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RESEARCH PAPER

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GOING HOME: NARRATING MATURITY AND SAFETY IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* AND NICK HORNBY'S *HOW TO BE GOOD*

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The paper explores the idea of home as treated in two dissimilar texts representing distinctive genres and literary traditions: Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1957) and Nick Hornby's novel *How to Be Good* (2001). Hansberry's male protagonist Walter and his African-American family are on a literal quest for their own home, which is at the same time Walter's quest for maturity and his masculine identity. Hornby's first-person narrator is Katie Carr, middle-class woman and a medical doctor, undergoing a mid-life crisis, expressed in her desire to get divorced and live alone, away from her everyday familial struggles and duties. Despite the two protagonists' obvious contextual differences (gender, race, class) their journeys seem to converge at one point: both of them eventually come to find peace in domestic security. Focusing on issues of home, class, and gender, the analyses of these two texts point to the idea of home as a site of acceptance, inclusion, security, and maturity for the protagonists, despite the fact that home is, and remains, a political space. Both play and novel depict their respective protagonists in reversed gender roles, possibly suggesting that most of the existing criticism connected to home and gender overlooks the possibility that home, although inevitably political, may still be a place of refuge, safety, and even personal growth. Both texts signify the universal importance of home, which gives their protagonists roots and safety (regardless of gender) symbolized in the forms of a material home (a house), and the mental states of home (a sense of belonging to one's family) and homeliness.

Keywords: *A Raisin in the Sun*, *How to Be Good*, home, maturity, safety, gender roles.

1. INTRODUCTION

In her review "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of Literature" Shelley Mallet presents a multitude of approaches to the meaning of home that has, over years of disciplinary research, developed into a "multidimensional concept [...] conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying" (Mallet 2004: 62), which renders the discussion of home from only one angle impossible. In fact, the concept of home is so delineated (and thus complicated) by its full immersion in the socio-economic, psychological, ideological, chronological, and spatial context of a given text or character that it becomes difficult to discuss it comprehensively. Valid attempts toward a more universal representation of either home or gender roles typically include parallel readings of Anglo-American texts (for example, Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Armstrong 1987; Strehle 2008), since a cross-cultural approach provides scholars with a more versatile body of literary texts addressing specific phenomena in different cultural and temporal contexts. Additionally, it is ineffective to talk of home in the twentieth and early twenty-first century without considering capitalism as the period's dominant mode of economic and social organization, creating not only the backdrop against which the home is set, but also shaping the concept of home, due to its influence over its subjects. This influence is performed as an ideology that shapes people (through gender roles) and space (through division into public and private spheres), and relegates particular groups of people into specific spaces (typically, women occupy the private, and men the public sphere).[1] This, however, is complicated by issues of race and class, both of which influence a person's public and private performance and perception, and determine the space he or she will occupy. More complications arise with the postmodern developments of liberal capitalism in Western societies, where the axis of private and public (as well as that of male and female) is continuously destabilized since, according to Mark Fisher, the liberal capitalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries merges life and work, as capital follows us even in our dreams and shatters our nervous systems (2009: 34). In *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Sennett

[1] Among the oldest testimonies of such division is Aristotle's *Politics* (1999), in which he writes of the two spheres: the home (*oikos*), the private sphere occupied by women; and the city (*polis*), the public space reserved for men. See also: de Tocqueville (2002 [1840]); Engels (1978); Friedan (1979).

highlights that the precarious conditions of new capitalism erode family life by making the values that this life relies on (such as commitment, duty, and trustworthiness) obsolete (1998). Moreover, the demand for both parents to work and to consume goods and services breaks down traditional gender roles and challenges the traditional function and structure of home: "late capitalism insists and relies upon the very equation of desire with interests that parenting used to be based on rejecting", that is "the 'paternal' concept of duty has been subsumed into the 'maternal' imperative to enjoy" (Fisher 2009: 71). These changes call for a reassessment of what *home* really is, and how contemporary writers represent it.

Despite the complexity of the concept, it seems that home has largely, and quite justifiably, been connected with oppression, repression, claustrophobia, anxiety, and violence in scholarly discussion (see Gilbert and Gubar 1979; Poovey 1988; Ellis 1989; Macpherson 2000; Punter and Byron 2004; Strehle 2008).[2] The typical approach is to reveal home as contrary to what it stands for in universal, everyday vocabulary; while we teach children that home is a place of refuge, safety and love, literary theory and schools of criticism, as well as literary production,[3] uncover it to be the very opposite. While valuable for revealing issues of inequality and oppression, and for raising awareness of the need for change, this approach is insufficient, as it does not address the concept of home as an important space of refuge, inclusion, and connection, nor the fact that home as such is threatened by the dominant economic ideology. Moreover, in addition to issues of gender and gender roles (and the inversion of these roles), it is necessary to address issues of class, and how the states of want and poverty and prosperity and abundance interfere with family dynamics and the perception of home. Therefore, this paper provides a somewhat different approach, by suggesting that texts as divergent as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1957) and Nick Hornby's *How to Be Good* (2001) can converge in their approach to home as a space of warmth, affirmation, personal growth, and safety, without rejecting or blurring the political dimension of home.

[2] Since the literature on the concept of home is extensive, these references represent a starting point for the interested reader, rather than a comprehensive list of texts that outline literary uses or interpretations of home as a negative place. It would be impractical to list here all the works that deal with that subject.

[3] For example, Gothic fiction typically sees the home/house as a place of violence and fear, as do feminist fiction and crime fiction.

2. I DREAM OF HOME: HOME IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

In 1957, Lorraine Hansberry (at the time a 27-year-old college dropout) wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, a play that would become one of the most important African American texts of twentieth century American literature. It is an established fact that Hansberry's play was inspired by her own life experience. The Hansberrys moved into an all-white neighborhood in Chicago in 1938, but before long their disgruntled white neighbors stoned their house, horrifying the family. The problems of segregation, homeownership, (American) dreams, heritage, pride, identity, and family are masterfully discussed in this play. In her article, "The Politics of 'Home' in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*," Kristin Matthews explains that " 'home' becomes a complex space that is simultaneously material, historical, philosophical, psychological, and political," by identifying the problem of being " 'at home' in one's nation, one's community, and one's own skin" (Matthews 2008: 578).

While Matthews analyzes the play closely with regard to its particularity (the Younger family on a quest for a literal house) and its universality (finding a home within a larger community, namely the United States of America), she does not clearly define nor discriminate between the terms *home* and *house*. In this paper, the discussion will focus on the multiple meanings of home, namely the different understandings of the notions of home and house held by Walter Lee and his mother Lena, and how these understandings reflect their ideas of an *ideal* (future) *home*. In addition, the analysis will point to the peculiar reversal of gender roles in the play. This reversal clearly defies traditional feminist theory, "which has historically *rejected* the idea that home is a positive phenomenon for women" (Fox 2007: 426), and highlights the issue of class by presenting the family's poverty and inability to provide as the factor that makes home both the ultimate goal and a space of frustration.

As its title suggests, the main focus of the play is a dream: that of an African American family to have the better life they have worked so hard for. This dream is epitomized by the desire to *own* a physical house (for the first time), a milestone for the Younger family. As Lindsey Marie explains: "the American Dream has often appropriated the home as a symbol of social achievement [...] Each character has internalized their own ideals of what home should be, reflecting their personal relationship with the paradigm of the national mythos of progress" (Marie 2014). In a similar fashion, Williams comments that homeownership is "a metaphor for *personal* and *family* security [...] giving people a stake in society and a sense of control over

their lives" (qtd. in Fox 2007: 424). Ever since Lena and her husband came to Chicago "to seek jobs and justice in the North" (M'Baye 2009: 178), they have been living in a kitchenette building in Southside Chicago. Kitchenette buildings, mainly rented to African Americans, were tiny apartments with a shared bathroom.[4] Even though this dwelling was enough for Lena and her husband, once the children arrived they quickly outgrew it, and now, with Walter's family living there too, the living conditions become unbearable. However, this family of six has been making the best of it for over a decade, and it is only when an incurrence check for $10,000 arrives that everybody recognizes the *now or never* opportunity for a better life.

The physical *houses* in this play represent their current apartment and potential future dwellings (a three-bedroom house in an all-white neighborhood in Chicago for Lena, or a mansion for her son Walter) that would comprise their *ideal homes*. Both Walter and his mother Lena wish to own "a freestanding house with a yard occupied by a single family" (Mallet 2004: 67), the preferred dwelling for most people.[5] However, the crucial difference in their ideal homes relies on the fact that Lena wishes to take her present *home* to a better *house*, where the next generation could have more chance of success. Sensing that the family is falling apart because there is not enough room to accommodate one more person, Lena buys a house in order to preserve her family. For her, family and home are one. On the other hand, Walter dreams of a better *house* which he will make a *home*, and thus show the world that they have succeeded. Throughout the play, Walter behaves as if their current apartment is a reflection of his family and home: a poor, weary, and run-down space. He conflates his literal house and his family, which becomes the source of his frustrations and a driving force behind his dreams of a mansion, a gardener, pearls, yachts, and the best schools for his son Travis. Not feeling comfortable and relaxed in the apartment, Walter is uncomfortable and tense with his family, so he easily rejects the achievements of his ancestors. As Lena tells him, "In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity [...] You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; [...]" (Hansberry 1966: 61)

[4] Gwendolyn Brooks depicts the African-American existence in such dwellings in her poem "kitchenette building," where dreams suffocate in "onion fumes" (4), and "yesterdays garbage [is] ripening in the hall" (6), and drowning in "lukewarm water" (13).

[5] See Porteous (1976: 383–396) and Cieraad (1999).

Even though both Walter and his Mama seek a place where they can be "fully fulfilled" (qtd. in Mallet 2004: 69), the difference between how Walter and Lena envisage their future house speaks volumes about their identities. It becomes clear that Lena knows that a home is more than a house, whereas Walter's need to own a mansion is representative of his identity crisis, rooted not in issues of race but in those of class and the perception of home, which is among other things, inaccessible to the poor:

> I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room – (*very, very quietly*) – and all I got to give him is stories about how white rich people live [...] I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy. (Hansberry 1966: 22–60)

Put like this, a new house serves as a catalyst for resolving Walter Lee's identity issue: "As Madigan et al. (1990) indicate, the literature on the significance of home ownership variously argues that it is a source of personal identity and status and/or a source of personal and familial security" (Mallet 2004: 66). A house in the form of the extravagant mansion that Walter would like to own clearly portrays his desire for the personal identity and status that come with such a dwelling. His desperate shriek "Here I am a giant – surrounded by ants!" (Hansberry 1966: 71), though far from being true, indicates his desire for the identity of a successful man of the house. As for Lena, familial security is the driving force behind her pursuit of a modest house, but one that she owns. The choice of such a house in an all-white neighborhood is not an expression of her racial agenda, but is driven by a more pragmatic reason: it is affordable. As she says, "Son – I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family" (Hansberry 1966: 79). Lena is not concerned by the hostile environment, since her family history has taught her that they can overcome any obstacle if they stick together: "when the family recognize the value in each other's means of expression and 'measure' each other 'right' (Hansberry 2004: 145), then they are able to unite versus outside oppressors" (Matthews 2008: 567). The ending of the play suggests that, once again, the Younger family is ready to submerge into the outside politics of home, now that they have reconciled and strengthened their meaning of home as a space of proud and hardworking people, who "will try to be good neighbors" (Hansberry 1966: 130).

The discussion of home and gender reveals more layers of the concept of home in this play: each member has his or her own function and position within the family. Unlike the common practice among middle-class white families in the 1950s, where the man was usually the breadwinner and the

woman a housewife and mother, everybody works in the Younger family. Throughout his life, Walter's father Big Walter was a manual worker, and almost the stereotypical breadwinner and head of the household. Unlike his father, Walter Lee works as a servant, a chauffeur for a rich white man. In his father's eyes, Walter's job is the same as Lena's or Ruth's—one of servitude. In addition, Walter Lee did not assume the position of the head of the family upon his father's death—that role belongs to his mother, Lena.

In first wave feminist writing about home and gender, men perceived home as "a signifier of status and achievement whereas women view[ed] home as a haven" (Mallet 2004: 75). Later, Mallet continues, the majority of feminist authors wrote that for men home was a "space in which they have ultimate authority […] a haven from the pressures of the outside world, even a site of leisure and recreation" and for women a place of "oppression, tyranny and patriarchal domination" (Mallet 2004: 75). However, Young claims that "the true target of feminist critique of *home* is not in fact the idea of a connection between women and their homes, but instead […] the problem is with the woman's role within the family, rather than her attachment to her *home*" (Young 2000: 49). *A Raisin in the Sun* reverses this by focusing on the male rather than the female protagonist. Walter's mother Lena does not have a problem with her role in the family, and neither do Ruth and Beneatha. On the contrary, the three women are ready to work harder in order to finally leave that "rat trap" (Hansberry 1966: 32) of an apartment. Lena states, "I – I just seen my family falling apart today […] just falling to pieces in front of my eyes […] When it gets like that in life – you just got to do something different, push on out and do something bigger […] " (Hansberry 1966: 80). This is consistent with what bell hooks observes in her collection of essays *Yearning: Race*, *Gender*, *and Cultural Politics*:

> Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside of the public world. (hooks 1990: 42)

Home as a site of recuperation, relaxation, acceptance, and being your true self, then, serves as a means of resistance to the outside world. This is how Lena feels about her home; a sense of togetherness and belonging gave her ancestors the strength to overcome slavery, migration, and poverty, so it is natural that she is willing to do whatever it takes to defend her home.

However, a closer look at the power, control, and authority of the Younger family points to a particular reversal of gender roles, manifested in the fact

that Lena has the money (the insurance check belongs to her). With that economic control, she makes the family's decisions, even managing to stir social and racial incidents. In contrast, her son feels entrapped, emasculated, and oppressed, both by his family and the outside world, and seeks his own, true identity. The famous breakfast scene, in which Walter presents his dreams to his wife Ruth, who ignores him by reminding him of his breakfast, points to Walter's dissatisfaction with his life to the point of hysteria:

> Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death baby! And his woman say – [*In utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs*] – Your eggs is getting cold! (Hansberry 1966: 22)

By dismissing his wife's advice and warning, Walter tries to prove that women know nothing about business; they are unable to see and understand the world past their domestic sphere. Though Ruth seemingly lacks the vision of a better future (unlike Walter, who has one, despite its flaws), she is quiet about her desires simply because she knows that the insurance money does not belong to her. Walter's dreams, on the other hand, have disconnected him from reality; he is oblivious to Ruth's pregnancy, and reluctant to avert her from an abortion. It is this incident that sets Lena in to motion to buy a bigger house, saying: "When the world gets ugly enough – a woman will do anything for her family. *The part that's already living*" (Hansberry 1966: 61–62). Since Walter is caught up in the dreams that are destroying the family, Lena must assume the position of the head of the household, and do what must be done to protect their home. In many aspects, Walter feels and behaves in ways that have usually been attributed to women, which suggests that this text departs from stereotypical representations of gender. Walter finds his home and family restrictive to the degree that he must escape them physically (Hansberry 1966: 59–60). Furthermore, it is his mother who eventually grants him the rest of the insurance money, and appoints him man of the house. She renounces the money and the leadership, for nothing is more important to Lena than for her children to have the opportunity to learn (even from their own mistakes), grow, and mature:

> […] Walter – what you ain't never understood is that I ain't got nothing, don't own nothing, ain't never really wanted nothing that wasn't for you. There ain't nothing as precious to me […] There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else – if it means – if it means it's going to destroy my boy. (*She puts her papers in front of him and he watches her without speaking or moving*) I want you to take this money […] I am telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you suppose to be. (Hansberry 1966: 86–87)

Although broader socio-economic processes trigger the plot in *A Raisin in the Sun*, this plays conflates the ideas of home, house, family, and identity, predominately focusing on the issue of being *at home* with oneself. As Matthews observes, "it is not necessarily economic resources that keep a home but rather the net worth of the self-expression of a number of different individuals" (Matthews 2008: 568). Lena is aware of how her life has been shaped by outside factors (slavery, migration, the kitchenette building), but has managed to create and preserve her home despite these problems. Throughout the play, Walter struggles to integrate his past into his identity because he tailors it to standards that do not apply to an African American man in 1950s America. It is only when he acknowledges and appropriates his legacy that he can understand the value of home and family, thus becoming a father, a husband, and—a man.

3. HOW TO BE GOOD DESPITE TEMPTATION: CHOICE, MATURITY, AND HOME

When it comes to women and the home, both British and American fiction have largely addressed the suffocation of their female characters in the Victorian role of the *angel in the house*, and their attempts to escape the confines of the domestic space, which usually represents a space or place of limitation. Similarly, much feminist criticism has focused precisely on the semiotic decoding of the home and homeliness as distinctly negative, revealing its *oppressive nature*. In fact, in her book *Women's Movement: Escape as Transgression in North American Feminist Fiction* (2002) Heidi Macpherson shows that escape from home is the only means of emancipation for women. She highlights female characters who are voiceless while remaining within their prescribed gender roles, and who are liberated into fullness by escaping home. With Hornby's protagonist Kate, as with Hansberry's Walter, this is reversed. Hornby's novel depicts home as a place of inclusion not oppression, and as a political space in which the balance between personal desires and socioeconomic circumstances is constantly negotiated.

The protagonist of *How to Be Good* is middle-class woman Katie Carr. She is a medical doctor undergoing a mid-life crisis, expressed through her desire to get divorced and live alone, away from her everyday familial struggles. Katie, however, feels oppression where there is none, as her husband does not really limit her freedom: "I'm neither brutalized nor

degraded by my relationship with David; it's just that I don't really like it very much" (Hornby 2002: 27). Unlike many fictional female characters represented as genuinely suffering, voiceless, and oppressed, Katie is empowered enough to be able to leave her husband more or less on a whim:

> I'm in a car park in Leeds when I tell my husband I don't want to be married to him anymore. David isn't even in the car park with me. He's at home, looking after the kids, and I have only called him to remind him that he should write a note for Molly's class teacher. The other bit just sort of […] slips out. (Hornby 2002: 1)

What troubles Katie is, according to Freud, a very natural desire for happiness, since "to become happy and remain so" is the purpose and intention of human lives (Freud 1989b: 25). However, as he further explains, the problem is that happiness "in the strictest sense […] is […] an episodic phenomenon" (Freud 1989b: 25), so if the desired situation lasts for a longer period, it merely produces a feeling of mild contentment, which is what often happens in marriages like Katie's. In situations like this an individual will be more likely to indulge in various (selfish) pleasures, disregarding the demands of his or her actual life. This pattern will be repeated until a person enters a new stage in their personal growth, and reaches maturity (Freud 1989a: 7–9).

Katie's desire for personal reinvention and a more intense feeling of happiness drives her into an unwanted affair with a man she is not sexually attracted to. She tries out single life, spending her nights away from her family, and socializing with single people who "drank wine, and listened to Air, who are French […] to me Air sounded modern and childless and single, compared to say, Dylan, who sounds old and married and burdened – who sounds like home" (Hornby 2002: 212–213). To Katie, home is at first the "old and burdened" place she is running from, whereas single life is about "cool music and white wine and letter boxes and a closed door when you need it" (Hornby 2002: 213). This kind of permanent dissatisfaction and psychological malaise is, according to Oliver James, to be attributed to selfish neoliberalized capitalist policies and culture, which incite extreme aspirations, as well as the expectation that such aspirations can be fulfilled (James 2008). Ironically, Katie soon realizes that her new friends only have one concern in life—to find a partner: "None of them want to be single" and "their romantic status" is a topic that "would come up in a discussion about anything at all" (Hornby 2002: 213). At this point, Katie becomes aware that, for her, there is no fulfillment in single life, and returns home as the place closest to her idea of contentment. Her *rebellion* thus may seem to fail, and

her return home might be interpreted as a feminist defeat, especially in light of the fact that it is a male author who gives voice to his female narrator and protagonist, possibly coloring his representation with his own patriarchal view of the world. But the fact that Katie's husband gives up on his career as a successful columnist in order to dedicate himself to their home, children, and his own spiritual revival, simultaneously accepting Katie's roaming and long working hours, unsettles what could have been the reestablishment of patriarchal gender roles in the Carr family. In fact, home is a safe haven for both of them: the career-oriented, stressed-out mother and the spiritually inclined, tolerant father, both middle-class and privileged. The reversal of gender roles, and the turn of events in general, complicates the interpretation of home in *How to Be Good* and brings into question the applicability of the framework typically used to discuss, for example, Toni Morrison's, Virginia Woolf's, or Kate Chopin's female characters.

To see home as depoliticized, and merely "a private, secluded space for settlement, separated from the public arena in a dichotomy of separate spheres" as it was traditionally seen in the West (Strehle 2008: 1),[6] would mean accepting that, as Mary Poovey suggests in *Uneven Developments*, (middle-class) women must be removed from public life and decision-making, and relegated to the private sphere (Poovey 1988: 1–22). Feminist and postcolonial theorists have found that there is a distinct connection between home and the public world, because home is a patriarchal space in which nation, culture, and the marketplace are negotiated (Strehle 2008: 1), and where women's rights are seen as either less important or non-existent. Obviously, Katie can hardly be seen as excluded or marginalized: she is white, financially well off, well educated, independent, and a respected professional, and her home is not a place of oppression. But it cannot be seen as depoliticized, either, as Hornby saturates his protagonists' lives with contemporaneous cultural and political circumstances that clearly shape their self-perception and their decisions, making it impossible to talk simply of Katie and David's midlife crises as mere psychological phenomena.

In her book *Home Matters* Roberta Rubenstein relies on psychology, myth, and gender to highlight the emotional aspect of home in literary texts.

[6] Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* explores the role fictional representation plays in constructing human identity as gendered, "provid[ing] the metaphysical girders of modern culture—its reigning mythology" (14). According to Armstrong, domestic fiction reinforced the gendering of separate spheres and the perception of the individual's private sphere as being "outside and apart from social history" (9–10).

Strehle criticizes Rubenstein's readings of home as flawed, since they omit the "analysis of the causes for the women's feelings in relation to power, money, labor, race, class, sexuality, or gender," which suggests that "women's feelings float lightly above the gravity of raced and classed existence," and that their problems are a consequence of feelings that can be "worked through" (Strehle 2008: 19). To a certain extent, Strehle has a point, and in the case of the previously mentioned female writers it is easy to see that a mere psychological reading might be too narrow to encompass the possible meanings inscribed in, for example, Toni Morrison's texts. Regarding Hornby, the material circumstances of *raced and classed existence* may be less obvious, but they are still evident and need to be taken into consideration; Katie's life is governed by late capitalist culture and the anxiety produced by what Renata Salecl (2010) would call the agony or paradox of choice, or what James (2008) might refer to as affluenza, caused by selfish capitalism.

David's saturation with his highly successful career and his quick replacement by another columnist, his attempt at a New-Age lifestyle, Katie's desire to be like the people in the commercials, and, ultimately, the readers' interpretation of their actions and desires necessarily represent a "position on postmodernism in culture," and therefore "an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (Jameson 1997: 3). Capitalism and the culture of consumption fuel the excessive desire for change epitomized in the fast consumption of goods, jobs, and relationships, promoted aggressively in the media, which function as ideological apparatuses of the system (Althusser 1971: 170–175). In her book *Choice* Renata Salecl suggests that the limitless options available to contemporary men and women cause anxiety and dissatisfaction rather than contentment. At first glance, "the ideology of the developed world: [that] the individual is the ultimate master of his or her life, free to determine every detail" (Salecl 2010: 1) may seem empowering, but it ends up being paralyzing. According to Salecl, "In today's consumer society we are not only required to choose between products: we are asked to see our whole lives as one big composite of decisions and choices" (Salecl 2010: 1). This is precisely what Katie is struggling with; the capitalist economy falsely emphasizes as truth that it is our choices that define us, not history, family, or the other objective circumstances over which people have no influence. Rather, it is up to each person to (re)create him or herself *from scratch*, and the responsibility is overwhelming. Consequently, instead of making bold decisions people search for the middle ground. This helps them appease feelings of anxiety and guilt, concerning both the decision they make and

the limitless possibilities of choice available to them. In light of this, Katie's decision to return home may seem like her acceptance of a higher order, but is in fact her way of dealing with the diversity of her possibilities, which is not liberating, but inhibiting. In Katie's words, "there is a sort of virtue in having no choices remaining, I think. It certainly clarifies the mind" (Hornby 2002: 299). Choosing the middle ground likely prevents the instigation of social change (Hornby 2002: 11), as it favors the *status quo* over a revolution. However, instead of interpreting Katie's decision as an act of resignation or defeat rather than illumination, we can see it as subversive, since she rejects the opportunity to continue her frivolous consumption and engages in a (difficult) struggle to make her marriage more satisfying:

> My family, I think, just that. And then, I can do this. I can live this life. I can, I can. It's a spark I want to cherish, a splutter of life in the flat battery; but just at the wrong moment I catch a glimpse of the night sky behind David, and I can see that there's nothing out there at all. (Hornby 2002: 305)

Katie's rational rather than emotional approach to the subject of home breaks the stereotypical notion of women as sentimental or hysterical. In addition, it is Katie who decides on the ultimate fate of the marriage, not her husband, proving that her legal and cultural power are equal to David's. Hornby further reverses gender roles by depicting David as a patient husband and devoted father and homemaker, suggesting that domestic bliss is not a *dirty word*, and exists as a possibility even in a non-patriarchal society, in which neither husband nor wife are pressured socially, culturally, or financially to save their marriage. Katie and David end up choosing home as their preferred destination, as a place of comfort and acceptance, where anxiety is reduced to a bearable level, even if it means effecting little or no social change.[7] Furthermore, their choice testifies to their personal maturation, which typically means being able to respond to life's circumstances in a socially appropriate manner, delaying personal gratification if reality requires it (Freud 1989a: 7–9).[8] The book's ending does not attempt to imply that everything

[7] This is debatable, since every rejection of the dominant ideology promoted by the media (i.e. one of ideological apparatuses, in this case the ideology of fast consumption) likely results in some kind of change, at least on a personal level. Further, it is reasonable to assume that a critical number of "changed" individuals will inevitably, at some point, cause social change.

[8] Adulthood usually implies making decisions that have serious consequences, and having the positive feeling that life has meaning and is worthwhile (Bruner 1972: 687–708; Wechsler 1950: 45).

has been said about this topic. It does, however, suggest that even in privileged societies the space of home has a distinctly political quality, as personal life is inevitably in constant dialectics with the material circumstances of public life and neoliberalist capitalism, which have a decisive impact on an individual's desires, decisions and choices.

4. CONCLUSION

Although Hansberry's play and Hornby's novel represent different genres and literary traditions, and feature dissimilar protagonists, they advocate a similar idea of *home* as a positive, inclusive and even emancipating space, since their protagonists seem able to move away from dominant cultural and behavioral paradigms. Both these characters feel trapped by the idea of home, and in each case the cause is found in their respective economic positions. Walter's lack of resources and options, his feeling of inadequacy, and his sometimes ludicrous material desires arise from his inability to provide financially for his family, marking their poverty as a cause for dissatisfaction. With Katie, however, meaninglessness arises from affluenza—she has everything she needs, yet feels pressured into wanting "more" or "something else". Katie has been liberated from the constraints highlighted by feminists (she is rich, professionally respected, has a family, and is at the same time free to leave them on a whim), yet her dissatisfaction persists due to the abundance of her opportunities. The economic extremes of lack and abundance are both revealed to foster feelings of alienation, pushing Walter and Katie to focus on their desire for material things, or for personal freedom, losing touch with the people who form what we think of as *home*. Thus, despite their diametrically opposed character profiles and economic and ideological circumstances, both Katie and Walter find resolution in the emotional dimension of the idea of home. The protagonists' journeys converge, as they come to find peace in domestic security, which is testament to their personal growth. Disregarding the economic pressures of the environment, they find meaning and peace not in material possessions, but in personal connections. Thus, both texts highlight the concept of home, not as one of alienation and isolation, but of connection and inclusiveness. The extreme contextual poles on which these two literary texts are located suggest that the inevitable political, emotional, and cultural complexity of home is worthy of research, even in cases when *home* is semantically decoded as a positive, inclusive space of acceptance.

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