

TOPDOGGING QUADRILLE: AN ANALYSIS ON THE PORTRAYING OF GENDER ROLES IN *THE BLUEST EYE* AND *TOPDOG/UNDERDOG*

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Abstract: This paper highlighted and problematized the portraying of gender roles in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Parks's *Topdog/Underdog* (2001). With a comparative approach, the debate on the matter of father and motherhood associated with the assigned roles of men and women was enlightening to raise awareness to the impact these representative figures have on the characters under examination. Also, the analysis of the synonymic relations that are established in the discourse of characters of the pieces lead to the conclusion that "beauty" in *The Bluest Eye* means "whiteness" and, in *Topdog/Underdog*, it means "richness". Finally, a parallel was set amid "topdogging" and "Quadrille" (ANDRADE, 2013), considering the "topdogging" act in the stories forms a chain of events and consequences in which one move/person is connected to and interferes with the next.

Keywords: The Bluest Eye; Topdog/Underdog; Gender portraying; Black Arts Movement

1. INITIAL WORDS: Setting the Context

The Bluest Eye (1970) is seen as one of the major works by Toni Morrison, the first Black female writer to ever be awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature. The prize's motivation took into consideration that the author "[...] in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality" (MORRISON, 1993, [lecture]), which makes reference to her guaranteeing the protagonism to African American cultures and their relationship with the white American society. In this sense, life is given to what is nowadays understood as institutionalized racism, a direct aftereffect of slavery, and the conflict between races and its consequences.

Topdog/Underdog (2001) is the work which awarded Suzan-Lori Parks the first Pulitzer Prize for Drama ever conceded to an African American woman. In a play that brings to life the struggles of Black men in such white American society, the protagonism is given to two Black brothers who need to deal with the condition their color, social class and family matters provide, all while struggling with their problematic manhood.

Sixty years set apart the contexts in which the storylines of *The Bluest Eye* and *Topdog/Underdog* occur: 1941 and 2001 respectively. However, beforehand, it is necessary to place spotlights on both the impact of these works in postmodern society and the importance of the novel to the play.

The Bluest Eye was produced between the years of 1962 and 1969 and portrays the struggles of Pecola, a young Black girl who lives in Ohio with her – morally and financially – broken family, and of her

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friend Claudia. In the period of its composition, the Civil Rights Movement was changing American history forever: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially forbid discrimination that had, among others, race and color base and also prohibited racial segregation in schools; The Voting Rights Act of 1965 started protecting voters and giving space to areas in which most voting population was part of the minorities. Afterwards, the Black Arts Movement (BAM), in 1965, started setting the context for Blacks to have more space in arts, literature included. Its considered father, Imamu Amiri Baraka, much recognized for *Dutchman* (1964), and its politically engaged artists created a whole new path for the upcoming post-war Black writers. Douglas (2006) proposes the idea that the novel takes up the possibility of “whether, following desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement, Black Americans could or should adopt dominant white cultural practices and values” (p. 142). Concerning this issue, the author suggests that “Morrison is describing a typology of cultural loss” (ibidem, p. 144). He features Geraldine and says that she “[...] can’t change her race, but she can try to change her culture, and this process is described as loss rather than a gain or transformation” (ibidem, p. 144). In such a sense, similarly to Geraldine, Pecola, the protagonist, attempts to accept her cultural background and heritages, tending to give in to the white normativity.

The said path created by the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements is, therefore, the previous context to *Topdog/Underdog*’s production. The playwright considers it a post-revolutionary piece, about which Fox (2011), in comparison to the revolutionary work of the founder of BAM, states:

In contrast to Amiri Baraka’s methods of violent and shocking representation to comment on social injustices for black people in theatres revolutionary phase, Parks uses imagery, realism and human issues to outline the underlying problems in post-revolutionary black society and how America has in many ways sanitized its history of black oppression and forced black men into these roles through years of slavery and inequality ([online]).

The ones of identity and African American culture are, hence, emphasized issues in Parks’s work. The author makes use of The New Black Aesthetic – which attempts “to move past the white-black conflict” (MURPHY, 2009, [online]) and “endeavors to place black people in situations that do not focus on oppression” (ibidem, [online]) – to present her storyline in *Topdog/Underdog*. The matter gains life in the figures of Booth and Lincoln, brothers who have problems fitting in the white 21st century society. Such lack of identification felt by the brothers goes through the economic factor: even if skilled, Lincoln does not want to surrender to the stereotypical and dishonest world that hustling represents, but, at the same time, is paid less than the employers would pay a white man to impersonate Abraham Lincoln. As to Booth, he is happy to fall into the stereotypes: easy money is good money for him, who does shoplifting for a living.

Thus, it is evident that both art pieces provide necessary aspects to be reflected upon. As mentioned supra, the protagonism in *The Bluest Eye* features the Black girls Claudia and Pecola. Meanwhile, in *Topdog/Underdog*, two Black men receive stage space. In addition, however, to discuss race and social class, the matter of gender must also be taken as a subject of analysis. With a comparative approach, it shall be brought to light the categories of gender in both stories and examine their portraying.

2. GENDER: A Dated Construct

As it was understood in the later years of the 21st century,

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time (WHO, [2021] [online]).

In this regard, for this analysis, it is crucial to briefly debate on the comprehension of the social roles of Black men and women in the context of both works under observation.

The Bluest Eyes's storyline is set in the 1940s, a time in which the impact of World War II was evident when it came to genders. Even if the first image that comes to one's mind on the topic may have to do with the man going to the military and the woman staying at home with the children in pure expectancy of his return, this was not reality for all American women. When commenting on the U.S. War Manpower Commission propaganda, McEuen (2016) states:

Since the employment of married women had been a long-standing practice in working-class families and in the middle-class African American community, the WMC propaganda implicitly targeted white middle-class women who had not typically worked for wages (McEuen, 2016, online).

So, female labor was already present in working-class and African American families at the time. In the novel, this is the case of Mrs. Breedlove, later identified as Pauline, who had worked since young age and, when Cholly was too drunk to bring home the livelihood, "took on the full responsibility and recognition of breadwinner" (MORRISON, 2004, p. 91).

It is interesting to notice, however, that some gender stereotypes present in the novel do not seem to take into consideration the current in-progress changes in gender comprehension. In the very first page, the behaviors associated with the established genders are clear: "Mother" is "nice", while "Father" is "big" and "strong". The use of personality adjectives to describe the female character and of physical ones to describe the male shows the strict gender construct.

Then, when the subject is the figure of Henry Washington, the following is said among Pauline and her friends:

"Well, somebody asked him why he left a nice good church woman like Della for that heifer. You know Della always did keep a good house. And he said the honest-to-God real reason was he couldn't take no more of that violet water Della Jones used. Said he wanted a woman to smell like a woman. Said Della was just too clean for him."
 "Old dog. Ain't that nasty!" [...]
 "I kind of thought Henry would marry her one of these days." "That old woman?"
 "Well, Henry ain't no chicken."
 "No, but he ain't no buzzard, either." "He ever been married to anybody?" "No."
 "How come? Somebody cut it off?"
 "He's just picky." (MORRISON, 2004, p. 15-16)

In this context, sexism based on stereotypes around the female figure is evident. It is told that a man left a woman because she did not smell like a woman; she was considered too clean for him. In the women's point of view, that thought makes him nasty, but, having renounced her, he becomes "picky". It is possible to understand that men can choose whether they want to be single or not, which would not

affect their manhood, but women should try to hold men – by keeping a good house –, otherwise they are considered *old* and unloved.

From the Women's Liberation Movement to the first celebration of the International Women's Day (1975) to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) up to UN Millennium Declaration (2000), the fight for gender equality has come a long way. Hence, the production of *Topdog/Underdog* – which is set *here* and *now*, referring to the year 2001 –, carries a background of solid changes in the understanding of gender roles in society. An example of women empowerment can be seen in the figure of Cookie: unhappy with her marriage, she had a right to a decision and made it, throwing Lincoln out of their home. In the position of the renounced – and Cookie's attitude must be compared to Henry Washington's – all Lincoln did was to accept her choice and look for another place to stay, having to deal with identifying once again to the feelings of rejection. Here, in comparison to the portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*, Cookie can choose her own destiny, as Henry's manhood allows him to, and Lincoln, as Della, has to accept it.

However, when Grace occupies her rightful place of decision maker in the relationship with Booth, she suffers the consequences of his denial in accepting the feeling of rejection. In the turning to the 21st century, the idea of *femicide* was already a matter of debate.

Until 1992, the term femicide was used by journalists and by society in a colloquial manner in order to refer to the death of women. That year, Diana Russell and Jill Radford gave legal and social meaning to the concept in their text *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, defining it as the murder of women, committed by men, for the simple reason of their being women. Russell and Radford developed the concept with a view to highlighting the gendered motives behind the deaths of women at the hands of men: attempts to control their lives, their bodies and/or their sexuality, to the point of punishing through death those women that do not accept that submission (OAS, 2008, p. 3).

In this regard, it is interesting to analyze the statistics that set the scenario in such a moment. The results of Mercy and Saltzman (1989) show that

Blacks accounted for 45.4 per cent of all spouse homicide victims. The rate of spouse homicide among Blacks was 8.4 times higher than that for Whites. (p. 595) Firearms were used in the perpetration of 71.5 per cent of spouse homicides from 1976 to 1986 (p.596).

If established the relation of such data to Parks's stylistic element of writing *Rep & Rev*, “a literal incorporation of the past” (PARKS, 1995, p. 10), it is possible to conclude that, on the one hand, in the figure of Grace, there is the repeating of the historic facts of femicide. In accordance with the line of reasoning developed by Achilles (2010), this would be the repetition of an “anthropological pattern that can be revised but does not lose its essential contours” (p. 17) and, following the thoughts of Tucker-Abramson, it is safe to interpret that Booth's behavior is a “desperate assertion of his manhood” (2007, p. 90). On the other hand, Cookie is the personification of the revising of history, one in which things can actually take a different path for women.

In this sense, it is likely to understand that, although the conception of genders is dated and changes throughout time and society, the portraying of the roles does not vary immensely in the sixty years that set storylines of the pieces apart.

3. PLAYING PRETEND FAMILY: Dolls, ma and pa

Having discussed the concepts and representations of gender, it is fundamental to argue on how the works represent the idea of motherhood and fatherhood in relation to womanhood and manhood in a family structure.

When it comes to Claudia, the first person narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, she is presented in the position many young girls find themselves in since long before the 1940s and up to this day: receiving a doll as a gift. She struggles with it:

From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked. What was I supposed to do with it? Pretend I was its mother? I had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood. I was interested only in humans my own age and size, and could not generate any enthusiasm at the prospect of being a mother. Motherhood was old age, and other remote possibilities. I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it (MORRISON, 2004, p. 20).

The use of the verbs *represented* and *expected* leads to a reflection on Claudia's exposure to compulsory motherhood, "the idea that all women should be mothers and that they should gain intense satisfaction from it. According to this view, a woman's ultimate purpose is to be a mother [...]" (COLTRANE; ADAMS, 1998, p. 90). Akin behavior is portrayed by Cholly when Pauline tells him about her second pregnancy: "he surprised her by being pleased. He began to drink less and come home more often. They eased back into a relationship more like the early days of their marriage, when he asked if she were tired or wanted him to bring something from the store" (MORRISON, 2004, p. 88). In this moment, there is the social understanding that a woman should be treated well during pregnancy because that is her function, after all. Claudia's questioning of such a pattern that oppresses her is indeed relevant to the comparative analysis done here, since the same is not true when it comes to Pecola.

Coming from a morally and financially broken family, she is exposed to compulsory motherhood through an atrocious way: being raped by her own father. As highlights Werrlein (2005),

[...] through Cholly's inability to express love constructively, Morrison paints a picture of black fatherhood so incapacitated that it sacrifices its children to save itself. Likewise, when the sight of Pecola's abused body on the kitchen floor incites Pauline to beat instead of comfort her daughter, Morrison portrays a similarly affected motherhood, suggesting that histories of suffering not only debilitate parents, but turn them from nurturers into oppressors (p. 61-62).

It was the woman's – the mother's – "obligation to make domestic spaces into safe havens" (ibidem, p. 61) and the man's – father's – to actually provide for the family. However, Pauline is the one that ignores the household whenever possible, leaving the kids on their own, and Cholly is the one that manages to put them outdoors and officially split the institution. This can be seen, for instance, in the fight the couple has for Cholly to go get coal to keep the house warm while Pauline does housework: "If working like a mule don't give me the right to be warm, what am I doing it for? You sure ain't bringing in nothing. If it was left up to you, we'd all be dead" (MORRISON, 2004, p. 35).

Referring again to the wartime period in which the storyline occurs, the U.S. government managed to allocate women in jobs for which they were skilled and indicated that "Mothers with children under fourteen were encouraged not to seek employment outside their homes unless other

family members or trusted neighbors could offer reliable childcare” (MCEUEN, 2016, [online]). Pauline was obliged to do the contrary as a result of Cholly’s incapability of providing, which culminated in the biggest symbol of the brokenness of the family structure: Pecola’s pregnancy.

Accordingly, the lack of ability of Cholly and Pauline to execute their parenting roles implies the impossibility of them fitting the social roles expected for men and women in contemporary North American society. As a consequence, the absence of Pecola’s identification of her parents, mainly her mother, as meaningful figures is enormous. This is evidenced by the fact that the girl refers to her mother as “Mrs. Breedlove” instead of “Mama”, as does Claudia to hers, or similar title. As stated by Kathon and Kibriani (2015), it is a “relationship devoid of compassion, love and sympathy which results in the daughter’s eventual dysfunctional sense of identity” (p. 485) and ends up leading Pecola to a place of self-hatred.

The same issue is experienced by Lincoln and Booth in *Topdog/Underdog*. In opposition to what one must expect when reading the preface of the author – “This is a play about family wounds and healing. Welcome to the family” (PARKS, 2002, p. 7), this is not a story about a happy traditional North American family. The brothers ought to deal with the rejection, which directly affects their personality and manhood, caused by having been abandoned by their parents. In this regard, it is interesting to compare that, while for Pecola parenting has no specific meaning, for Booth it is a synonym of abandoning: “Thats what Im gonna do. Give my kids 500 bucks then cut out. Thats thuh way to do it [sic]” (PARKS, 2002, p. 98).

In a corresponding way in which the lack of dedicated parenting figures affected Pecola, it happened to the men. Achilles (2010) stresses the places from which each brother depart:

While Booth hankers after the parents’ potential reunion, Lincoln considers the family as an arrangement that can be reproduced at will with different participants. Booth cannot bear such randomness. If he cannot have his parents back, he wants to team up with Lincoln again (p. 15).

They try, therefore, to suppress that absence by playing pretend happy family in the one-bedroom where Lincoln lives temporarily with Booth. Funny enough, the visitor is the “baconwinner” and represents the “Pa” to the house owner’s role of “Ma”. Hence, the gender roles are well defined, as states Alshammari (2017):

Lincoln’s employment, thus his economic advantage, brings him closer to scoring the capitalist ideal of masculinity in modern America and becomes an embodiment of this ideal in the eyes of Booth. He is more of a man than Booth who stays home and takes care of the house and Booth knows that very well. This tension creates a rivalry between the brothers. They both wish to fulfill the masculinity criterion (p. 65)

In an analogy, the inheritance that each brother received from their parents goes far beyond the 500 dollars: Lincoln got his from their father, and Booth, from their mother. Along with it, they inherited their personalities and have been acting like that since the abandonment. The father spent two more years providing for them before leaving as their mother did, and that is the trait Lincoln has inherited. According to Booth’s narration, the mother asked him to look after his older brother before leaving, and one could find that behavior in the sheltering he offers Lincoln when he is thrown out by Cookie. In addition to that, his connection with his mother can be seen if taken into consideration that the murder was also provoked by his instinct to be close to the only thing his mother left him and that he keeps so

dearly: not necessarily the money, but the stocking in its original format. Alshammari (2017) also stresses that “to efface any identification with his mother, or his feminine side, he amplifies his manhood throughout the play by fabricating sexual encounters with Grace and Cookie” (p. 66). This analysis leads to the interpretation that, in the character’s point of view, it is something negative to act “like a woman” and, therefore, to be one. The correct, then, is owning one. Aiming at defending his manhood from his own womanlike behavior, “Booth diverts the attention to another definition of manhood fostered by the African American culture that is: virility” (ibidem, p. 66).

Like Pecola’s parents, theirs were not capable of executing the roles that were socially assigned to them as man and woman: father and mother. The consequences in the brothers’ lives were so big that they also developed a dysfunctional sense of identity and, in the end, abandoned – by disputing the place of player and played, of top and under – each other just like their parents did. In this sense, there is the perpetuation of the cycle portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*: the personal failure derives from the failed system.

4. WHITE AND RICH IS BEAUTIFUL

The analysis done so far requires the comprehension of the status that the idea of power, in relation to gender, possesses in the works under observation.

The Bluest Eye, as mentioned in the first section of this article, had its production context set in the glorious years of the Black Arts Movement. In opposition to it, however, as highlights Douglas (2006), “that Geraldine, like Pecola, does not believe that ‘black is beautiful’ is the thematic center of the novel” (p. 144). The protagonist is the portraying of the African American female that is willing to give up her cultural background and its physical traits to the white supremacy established in contemporary society. As the cause for that, it should be considered the massive influence of whiteness induced by constant exposure to blue-eyed-white figures such as the Shirley Temple cup, the dolls received in Christmas time and the verbal appreciation of white beauty.

In Pecola’s specific case, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that she occupies a place where she is constantly surrounded by ugliness. From the tangible environment of her household – “They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly” (MORRISON, 2004, p. 33) – to her family heritage:

But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. [...] Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove–wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. [...] You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (ibidem, p. 33-34).

It is described as if ugliness ran in their blood. Still, such lack of beauty is not necessarily related to their body, but to their attitude. Much of Pecola’s ugly self-identification is a reflection of her mother’s, who treated herself as ugly and did the same to her child since she was born: “Eyes all soft and wet. A cross

between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (ibidem, p. 91). As another consequence of Pauline’s inability to execute the mother role she was assigned to as being a woman, she installs in Pecola the notion that she has never been nor will ever be beautiful. In accordance with Bryce (1992), “[...] being both ‘poor’ and ‘ugly’ excludes Pecola from sharing in whatever social and economic tidbits that may be offered. Pecola and her parents cannot fully comprehend the depth of ostracism and are powerless to change the situation” (p. 39).

It is valuable to notice, however, Claudia’s behavior in opposition to Pecola’s. In contact with the figures to which she is exposed, she reacts differently. She varies from lack of comprehension to anger, for instance, when it comes to Maureen Peals, a light-skinned and green-eyed girl:

If [Maureen Peals] was cute—and if anything could be believed, she was— then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? [...] And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made her beautiful, and not us (ibidem, p. 57-58).

Claudia, then, does not identify with ugliness in the way Pecola does. She relates to the feeling of not being recognized or valued as pretty.

The said *Thing* that makes “the Maureen Peals of the world” beautiful can be understood as their light-colored eyes and clear skin tone which brings them love from the peers. As an aftereffect, Claudia is revolted with the place of power that such beauty guarantees to the Maureens. She does not, nonetheless, admit defeat to the *Thing*; that movement is up to Pecola.

In her desperate resorting to the Soaphead, she begs for the bluest eyes. The choice of words used to report what went through the man’s mind is fundamental for this analysis: “He thought it was at once the most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received. Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty” (ibidem, p. 124). The synonymic relation established between “beauty” and “blue eyes” and between “Black” and “ugly” demonstrates the obvious impact of institutional racism in the lives of African American women in the 1940s. In this sense, as Seraman and Selvakkumar (2013) state, the novel “makes one of the most powerful attacks on the relationship between white standards of female beauty and the mental and psychological oppression of black women” (p. 5).

In *Topdog/Underdog*, it is possible to understand that the synonymic relation of beauty is not established only with whiteness, but also goes through the matter of economic power and its impact on masculinity/manhood. In the words of Tucker- Abramson (2007), “Both characters are in crisis – economically and with respect to their masculinity – and Parks’s notion of wealth is both a cause of and a metaphor for the crisis” (p. 90).

As mentioned in section 3 of this paper, Booth, in order to escape from his womanlike behavior, resorts to his virility and supposed ability to attract women. Tucker-Abramson (2007) also states that “In lieu of being a man in the economic sense, Booth tries to assert his manliness through sex” (p. 90) and that “the ability to obtain and control women is symbolic of the ability to obtain and control money, and by extension, power” (ibidem, p. 89). However, the very fact that Grace is not present in the play is a symbolic expression of Booth’s deceased manhood, and it is possible to interpret it as being the

reason why, after she breaks up with him, he “poppo” her: his masculinity was not enough to keep and control her; he needed money.

In this regard, the synonymic relation between “beauty” and “richness” as well as between “man” and “sex” is implied. Booth’s discourse corroborates this interpretation, especially when he tries to convince Lincoln to go back to hustling: “Pockets bulging, plenty of cash! And the ladies would be thrilling! You could afford to get laid! Grace would be all over me again” (PARKS, 2001, p. 30); “You look good. Like you used to look back in thuh day when you had Cookie in love with you and all the women in the world was eating out of yr hand” (ibidem, p. 44). In these excerpts, the younger brother makes use of the idea that if they had money, they would be guaranteed once again with the power of being desired. In a similar conception of Claudia and Pecola’s, who think that whiteness and blue eyes grant recognition and value, they believe that economic status is the key to being contemplated with love and worth.

Parks and Morrison’s works fall into Fanon’s (1967) notion that if there is the identification of oneself to a sick society, then one is sick with the same ailment. In other words, as Pecola identifies with a racist society that understands that white blue-eyed girls are the pretty ones, then Pecola herself is racist and suffers from its illness. The same is applied to Booth: once he identifies with a society that believes men are synonym of sex and that money is recognition, then he suffers from all the illness of capitalism. Therefore, the conceptions of power, i.e., whiteness and richness, – which are intrinsically related to the gender roles each character represents – are considered social illnesses of North American society.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper highlighted and problematized the portraying of gender roles in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Parks’s *Topdog/Underdog*. Having analyzed the context of production and of the storylines, it has become evident that socially constructed and dated gender understandings have evolved, but, certainly, still have a far-reaching path to trace. The debate on the matter of father and motherhood associated with the assigned roles of men and women was enlightening to raise awareness of the impact these representative figures have on the characters under examination and in society as a whole. Finally, the examination of the synonymic relations that have been established in the discourse of characters of the pieces lead to the conclusion that “beauty” in *The Bluest Eye* means “whiteness” and, in *Topdog/Underdog*, “richness”. If, in the novel, as states Werrlein (2005), “For power they need beauty, and for beauty they need whiteness” (p. 63), in the play, for power they need beauty and for beauty they need richness.

One final remark must be made to conclude this work: the analysis on the top and underdog relations among the characters of the pieces. It is understood that the roles can be, and are, constantly interchanged between Booth and Lincoln in their interaction, but the same is not valid for most of the established interactions in *The Bluest Eye*. In Morrison’s, the “topdogging” seems to come from social fixed structure, while in Parks’s it seems to result from the relation entrenched between the brothers. In an analogy, the “topdogging” act in the stories forms a chain of events and consequences in which one move/person is connected to and interferes with the next.

A parallel can be set amid “topdogging” and “Square Dance”²⁹³, by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (2015, p. 8). The poem brings to life a chain of events formed by modern love and its impossibility. Adulthood is featured in the piece, which brings an initial moment of unanswered love between the members of the quadrille and then its resolution, taking into consideration that life changes in ways that were not expected.

João loved Teresa who loved Raimundo
who loved Maria who loved Joaquim who loved Lili
who didn't love anyone.
João went to the United States, Teresa to a convent,
Raimundo died in an accident, Maria became a spinster,
Joaquim committed suicide, and Lili married J. Pinto Fernandes
who had nothing to do with the story.

Hence, it is possible to link the poem to the play and the novel and conceive following: the tragic dance of Black North American men and women being oppressed into a white supremacist society:

Cholly topdogged Pauline who is topdogged by Whiteness who
topdogged Pecola which
Claudia is revolted about.
Cookie topdogged Lincoln who topdog played Booth who
was topdogged by his mother.
Cholly was arrested
Pauline disinherits her kids
Pecola surrender to cultural loss
Booth disinherits Lincoln and pops
Gracewho never appears in the play.

²⁹³ João amava Teresa que amava Raimundo
que amava Maria que amava Joaquim que amava Lili
que não amava ninguém.
João foi pra os Estados Unidos, Teresa para o convento,
Raimundo morreu de desastre, Maria ficou para tia,
Joaquim suicidou-se e Lili casou com J. Pinto Fernandes
que não tinha entrado na história.

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