racial ones, all these leading to *mental mestizas* whose torn consciousness may not necessarily be the result of a cultural clash, but of a mental one, a situation in which the latter may prove just as tormenting as the former.

In order to support the concept extrapolation, we will consider one's consciousness, including the mestiza's, as part of the wider concept of identity which we generally regard as a highly complex and problematic process. Thus, we will discuss Jeffrey Weeks' perspective on identity in his work "The Value of Difference," according to which identity is the result of both representation and production, which we will translate in terms of the (conflicting) interaction between *the private* and *the public*, resulting in a state of acceptance or, at times, in a state of negation. As a completion of Weeks' theory, we will also call in Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in order to emphasize the inexhaustible nature of the process of shaping one's identity.

Following the theoretical chapter, all the other four chapters will aim at critically applying the concepts introduced and explored in the theoretical section, each of them bearing a precise research objective which will contribute to the eventual

reaching of the overall aim. In order to see the extent to which the discussed concepts can help us reach our research goal, we have also selected works belonging to Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros, which we consider highly illustrative of the concepts we will be working with.

Thus, the second chapter titled “When Heterotopia and Utopia Meet Aporia” will be handling Foucault’s concepts and will aim at answering the following question: *Can both utopias and heterotopias be considered proper sources of mental aporic states?* The chapter will be structured in two sections: the former, titled “*Beloved* – Heterotopia of Deviation” will bring to the fore Toni Morrison’s novel which we consider most illustrative in portraying the physical, mental and spiritual estrangement undergone by an individual whose behavior is labeled as collectively deviant. The latter, titled “*The House on Mango Street* – A Utopian House of One’s Own”, will focus on Sandra Cisneros’ collection of vignettes with a view to reading them through Foucault’s concept of utopia.

The third chapter “Spaces of Social and Moral Decay in *Jazz*” will aim at providing the answer to another research question, generated from the previous one: *Could the two dimensions of space – physical (social) and mental – create aporic states individually, or in a blended form?* In search of a consistent and convincing answer, we will project our critical analysis on Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* by means of which we will associate the physical coordinate with the social space of the City and the moral one with the inner space of the characters, Joe and Violet Trace.

While still believing in Soja’s theory which promotes the intrinsically spatial nature of human beings, we will split space in two with the aim of investigating their individual power to generate aporic states. We believe that in *Jazz* space can undergo this split as the City functions as a new and luring space where the couple, already internally plagued by past experiences, is seeking social integration. In other words, we will try to demonstrate how their consciousness gets a double aporia: on the one hand due to the experiences they went through outside the space of the City (experiences which were transferred and carried along at the mental level), and on the other, because of the chaotic urban jungle they gradually immerse in. It is true that the aporic state increases its intensity the moment the physical (social) and the mental join, but our point does not necessarily lie in combusting the aporia by daring its limits, but in patenting its non-hybrid causality. In analyzing the mental, we will explore the extent to which we can apply Stephen D. Ross’ theory