Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Centro de Educação e Humanidades
Faculdade de Letras

Roberto Gonçalves Ramalho

Transgressive “Monsters” in *Angels in America*

Rio de Janeiro
2007

Roberto Gonçalves Ramalho

Transgressive “Monsters” in *Angels in America*

Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof[a] Dr[a] Eliane Borges Berutti

Rio de Janeiro
2007

CATALOGAÇÃO NA FONTE
UERJ/REDE SIRIUS/CEHB

K972 Ramalho, Roberto Gonçalves.
Trangressive "monsters" in Angels in America / Roberto Gonçalves Ramalho. – 2007.
95 f.

Orientadora: Eliane Borges Berutti.
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Letras.

1. Kushner, Tony (Anthony Robin Jeemy), 1960- .Angels in America – Crítica e interpretação. 2. Shelly, Mary Wollstonecraft, 1797-1851 – Crítica e interpretação. 3. Homossexualismo na literatura – Teses. I. Berutti, Eliane Borges. II. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Instituto de Letras. III. Título.

CDU 820:613.885

Roberto Gonçalves Ramalho

Transgressive “Monsters” in *Angels in America*

Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

Aprovado em 06 de dezembro de 2007

Banca examinadora:

_____
Profª. Drª Eliane Borges Berutti (Orientadora)
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

_____
Prof. Dr. Mário César Lugarinho
Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas – USP

_____
Profª. Drª Maria Conceição Monteiro
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

_____
Profª. Drª Daniela Versiani (Suplente)
Departamento de Letras - PUC-RJ

_____
Profª. Drª. Ana Lúcia de Souza Henriques (Suplente)
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

Rio de Janeiro
2007

For my mother, in the hope that, one day,
she understands the beauty that lies in difference.

For Davi, for showing this beauty to me.

Acknowledgments

I cannot even start to think about thanking anyone else before my professor and advisor Eliane Borges Berutti. Without her trustful guidance and leadership, her perceptive mind and extensive knowledge, my initial ideas would have lost themselves within the deepest realms of excitement. Thank you for your dedication and unconditional commitment.

My interest in Literature would not have flourished at all if it had not been for my Literature professors at UERJ, both during the undergraduation course and the master one. Without the passion that you clearly displayed in each of your classes, I would not have been awoken to the real meaning of letters. Thank you all for cultivating the seeds of good reading in me.

To four very special friends who kept by me throughout the whole undergraduation course, I reserve a great deal of thankfulness and an honest feeling of partnership. For all your support and insistence, for all your patience and loyalty, I register my sincere gratitude on this page.

To Davi, for being by my side when I faltered, for believing in me when I could not, for always seeing the bright side of me. For the patience and companionship, for the shared journey only we could understand and for what is yet to come, my gratitude, respect and love.

To Leidecléia, my mother, who taught me how to read, thus opening the doors to the beginning of this long adventure. For all the times we spent studying together, for all the achievements we celebrated and the failures we overcame, for the tears we dropped and the laughs we shared, I thank you. You have shown me the meaning of maternal love and selfless dedication. I can only hope that you can really understand me and know that I will never not be your son.

Resumo

RAMALHO, Roberto Gonçalves. *Transgressive "Monsters" in Angels in America.* 2007. 95 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

O objetivo desta dissertação é discutir por que indivíduos homoeroticamente inclinados, em especial gays, são socialmente interpretados como "monstros". Através da análise de dois personagens gays da peça *Angels in America*, de Tony Kushner (Joe e Prior), e apoiado por um clássico "monstro" literário, o personagem sem nome de Mary Shelley em *Frankenstein*, busco demonstrar os mecanismos sociais que transformam os gays em seres abjetos. Entrementes, conduzo minha análise por dogmas cuidadosamente construídos e pelas instituições de poder que escrutinam e tentam controlar as sexualidades desviantes. Em última instância, vejo a transgressão como um passo necessário que garante aos gays o direito à realização pessoal (que deveria ser inalienável para todos os indivíduos), e a única saída para a expressão de suas verdadeiras subjetividades sexuais.

Palavras-chave: Drama Americano; Homoerotismo; Transgressão.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss why homoerotically inclined individuals, especially gay men, are socially construed as “monsters”. Through the analysis of two gay characters out of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (Joe and Prior), and supported by a classical literary “monster”, the nameless character in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, I try to point out society’s mechanisms that transform gays into abjected personas. Meanwhile, I conduct my analysis through carefully constructed dogmas and the institutions of power that scrutinize and attempt to control deviant sexualities. Ultimately, I see transgression as a necessary stand for gays to guarantee their right to self-fulfillment (which should be unalienable to every individual), and the only way to the expression of their true sexual subjectivities.

Keywords: American Drama; Homoeroticism; Transgression.

Summary

CHAPTER 1

Transgressive Writing, Transgressive Writers

As a rich metaphor for any kind of social minorities, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) has fiercely caught my eye. In the novel, the creature made by Victor Frankenstein is brought to life and, due to his horrendous physical appearance, has to suffer boundless acts of rejection. From the moment the being realizes he is unfit in a society in which he constitutes an abnormality, and after a series of attempts to fit in (which include trying to earn his creator's affection first and later, the affection of the old De Lacey's family), the creature's fate resulted in ostracism and isolation.

Pondering about Shelley's nameless character's destiny and keeping in mind that he was an unquestionable example of a social misfit, my considerations could not help drifting towards one kind of contemporary minorities, more specifically same-sex oriented men. Once such men identify themselves with a pattern of behavior that goes against what society acknowledges as normal, what is left to them is the label of "monsters". Moreover, upon their choice to carry on with same-sex intercourses, their lives are punctuated by constant boundary crossings, and their sexual feelings and affection can only be given vent to through the affirmation of transgression.

In order to bridge Mary Shelley's character and contemporary gays, and to enable the use of the "monster" metaphor referring to those men, the reading of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) came to my rescue. In this play, we are introduced to a rich array of same-sex oriented characters that take on all the labels those who identify themselves with the "monster" of homoeroticism have to take. Here, the situation is aggravated by the original and long-standing social consensus of AIDS being a gay disease. Like the creature in Mary Shelley's novel, characters such as Joe, Roy, Louis, Prior and Belize live their lives constantly fighting inner struggles against acceptance (some achieving better results than others). From the moment they take in their position as gay men in the binary system homo/heterosexual and, in addition to that, when two of them end up typifying the gay man dying of AIDS, they are called to assume their

subjectivity (notwithstanding the prices they have to pay) and to consolidate themselves as transgressors in order to really be.

My hypothesis is that, as with the creature in *Frankenstein* and the aforementioned characters in *Angels in America*, rejection and the burden of pre-determined identification with certain types dictated by an oppressive society (such as the *gay-man-sick-with-AIDS* identity) lead gays through a path of transgression in their search of self-assertion. In addition to that, if those same individuals internalize homophobia due to the social pressures they suffer, their sexual subjectivity becomes deeply impaired.

How hardened is the way to self-acceptation for a homoerotically inclined man who needs to fulfill his love aspirations? Is transgression the only answer for the realization of his sex life? Hopefully, these are the questions I seek to answer.

The train of thought that permeates my research lies in transgression. Transgression of ideologies, boundaries, conventions, and rules. The whole basis of my studies, the inspiration of my musings can be found and justified in the nature of those who dared (and the ones who still dare, and forever will) to question standards, universal truths and morality's establishments.

Throughout history, there have always been individuals that rebelled against the system of conventions. For every rule, there is a breach. For every tyrant, a rebel. For every oppressor, a soul thirsting for freedom. These are the motifs that urged me forwards and incited my curiosity, and the works of literature that I propose to discuss in this thesis are, undoubtedly, representative of this historical and never-ending query. The characters I want to focus on clearly defy what is taken to be universal and unquestionable. Either by playing God or blurring the idea of male/female sexual roles, for instance, these characters question religious issues, social conventions, language constructions, binary oppositions, to name a few.

Thinking about how to begin my introduction, I caught myself wondering as for the ways in which I could escape the mere repetition of what has already been said about the writers I intend to study. My intention is not just to point out and reproduce everything that has been published about these authors: life, work and death. If only I

could at least organize these pieces of biographical information in a way that they became part of the mood of my thesis, then I should be satisfied. Thus, an idea dawned on me that, since I find myself immersed into the transgression issue, perhaps it would be interesting to emphasize how transgressive the authors I intend to study were/are. Therefore, these introductory considerations will - apart from situating the reader among evidences about the authors' biographies - focus on how they contributed to the breaking of accepted thoughts, each in his/her own ways and time.

1.1. Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley's life was punctuated by gruesome realities and harsh sufferings. From a very young age, she found herself surrounded by deep questions of morality, delicate predicaments and social pressures, not to mention personal tragedies due to successive family losses. She was forever haunted by a life full of expectations – few fulfilled, most failed: motherly tensions (she could hardly sustain pregnancies, and most of her babies were short-lived); intellectual burden (being the daughter of two of the greatest thinkers of her time, she was expected to live up to their legacy); and social conformity (as regarding her romantic entanglement).

Mary Shelley was born in August, 1797 to Mary Wollstonecraft, the forerunner of feminism, and William Godwin, the great political philosopher, and here is where her tendency to overlook conventionality most certainly finds its roots. But before I delve into the exciting aspects of her parents' lives, at this point in time, it shall be interesting to turn to some historical occurrences of the time around which her life began.

It was a moment of social and political upheavals. A time when rebellions and wars erupted all around in Europe and America alike: the eighteenth century French Revolution; the American claim for independence based on those same ideals of equality and freedom preached by the French rebels; the Napoleonic wars, which had just come to an end; the shaking effects of the recent European industrialization, casting a shadow of doubt, fear and darkness in man's confidence in the goodness of progress;

the rise of a middle working class, changing from a feudal, agricultural society to a new urban one. As usual, times of great changes bring along great insecurities and inquiries. And in the midst of uncertain thoughts and feelings, significant philosophers have been known to emerge. It was in this context that Mary Shelley's parents made a difference by taking a stand and making their (revolutionary) ideas known to a public hungry for answers and directions.

William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, was a "transgressor" himself in many senses that I intend to show. He used to be a preacher, but later became an atheist who turned his intellectual efforts to ethics and politics.[1] Completely for liberty, truth and justice, he welcomed the French Revolution. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), he conveyed his radical ideals – a deed that almost cost him a prosecution by the government that could have led to his execution – by asserting his faith in those same values that motivated the French Revolution. It is true some critics might claim that Godwin was a contradictory revolutionary, in the sense that he openly disapproved of violence and uncontrolled mobs, but his courage and intent to display his outright support to French revolutionaries at a time when his own country had declared war against them undoubtedly confirm his aptitude for transgression. William Godwin, first and foremost, believed in progress towards a state in which no form of government would even be needed, and that was only possible because he believed in the perfectibility of people.

In the sense that she was a woman, it can be said that Mary Wollstonecraft transgressed even more boundaries than her husband. She wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which some of her complaints regarded the lack of professions available for women, political oppression against them (who were far from being well-represented), lack of educational opportunities, among others. She defended that women should be provided with the necessary means to develop themselves into full human beings insofar as they would be able to take an equal stand alongside men.

Even before that, in 1790, Mary Wollstonecraft dared to write *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. The work was the first one to establish a dialog in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Being harshly conservative in

[1] SMITH, J.M. (1992) p. 7

his attacks on the French movement and the Jacobins (its English supporters), Burke was boldly criticized by Wollstonecraft who posed her arguments by pointing out the innumerable social injustices poor people had continually been going through, throughout the course of history.

In addition to her social contributions towards transgression, Mary Shelley's mother went on to construct herself as a highly rebellious woman in the personal sphere as well. After all, sustaining a marriage in separate houses and carrying out an extra-marital affair in the late 1700's (all of which are present in Mary Wollstonecraft's life story) can hardly be rendered conservative at all.

It was into this atmosphere of heavy boundary-breaking propensities that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born, and it is not a hard task at all to find out whom she took after. She was an avid reader and had all the encouragement from her father to remain as such. She spent hours reading her mother's books at the latter's grave. Having been deprived of knowing her mother due to her early death after delivery (the woman died just ten days after giving birth), Mary Shelley devoted a great deal of time to getting to know Mary Wollstonecraft by means of her writings.

The same grave that was Mary's chosen setting to read also bore witness to the blooming of her affair with Percy Shelley. Here lies one of the greatest signs of Mary Shelley's defiance of social values and moral codes, for Percy Shelley was married to Harriet Shelley. Although society harshly frowned on adultery, Mary Shelley carried her affair on, even taking it to further and more delicate levels, as she and Percy finally eloped to France. Needless to say she suffered severe criticism from a Victorian society that strictly controlled manners of conduct and deviant behaviors. Even after Harriet committed suicide and Mary was eventually allowed to make her connection to Percy official - under the requirements of law and religion - she continued to suffer attacks from an angry and regulatory society.

Feeling somewhat compelled to follow in her parents and husband's footsteps and to inscribe her name in the history of important thinkers/writers, Mary Shelley received great encouragement from her husband and "produced […] five novels, nineteen short stories, a travel book, several biographies of scientific and literary figures,

and critical editions of Percy Shelley's poetry and prose".[2] As a result, she became one of the very few women writers of her time to dare to express themselves in literature and receive recognition because of their work, although her only work to be acclaimed was *Frankenstein*. After that, just the novel *The Last Man* (1826) came close to *Frankenstein* in matters of publicity.

Frankenstein can certainly be analyzed under the heading of defiance: Mary Shelley permeates her work with the revolutionary background she had undoubtedly acquired from her mother and father. Among the various readings that can be made of the above-mentioned novel, the theme of defiance and transgression can be hardly contested to be true. Victor Frankenstein transgresses the laws of nature and religion when he forces himself into the role of life-creator. The creature's appearance transcends concepts of what is/is not human. Moreover, Victor's creation ends up questioning and subverting the power relations between the one who bestows life and the one who receives it when he (the creature) treads a path on which his creator is overpowered by him. And, most certainly, Victor's being is an unquestionable example of a minority species, so to speak, one which has to endure people's contempt and disgust, and ultimately finds himself secluded from society and deprived of human contact, affection and (perhaps most importantly) acceptance.

In this short account of Mary Shelley's life and work, I have attempted to focus on the aspects that place her within the circle of transgression: coming from a family of active revolutionary thinkers; paving her way into intellectualization by doing a lot of reading and taking part in her husband and friends' groups of academic discussion (even though she did not assume an active position in them, most of the times) in a time when women were not encouraged to become intellectuals; daring to sustain a romantic relationship with a married man in a society that considered adultery one of the most serious felonies a person could commit; and being courageous enough to write a novel whose careful reading allows interpretations towards moral, religious, and individual subversions.

Mary Shelley was, indeed, a transgressor, in many levels. Even more so if we take into consideration the repressive and controlling society she lived in – a Victorian

[2] SMITH, J.M. (1992) p. 11

society, with its strict moral codes, religious enforcements and conduct dictatorship whose details and subtleties would go too far to be discussed in this introduction.

These are some of the aspects that help make Mary Shelley a member of the group of boundary-breakers, which is the very group this thesis proposes to discuss. Throughout the history of mankind, there have been various kinds of transgressors, rebels, fighters against oppressors, margin dwellers, and outsiders. In contemporary society, for instance, one group that has its cause highly in vogue is that of gays, lesbians, transsexuals and transgenders. And this is where my other transgressive writer shows his face for public assessment - Tony Kushner.

1.2. Tony Kushner

Hardly anybody would doubt Tony Kushner's position in the sphere of transgressors. Born into a Jewish family in New York in July 1956, he became a highly politicized man whose revolutionary ideas permeate his works. Since his birth, a member of a historically scrutinized minority (Jews), Kushner eventually grew up to take part into another controversial group of misfits: homosexuals.

In Lake Charles, Louisiana, to where his family moved early in his infant years, Kushner found himself surrounded by a society that sustained powerful religious traditions, as well as the ambivalence those very traditions made room for: the need for inquiry and freedom. These inquiries show themselves most strongly in Kushner's later position in the American society in which he lives – one that praises individualist thinking (both artistic and political) in service of powerful Capitalism. On the "myth of the Individual"[3] and, consequently, on Capitalism, Tony Kushner poses a piercing critique: in the short essay "With a Little Help from my Friends", enclosed in the "Afterword" appendix to the 2005 Theatre Communications Group edition of *Angels In America*, Kushner harshly criticizes the so-called American Individualism in all its forms. For him, due to American's excessive concern about Individualism, a great number of social and

[3] KUSHNER, T. (2005) p. 283

personal issues arise, such as flaws in public health care, children's education, presidential elections, and superficial personal concerns (as for aging process and death). About that, he says: "Americans pay high prices for maintaining the myth of the individual: We have no system of universal health care, we don't educate our children, we can't pass sane gun control laws, we elect presidents like Reagan, we hate and fear inevitable processes like aging and death".[4]

In relation to those matters of Individualism and Capitalism, Kushner is willing to take a stand and, for that purpose, he makes an effort never to miss his inquiring prowess towards the simplest predicaments of the human mind and soul.

Within the grounds of his political and social ideologies, and by means of his several work collaborations and friendship circles, Tony Kushner was introduced to Freud and Marx, and decided to take a closer look into the philosophers that shaped the German Frankfurt School. Basically and briefly speaking, beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, those philosophers started their trend of thoughts by developing a critical theory of society in which psychoanalysis and Marxist ideas attempted to blend. In their majority Jews, the Frankfurt School thinkers later diverged from Marxist assumptions when they began to question working class men's abilities to actually promote social changes. Eventually and generally speaking (for this is not the purpose of this introduction), the Frankfurt School has been known to have set the grounds to some segments of the New Left. Making himself part of these studies, trying to know more about them and apply those very ideologies to his works, Tony Kushner shows himself as an extremely critical writer - one that does not simply accept reality without questioning it and, principally, one that intends to make his audience ponder about standards taken for granted.

At about the same time Kushner became interested in the Frankfurt School, he was also introduced to the esoteric theosophy known as Kabbala. Being a kind of doctrine that finds its roots back in the beginning of the tenth century (and which has been developing itself since then), the Kabbala system of beliefs is most popular chiefly among people of Jewish descent and is known to spread its religious philosophy basically by oral tradition. About that, when talking about his childhood friend and

[4] KUSHNER, T. (2005) p. 283-284

collaborator Kimberley T. Flynn, Kushner says: “She [Kimberly] introduced me to […] the German philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin, whose importance for me rests primarily in his introduction into these “scientific” disciplines a Kabbalist-inflected mysticism and a dark, apocalyptic spirituality”.[5]

If we trace these evidences back to a childhood time, which Tony Kushner lived under strict surveillance of a highly conservative and religious Southern society, ours is not a hard job to understand why the author turned to alternative interpretations of mankind’s roles and position in this world.

Being a very politicized man, critical of the whole Republican, Capitalist, Individualist scheme, Tony Kushner transpires his ideologies and critiques in his works. Always dealing with society’s delicate private and political/public issues, he has written over twenty plays (including adaptations of several other playwrights such as Goethe and Bertolt Brecht, for instance) among which are: *Slavs!: Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (1995), *Caroline or Change* (2002), among various others.

In a July/August, 1995 magazine and web interview conceded to Andrea Bernstein (who writes chiefly about politics and culture) from the *Mother Jones Magazine*, about his play *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner commented:

> I was very scared about writing a play where there’s a couple, one has AIDS and the other walks out. I thought, this is transgressive and scary and am I going to become public enemy number one in the gay community for having written a character like Louis? On the other hand, you have to be willing to scare the horses. You have to be interesting and you have to be **daring** and you have to be **willing** to write things that **shock**. Shock is part of art. Art that’s polite is not much fun.[6] (My emphases)

From the above quoted interview passage, it is clear that Tony Kushner himself considers his work transgressive and subversive. Also evident is his propensity and desire to produce shock with his writings. Only by shocking can one make others awake to a reality that is present, however suffocated, and think about it.

In the work this thesis is going to focus on – *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, Tony Kushner handles crucial and polemic issues of contemporary society: homoeroticism and AIDS, not to mention politics and religion. As evidenced in the small excerpt from the interview Kushner gave to the *Mother Jones Magazine* in

[5] KUSHNER, T. (2005) p. 286
[6] The *Mother Jones Magazine.* At http://www.motherjones.com/arts/qa/1995/07/bernstein.html.

1995, although the author was somehow concerned about the public's reaction to such delicate matters he intended to deal with in the play, he managed to not shy away from talking about those matters nonetheless, since he strongly believes a writer's job is to shock the audience so as to produce the intended effect, which is thinking.

In *Angels in America*, Kushner introduces his viewing/reading audience to a rich array of boundary-breaking characters: Belize, a former drag queen with strong political and personal ideologies who strives to prove that the United States of America – despite its everlasting promises of individual prowess and national progress, freedom and self-fulfilment – is actually far from being a dream land; Joe, a dedicated husband who struggles against his inner self and tries to suffocate his homoerotic feelings for the sake of a life "correctly" lived; Roy, an influential, all-powerful lawyer (actually based on a real person) who embodies the gay-dying-with-AIDS persona and desperately tries to put up a strong, unflinching facade in an attempt to free his public image from any traces of deviations; Prior, another gay man dying with AIDS whose world falls apart not only because of his fatal disease, but also because his four-year love commitment crumbles in the face of his critical health condition; and Louis, Prior's boyfriend, who cannot endure the responsibilities and implications that caring for a gay man sick with AIDS carries along, and ends up abandoning his long-term partner.

Not only does Tony Kushner expose those problematic issues in his play, he also does it in an outright, unafraid way. He does not hesitate to assign his characters the most pungent lines, and straightforward words and expressions, as well as he is not fearful of making his characters talk about and practice sex in a style that is never offensive or vulgar.

These are some ways in which I consider Tony Kushner to be a transgressive writer. By being a gay Jewish man who dares to inquire accepted conventions, who strives to make his ideas stand out by means of his writing, who is not afraid of exposing himself and what he believes in, Kushner has undoubtely inscribed his name in the history of thinkers who not only try to make a difference, but who make a difference indeed.

I start developing my thesis with a discussion of *Frankenstein*. In it, not only do I analyze the process that leads Victor Frankenstein to the creation of the "monster", but I also study the ways in which the unnamed character becomes such a menace to the people around him. In this chapter, contributions such as those of Johanna M. Smith, in her feminist approach of Mary Shelley's novel, help me understand Victor Frankenstein's motivations and ultimate scientific endeavor. Moreover, Otto Rank's studies of the Double enlighten my analysis of the connection between Frankenstein and the nameless character he brings to life. Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection contribute to my understanding of how the creature comes to pose such a threat to society, while Michel Foucault's and Jamake Highwater's books provide theoretical material for my reading. It is also in this chapter that some of Jurandir Freire Costa's ideas help me shape my approach to the "monster" in terms of language use.

In the next chapter, I study issues such as: identity, as discussed by Kathryn Woodward and Stuart Hall; the matter of AIDS and the ways in which its epidemic is interpreted, in Susan Sontag's and Marcelo Secron Bessa's views; the boundaries imposed by language use, as developed by Jamake Highwater and Jurandir Freire Costa; and power institutions within society, as viewed by Michel Foucault. These studies will enable me to understand the matter of exclusion and the mechanisms that turn deviants into "monsters".

In the same chapter, I take advantage of the "monster" metaphor and the discussed theoretical material in order to study two gay characters from *Angels in America*. In my analysis, my goal is to understand how each character ends up being a transgressor and the reasons why they cannot escape the label of "monsters", unless they choose to live a life of denial and secrecy.

CHAPTER 2

"Monster" of Yore: The Creature in *Frankenstein*

> The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

It is not at all infrequent that I get to be asked where the idea of linking the two literary texts I intend to discuss in this thesis (a novel from the nineteenth century, and a play from the twentieth century) came from. Moreover, apart from the distance in time, I also find myself in a position of having to explain the connection between the two ideas, all without falling into the trap of making misleading and unfounded affirmations.

For all practical purposes, indeed, how can one bridge Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) and Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* (1991)? Does an association of ideas between the novel and the play actually damage the fundamental meaning of the two pieces of literary work? Most importantly, is it even possible to make that connection, to begin with?

In answering those queries, I found great help in the chapter "Reader-Response Criticism and *Frankenstein*" taken from a 1992 Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press's edition of the novel. Briefly speaking, reader-response critics deal with the correlations between the responses we (readers) come up with after reading a text and the actual meaning(s) of that text, whether any sort of response is appropriate for a certain text and, finally, whether one response is superior or more valid than another. Within this field of study, the author of the chapter, Johanna M. Smith, clarifies that "a text exists and signifies while it is being read, and what it signifies or means will depend, to no small extent, on *when* it is read."[7] (author's italics). Following this line of thought, I would safely be able to affirm that a text assumes its meaning when its reader, time and social contexts considered, puts that meaning together.

[7] SMITH, J. M. (1992) p. 208

However, not all reader-response critics believe in this notion that readers "make" the texts in relation to their own era. Within the grounds of reader-response criticism, there are some subjective scholars such as David Bleich and Norman Holland who "do not see the reader's response as one 'guided' by the text but rather as one motivated by deep-seated, personal, psychological needs. What they [readers] find in texts is […] their own 'identity theme.'"[8]

Either way or another, reader-response critics defend that the reader's **experience** plays an essential part in grasping the meaning of a text, whether it is based on historical time or psychological needs. And it is within the boundaries of this ground that I formulate my connection between *Frankenstein* and *Angels in America*.

Another essential issue I feel the utmost need to clarify at this starting point is the matter of how I am going to address and/or refer to Victor Frankenstein's creature. For one thing, I do not at all intend to call him "monster" (and in the few times when I do, in some titles, for the purpose of effect, the term will appear between inverted commas), but will rather use the terms "creature" and/or "being". Moreover, when in need of pronouns, I will choose to use the masculine third person pronoun and its derivatives (he, him, his, himself). After a series of readings and careful consideration, I have reached the decision about this major matter of addressing since the terms which one chooses to use to refer to someone else are highly responsible for the way one feels towards the referred subject.

The scholars that have mostly contributed to the decision I made were Jurandir Freire Costa, in his *A inocência e o vício: estudos sobre o homoerotismo*, and Jamake Highwater, in his *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor*. Both authors present very similar ideas regarding linguistic conceptualizations. Briefly speaking (since this topic will be further developed in Chapter 3), they strongly believe language plays an important part in imposing a subjectivity upon an individual, as language is responsible for labeling, classifying, and singling out groups of individuals.

Jurandir Freire Costa claims that: "Diverse vocabularies create or reproduce diverse subjectivities".[9] (My translation) The danger implied by such an assumption lies in the fact that once individuals define others by means of words, they impose on their

[8] SMITH, J. M. (1992) p. 209
[9] COSTA, J. (2002) p. 14

objects of reference a subjectivity that is all shaped in contrast and comparison to their own subjectivity. Whence the label of Other, for instance, which only assumes its contours due to the belief of the caller that he/she is the One. This way, language definition denies the labeled individual the right to comprehend and define his/her own subjectivity, making him/her susceptible to classification by one who is exterior to his/her true feelings. Costa subsequently develops his theories on what purpose language should really serve and explains: "Its work [that of language] is not always the same. […] the work cannot be that of "representing" something which is pre-existent to language and whose essence will be more truly revealed the more truly it is linguistically represented […]".[10] (My translation)

In other words, one has to be extra careful when resorting to language definitions, since language itself can end up creating and assigning subjectivities, instead of allowing them to emerge as they must. In addition to that, when Costa says what the work of language cannot be, in the above passage, one cannot make the mistake to expect language to create, define and enclose an individual's essence. As the author himself reminds us, the object which language defines is pre-existent to it, and therefore, it must have the right to exist without having its contours clipped out and narrowed by language.

Jamake Highwater's and Jurandir Costa's ideas are similar, as we realize when the former affirms that language is used to offend and attack, just about the same way a weapon might be used. Highwater presents his arguments accounting for the idea that: "[…] words are so often loaded by social manipulation, often attaining a significance in one social system that is quite different from their meanings in other systems."[11] Thus, in Highwater's conception, words can, indeed, be used to keep outsiders at bay and to cause the cruelest of effects: humiliation and a sense of not belonging.

As a final note on this issue, it is important to mention that whenever I use passages from the novel in which the creature is called offensive names (names that intend to disqualify him of feelings, emotions and human attributes) and is referred to by

[10] COSTA, J. (2002) p. 15
[11] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 7

pronouns other than the masculine, third person one, I will have no way but to reproduce that treatment, for obvious reasons of impossibility of changing published material.

2.1. Victor Frankenstein: A Domesticated Man

There are, undoubtedly, a number of readings that can be done out of Mary Shelley's most famous novel *Frankenstein*, but two features appeal to my studies the most: the issue of the double and the matter of abjection.

In order to understand Victor Frankenstein's motivations to create a life in a God-like way, outside the conventional methods of sex and procreation, a deed that would (at least theoretically) fulfill his aspirations of knowledge and power, I could obtain further clarification by means of analyzing some aspects about Victor's own life, since his childhood. In the process of fulfilling my needs, a reading of the novel under the light of some feminist perspectives provided me with excellent material for the grasping of the idea of a "domesticated" Victor (SMITH, 1992). This idea is quite significant in the sense that it not only helps us understand how comfortable and safe Victor could feel within the grounds of his own home, but also how imprisoning and suffocating that very protection could be.

From a feminist point of view, Victor's house witnessed, in every aspect, the clear delimitations of women's and men's roles in society. Paradoxically, while masculine and feminine roles were well delineated, they were also intertwined. Victor's father, Alphonse Frankenstein, had experienced all the honorable manly aspects of his life prior to getting married (having himself been an accomplished businessman, renowned in the public business circles). Moreover, Alphonse's rescuing of Caroline Beaufort (his wife-to-be) from poverty itself comprehended the greatest act of manly kindness he could ever perpetrate. But since getting married and establishing a new home, Alphonse retreats from his male "duties" and, together with Caroline, becomes active in what one could call "feminine domesticity".

Since the beginning of Victor's narration of his tale to Mr. Robert Walton, he never fails to praise both his parents' important role in his upbringing. Both parents made sure Victor could grow in a pleasant environment, one in which he could feel carefully enveloped and protected from outside dangers through love and affection. Victor assumes that his father and mother were overly protective: "Much as they [his parents] were attached to each other, they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me."[12]

Not only Victor's mother, but also his father – in the exercise of his full "feminine domesticity" – condition the boy to a sheltered life, a life enclosed within the boundaries of home, one in which he could feel safe and protected from the dangers of the public sphere. And by public sphere, we shall understand the realm of men, the environment where they (men) can put their masculinity into practice by working, socializing, negotiating, as opposed to the household entrapments (the caring of a house and family) conditioned to women.

Trapped in this environment of strict protection, Victor feels both attracted to the safety of his "fortress-home" and to the enchantments of a life of discoveries in the public sphere of men. In her article entitled "'Cooped Up': Feminine Domesticity in *Frankenstein*", Johanna M. Smith talks about the different moods in these two environments: "In these moods of openness to nature [the safety of his home, the maternal protection which the boy regards as a natural gift], Victor is feminized into passive tranquility and domestic affection. In other moods, however he thrills to a more masculine nature […]."[13] Here, it is clear to us that, sooner than later, due to the masculine essence that has been coiled up inside him, Victor will thirst for his freedom. The feeling of being indebted to his parents for his upbringing and earlier education also imprints on Victor's soul the desire to break free from that debt. Smith goes on to say that "[…] the 'spirit' that Victor releases through the monster is the masculinity so 'cooped up' by Alphonse's feminized domesticity […]."[14]

Bearing these ideas in mind, it is easier to move on to deeper matters of transgressive identity that this thesis proposes to discuss. In the scope of these notions,

[12] SHELLEY, M. (1981) p. 19 (Subsequent quotations from this novel refer to the same edition and will appear by page number in the text.)
[13] SMITH, J. M. (1992) p. 277
[14] SMITH, J. M. (1992) p. 280

the creature is no more than the release of Victor's repressed aggressiveness, his thirst for the outer world or, in other words, his repressed masculinity. Everything that Victor has suppressed in being a good son, in conforming to the domesticity of his family circle, comes out – or better, bursts out – in the shape of his creation. This is an issue that will be further developed under the heading of the double.

2.2. The Creature: Frankenstein's Double

Important scholars have studied the motif of the double through different methodological approaches; being the pioneer in this field, Otto Rank concentrated upon the topic under the light of a psychoanalytical perspective.

For Rank, the double issue is closely linked to the Freudian theory of Narcisism. From that point of view, the double is startled by some kind of morbid self-love, one that is overly concerned about immortalization, about leaving its mark. For one thing, this idea of immortality turns itself to the notion of the soul, which has always been man's "other side", his shadow, his imprint to wander around forever, even after his death. Notwithstanding, just as the idea of soul may assure man of his immortality, it can also lead to sensations of fear, by the same token: fear of death, decay, and degeneration - such fears which, curiously enough, end up leading back to the desire for preservation, thus immortality.

In the first subsection of this chapter, I talked about Victor Frankenstein's imposed domesticity and his longing for freedom in the public sphere, that of men or, more specifically, the scientific world. Victor's insistence on carrying his scientific ambitions further in spite of his father's and teachers' admonitions proves us that his fantastic endeavor represented, in itself, a cry for freedom. And Victor's making the creature is the signing of his release contract.

Succeeding in the making of a creature meant both the release of Victor's imprint upon the earth, the one that would guarantee his eternal perpetration (for the acquisition of knowledge and success means power and recognition, thus leading an individual to

everlasting praise through his accomplishments) – such as Otto Rank would see it. The creature, a nameless character, also embodied the projection of all the longing that Victor kept shut within himself for several years, his aspirations to release the masculine expression of his soul, which had been prevented by both his overprotective family and a life enclosed within the limits of a fortress home. In these senses, the creature would be Victor's double – the personification of his unconscious side and, in being so, he would be free to do anything that Victor's righteous upbringing and earlier education would never allow him to do, from such unimportant deeds as breaking little social rules and/or codes of conduct, to more serious acts as infringing laws, hurting people, inflicting pain, and even killing.

Paradoxically, at the same time the release of a double can provide one with a sense of liberation and relief (when this double represents whatever has been suffocated by the individual), it can also bring up feelings of guilt and self-torture. Otto Rank explains such assumption as follows:

> The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt which forces the hero no longer to accept the responsibility for certain actions of his ego […] As Freud has demonstrated, this awareness of guilt, having various sources, measures on the one hand the distance between the ego-ideal and the attained reality; on the other, it is nourished by a powerful fear of death and creates strong tendencies toward *self-punishment*, which also imply suicide.[15] (My emphasis)

In this short passage, what Rank means by "ego" is the repressed instance of one's self personified by the double, whereas the "ego-ideal" would be the expected virtuous conduct of the aforementioned double, and the "attained reality", the double's actual behavior. In order to link Otto Rank's ideas and my discussion of *Frankenstein*, I shall turn to a speech of Victor's as he and Elizabeth discuss William's and Justine's deaths: "I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer." (p. 77) After Elizabeth's death, Victor decides to report the case to a criminal judge and he tells the magistrate:

> My revenge is of no moment to you; yet, while I allow it to be a vice, I confess that it is the devouring and only passion of my soul. My rage is unspeakable when I reflect that the murderer, whom I have turned loose upon society, still exists. […] I devote myself, *either in my life or death*, to his destruction. (p. 184) (My emphasis)

Victor feels guilty for the murders of his friends and family. He knows that the true murderer is no other person but himself. To a certain extent, he bears the notion that he,

[15] RANK, O. (1979) p. 76-77

in spite of his involuntariness, was the perpetrator of the crimes through his own double. The sense of guilt permeates his mind. As he sets himself to the mortal chase of his creation, he is aware that he might have to pay the consequences of his acts with his own death, which he actually does.

In the next subsection, I take a closer look into the concept of abjection, developed by Julia Kristeva, which certainly helps my discussion of *Frankenstein*.

2.3. The Creature: An Abjected Character

According to Julia Kristeva, abjection is related to whatever disturbs the system of rules and conformity, be it laws, religion, or morality, for instance. Whatever does not follow in the footsteps of what is already accepted or conditioned, whatever questions, subverts, and disturbs is what she classifies as abjection. Putting it this way, however, it might seem that abjection constitutes only what is rejected and spurned, but that is not altogether true; one very important feature about abjection lies in its paradoxical characteristic, in the sense that it exercises forces of attraction and repulsion upon the individual. At the same time one feels disgusted by what is abjected, s/he also feels a kind of attraction to it, principally because it represents everything that has been rejected, suffocated and thrown aside for the sake of rules, or notions of "right or wrong". Abjection, then, would not only wield a sense of disapproval and condemnation, but also inflict on the same individual an opposite sense of instigation, curiosity and wonder at the abjected body's ability to dare and transgress. In the following passage, Kristeva exemplifies the idea of abjection, pointing out to the attraction/repulsion paradox that helps constitute the concept:

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. […] Abjection […] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you.[16]

[16] KRISTEVA, J. (1982) p. 4

The psychological instance that is responsible for defining whatever will be abjected is the superego, for it stands for all the outside institutions that regulate our most primal instincts and urges; religious and legal prohibitions, morality, family values, ideas of what is right or wrong. Abjection is constantly clashing against the superego, since the former defies the latter incessantly. Kristeva clears the idea as follows: "A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it [what is abjected] away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master".[17]

It is now about time I move back to my discussion of *Frankenstein*. What is the nameless character himself if not an abjected body? A being magnificent in his dimensions, bearing deformed, distorted human features. Such character subverts what is considered to be human and, simultaneously, breaks the boundaries of what is believed to be God's and men's roles. That is why I should say that, at this point, there are two levels of abjection working alternately and together at the same time: first, the character is abjected for his deformed body dimensions and characteristics:

> His *yellow skin* scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more *horrid contrast* with his *watery eyes*, that seemed almost *of the same colour as the dun-white sockets* in which they were set, his *shrivelled complexion* and straight *black lips.* (p. 42) (My emphases)

The creature obviously does not fit into the archetype of a "normal" man (based on what society assumes to be normal). But concomitantly, he bears some features anyone aspiring for physical strength would like to have: he is strong, excessively tall and greater in proportion than regular people. And here lies the element of attraction Kristeva talks about, the one that works together with the element of repulsion: even though one would definitely feel awed by the character's huge and uncommon body frame, s/he would desire to possess the strength and power such a body could grant.

In the same level of abjection as that provoked by physical deformity, there is another aspect that permeates the story of the nameless individual: abhorrence. Whenever the character tries to establish contact with people, he is spurned and

[17] KRISTEVA, J. (1982) p. 2

shouted at, beaten up and scared away, all of which are clear signs of identification with what is abjected. Kristeva discusses these aspects of the abjected body:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. […] **The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object**. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.[18] (Author's italics, my bold)

It may seem Kristeva wrote this very consideration bearing in mind a direct correlation to *Frankenstein*. Even though that was not the case, it is clear to me that this paragraph could not be fitter for the task of studying the unnamed character, for he is all that and much more in between: being made up of parts of dead bodies, the creature is the embodiment of life and death in one. He is a walking and talking corpse, the blurring of what is dead and alive at the same time. Moreover, being an ungodly being and a product of science, he challenges universal and religious truths. The character also defies the senses and the feelings, he arises abhorrent reactions, he pushes us to the limits of what we are, what we should look like, and the limits of what we are while alive and what we are to become after death. These are some of the reasons why the being turns out to be 'a "something" that [we] do not recognize as a thing.'[19]

The second level of abjection can be evidenced in the nameless character: since he is socially rejected due to his physical deformity, he has no other choice but to segregate himself and live in the margin of society. But rage towards prejudiced mankind leads him to commit crimes. And it is exactly in this sphere, in the breaking of the law, that the second level of abjection mentioned lies: the creature dares to do what is socially despised by the regulations of the law and, for that, he is once more abjected. In this second degree of abjection, the element of attraction would be evidenced in the fact that most of us, in our moments of anger triggered by a sense of injustice, for

[18] KRISTEVA, J. (1982) p. 3-4
[19] KRISTEVA, J. (1982) p. 2

instance, would eventually exteriorize our anger in the form of violence or, at the very least, in the form of an aggressive outburst of emotions, if we were not constantly reminded of the existing social sanctions, laws and prohibitions. The character without a name, once again, dares to do what we restrain ourselves from doing.

2.4. The "Monster": A Transgressor

At this point of the discussion, there should be no doubt whatsoever that the creature is a transgressor in every aspect of his existence. Independently of his criminal behavior, his murderer status notwithstanding, the simple fact of *being* in itself, of having been brought to existence, makes the character a transgressor. In essence, the creature is a transgressor (and for him there is no way out of being such) because he is different.

Apart from being different, the character, as Julia Kristeva would probably consider, brought into question some of the most basic inquiries of mankind: who are we? Where did we come from? Is there such thing as God? In other words, the creature is most defying in the sense that he questions our identity, everything that we take (for granted) to be true and universal. Not only does he question those values, he disturbs and blurs them, and attracts our curiosity to them.

I believe it is important to take a look at what being a transgressor means. For that purpose, I have turned to Jamake Highwater's work, already mentioned in this chapter, *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor*. Although this particular book analyzes transgression from under the microscope of homosexuality (an approach which this thesis later proposes to assume), its ideas of the concept of transgression certainly apply to any kind of transgressor. According to Jamake Highwater:

> The commonplace definition of the word "transgression" is a violation of morality. We use the word "transgression" almost entirely as a description of a breach of religious doctrine. Most of us understand a transgression as a sin. We customarily say that people transgress when they are guilty of an infraction of religious teachings – like disobeying the ten commandments or some other religious doctrine governing morality. For these reasons the word "transgression" is generally understood to mean an action that is morally subversive. A transgression is closely associated with the religious idea of damnation. Therefore, we do not admire those who transgress. We reproach

> them as sinners. And the more "terrible" the transgression, the more we reproach them. We may ridicule them, disdain them, beat them, imprison them, banish them, or we may even kill them.[20]

The fact that the unnamed character is a transgressor in his very essence is absolutely unquestionable. His mere existence shakes the grounds of generally accepted religious beliefs concerning human creation: he has not been brought to life by God's hands. A single glance at his gigantic body frame, distorted features and stitched limbs would be an immediate giveaway that that could not possibly be the work of God. Moreover, as he later releases his frustration at being socially rejected for his appearance in the form of murders, the character transgresses once again, playing the role of God in taking lives away. He is a sinner, a transgressor, twice: for being what he is and for killing.

In his book, Jamake Highwater also works the metaphor of being inside/outside walls when dealing with the binary insider/outsider. Briefly speaking, the insiders would be the ones who are able to "boast" about bearing the necessary characteristics required to belong to the so-called group of "normal individuals" (earning the right to be inside the walls that delineate that group). In counterpart, the outsiders would be the ones who do not possess those same characteristics or who, one way or another, do not follow the standards of assumed normalcy and, as a consequence, are labeled as abnormal individuals and left outside the walls.

Within this concept of insiders/outsiders, one crucial aspect that demarcates territory would be language use. Highwater concludes that "the language of insiders is aimed at the exclusion of outsiders."[21] When individuals consider themselves part of the so-called "normal standards" (regardless of the aspect in question), they arm themselves against those who fall short of their requirements with an apparatus of language whose objective is to segregate. As further exemplification of such an occurrence, Highwater recollects a particular moment in his life when his classmates called him names at the suspicion of his homosexuality:

> I understood all too well that my classmates expressed themselves in vicious terms whenever they talked about things they rejected. It didn't take long for me to understand that they had a great many cruel words for things and people they didn't like. Gradually, as I heard those angry words repeated again and again, I began to realized [*sic*] to what extent I was one of the people they hated. […] They were words that aroused a sense of power and aggrandizement for those who shouted them; they brought shame and humiliation in those at whom they were shouted. Words were weapons,

[20] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 41-42
[21] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 24

> fired in rapid succession in order to hold back in intrusion of outsiders […] Words were a psychological Great Wall of China, staunchly guarding the frontiers of conformity and an unrelenting notion of the superiority of insiders.[22]

Hence the danger of choice of words when referring to an individual. Since language can both offend and exclude, it has to be carefully chosen if one does not intend to label someone else.

The nameless character himself feels the power of language under his own skin. Throughout the novel, since the moment he opened his whitish watery eyes, he is shouted at and called by the most varied array of bad names such as: wretch (first name called by his own creator, at the moment he comes to life), monster, demoniacal corpse, creature, enemy, demon, devil, being, animal, fiend, destroyer, insect, ogre, foe, persecutor, villain, murderer and adversary. With the exception of "being" and "creature," all the other terms used by various characters along the narrative clearly bring in themselves the negative connotation of something that is evil, deformed, and bad-intentioned, an opponent, an enemy, a dangerous castaway. These categories, after a moment of judgment and labeling, serve the purpose of singling out individuals and leaving them out of the group of insiders, outside the walls Highwater talks about. The creature in *Frankenstein* has been left out from the very beginning, first due to his extraordinary body and existence, and later due to his criminal atrocities.

Whence the inescapability of transgression inherent to the nameless character's nature. He has no way out of it: **living**, in his case, **is** pure transgression. Since the moment he was "born" he has been given clear hints that he does not belong to any social circle, any human race, any physical archetype taken to be normal. In a desperate attempt to fit in, he buries himself in more transgression by murdering those who appeal to his creator the most, believing he can coerce Victor to either accept him (sympathizing with his pain) or to create a female companion for him and setting them free upon the earth to live their unhappy wretched lives by themselves. However, he finds out that his issue will remain unsolved forever and realizes that the ultimate redemption for his transgressive existence will be death. At the end of the novel, after watching his creator die in Robert Walton's vessel, he sets out to fulfill his only possible destiny: isolation and death. In his farewell lines to Robert Walton, he affirms:

[22] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 24-25

> But soon, […] I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace, or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell. (p. 205)

If I proceed with an examination of the creature's representation as a literary tool, I will be able to find even more layers of transgression in *Frankenstein*. When talking about outsiders of the wall, Jamake Highwater considers a fact:

> I have spent most of my adult life in a ghetto among countless other outsiders who have also learned how to talk through the wall. We revel in each other's voices, but the people within the walled city are often offended by the sounds of outsiders that penetrate the sturdy barriers of conformity. They attempt to silence the voices, but occasionally the valiant utterances of outsiders manage to loosen a bit of mortar, perhaps even dislodge a few bricks, opening the wall to a strong, new light that has never before been seen by those who are safely walled up. Not everyone has a voice. Many outsiders cannot speak through walls, and, as a consequence, they become silent and invisible. Some give up their voices willingly. Others cannot face the ferocious silence of their lives; so they replace their genuine voices with incomprehensible shrieks of rage. They bombard the wall with wrath or batter it with explosives. The silence is broken by their rage, but nothing changes. They remain outsiders who are desperate to be allowed into the world.[23]

It is most common to find villains and bad guys being represented in literature, but they hardly ever have a voice of their own. However, Mary Shelley gives the creature a voice (and a most eloquent one). In that sense, Shelley attributes to him another layer of transgression. From chapter 11 to 16, the reader is allowed access to the character's most inner feelings and emotions as he tells Victor his story. Not only does the being tell his story, but he also fights for the right to have a voice. He avidly educates himself in an attempt to communicate. He goes after his creator in search of an honest conversation and, perhaps most importantly, he manages to gain the reading audience's sympathy for his case, in spite of Victor's cold reception to his tale. In the scope of how antagonists are usually portrayed in literature, voiceless and usually defined by the protagonist's narration, the character in question, although nameless, guarantees a voice of his own in *Frankenstein*, thus constituting yet another layer of transgression in Mary Shelley's novel. In one passage, the reader has direct access, by means of the creature's own words, to his feelings of compassion towards the family of cottagers he has been observing closely: "They were not entirely happy. The young man and his companion often went apart and appeared to weep. I saw no cause for their unhappiness, but I was deeply affected by it." (p. 95)

[23] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 6

The transgressive character also talks about the insecurity that disturbs his soul, due to society's despise towards him: "I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me." (p. 105) In these lines, the character's fears and preoccupations are nearly palpable.

Another eloquent example of the agonies the being undergoes can be found in the following passage, where he contemplates the meaning of his existence:

> I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. 'The path of my departure was free,' and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my nature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them. (p. 113)

The greatest significance of passages like these lies in the fact that the unnamed character, the so-called "villain" of the narrative, is given the opportunity to express his feelings and judgments himself. In *Frankenstein*, this feature is evidenced in a twofold way, since both Mary Shelley (the author), and Victor Frankenstein himself (one of the novel's three narrators) allow the creature a share of the narration. In this aspect, the transgressor escapes the trap of imposed silence Highwater talks about, even though he cannot escape final condemnation.

It is hardly a surprise that the creature's acts of transgression should not go unnoticed and, deeper than that, punished. This character represents a threat to society, which, in turn, has to react against him somehow. In his book entitled *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão*, Michel Foucault discusses the ways and means by which society has exercised its punishing forces against infractions since the eighteenth century. Foucault states that:

> Effectively, the infraction thrusts the whole individual against the social body; society has the right to stand up completely against this individual in order to punish him. […] Thus a formidable right to punish forms itself, for the outlaw becomes a public enemy. Even worse than an enemy, he is a betrayer, because he throws his punches within society. A **"monster"**. […] The right to punish has shifted from the sovereign's vengeance to society's defense.[24] (My translation and my bold)

Since the creature's very early attempts to establish contact with other people, he is rejected and attacked. From a very early moment, just as eye contact is established, it becomes a matter of public safety that people defend themselves against such a being,

[24] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 76

even if the most the creature has tried to do is to talk. In an early stage of his narrative to Victor, he recollects a very unpleasant moment when he finds some cottages and enters one of them:

> One of these [cottages] I entered, but I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel. (p. 91)

In another occasion, as he tries to introduce himself to the DeLacey family, the reception he gets is far from warm:

> […] Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung; in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. (p. 119-120)

In both moments, the "monster" is physically punished without having committed any particular crime. His appearance alone is a threat to society. Speech or actions notwithstanding, his very existence and presence demand surveillance and expiation. Due to his unconformity with human physical rules and standards of normalcy, he becomes a public enemy, such as Foucault explains.

Society despises what is different, but it does not resist the temptation to classify and scrutinize that difference, even if it is with the sole purpose of rejecting it. And this is exactly where the creature comes pretty close to matters of identity that have incited men's curiosity and despise throughout history: Jews, women, black people, homosexuals – with both their real-life controversies and representations in literature. Moreover, I could not fail to point out their allegorical representations in literature and arts in general: super heroes and their supernatural powers, mutants, ghosts, vampires and monsters.

Indeed, taking that perspective into consideration, the creature in *Frankenstein* can be seen as a rich metaphor for any kind of "monster" one proposes to analyze. Being the "monster" he really is, he has given me room for discussion of various other metaphorical "monsters" that have treaded the history of this planet.

At this point of this discussion, it is quite fitting to explain my choice to write the word "monster" between inverted commas. After what I have learned from Jamake Highwater and Jurandir Freire Costa, I could not take the creature as a literal monster.

Among the countless discussions that can be aroused by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the issues of domesticity, the double, and abjection are the ones that appeal to me the most, in what they help me understand the degrees to which the creature has come to be a transgressor. Those issues all relate to greater matters of identity (and the threats to the "accepted identities" mankind has created), which is a topic that never ceases to incite heated discussions among any circle of society.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I am going to link the issue of transgression to another kind of "monsters". "Monsters" that, like the alleged one in *Frankenstein*, come to life as the personification of transgression and whose lives are usually pre-defined and dictated by it. I am going to talk about contemporary same-sex oriented men.

CHAPTER 3

"Monsters" of Today: Transgression in *Angels in America*

It was the darkness that gave my life significance and power.
At the moment of that realization, my sense of "alienation" became a cherished gift.
[…] the greatest distance between people is not space but culture.
Jamake Highwater, *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor.*

3.1. Identity: Kathryn Woodward and Stuart Hall

Before I can deal with matters of identity in the play *Angels in America*, it is essential that I discuss and understand this concept. After all, what does one mean by the term "identity"? What does it have to do with another term, "subjectivity"? What are the differences and relations between the two terms?

In "Concepts of Identity and Difference", Kathryn Woodward defends the thought that individuals develop their identities within the personal sphere, that is, inwardly, whereas the public sphere is what causes impacts on this process of identity formation. In other words, depending on the environment in which one finds himself/herself, he/she exercises a certain identity. This way, an individual does not have only one identity, but multiple identities. For instance: a woman is most likely to play the motherly role when she finds herself in the household environment, surrounded by her children and husband, while she plays the professional role when she is in her place of work. Both identities are thoroughly different in whatever aspect we set ourselves to analyze: the course of actions adopted, the type of language spoken (including tone, intonation, choice of vocabulary), the level of worth allotted to each role, and so on. Obviously, this plurality of identities does not come without a price, for in the exercise of such plurality, both a clash of identities on the inside, and the constant threat of outside judgment arise.

In another instance (since this chapter of my work intends to discuss these contemporary "monsters"), gay men also present us a sharp example of how this identity/environment clash occurs: a man who displays homoerotic inclinations is likely to perform a certain identity – one that is free of affectation and mannerisms, so to speak – while he is on the job (or on a job interview, for that matter), or among people who cannot be aware of his sexual preferences. This same man may display another identity when he finds himself within a friendly circle, in clubs, or places where he can allow his sexual orientation to show itself. Nevertheless, how well that man is going to be able to administer those differences, the price of constant watch and alertness he is going to pay, and the consequences he might have to endure (prejudice and judgment) in case some boundaries get crossed are all imbued in the complications of putting up walls of identities to masquerade a certain subjectivity.

In order to clarify and separate the two terms, Kathryn Woodward's characterizing of identity and its comparison to subjectivity is helpful. As Woodward clearly develops the topic:

> The terms identity and subjectivity are occasionally used in ways which suggest that the terms are interchangeable. In fact, there is a great deal of overlap between the two. **Subjectivity** includes our sense of self. It involves the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions which constitute our sense of 'who we are' and the feelings which are brought to different positions within culture. Subjectivity involves our most personal feelings and thoughts. Yet we experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to our experience of ourselves and where we adopt an identity. […] Subjects are thus subjected to the discourse and must themselves take it up as individuals who so position themselves. The positions which we take up and identify with constitute our **identities**.[25] (Emphases in the original)

Applying these concepts to men with homoerotic inclinations, I would understand that their **subjectivity** is what they really are on the inside, whether it is conscious or not (some gay men claim that they have been unaware of their sexual orientation until a certain point in their lives). Their subjectivity, as far as sexuality is concerned (since sexuality is only one aspect of a human being's personality), is their essence, their basic feelings, the motion that drives them towards other men, instead of towards women. No matter how hard they try to deny or suffocate that subjectivity, it is always going to be there, lurking, striving to be set free, bringing consequences to the individual for his decision to keep it away. One's subjectivity, thus, would not be an aspect of one's life

[25] WOODWARD, K. (2002) p. 39

that could be annulled or erased, but a facet that would remain regardless of one's efforts to overlook it.

However, still following Woodward's train of thought, that same individual has the choice of presenting distinct **identities** to the world around him: depending on the social context where that man is inserted, he is going to adopt a certain position in which he is either going to hide his sexual orientation (in places where he would be oppressed by acting the opposite), act it out in an outright way (in places where he would feel free to be himself), or simply not care whether people will take notice. Thus, one's chosen identities might match one's subjectivity or not. And greater than that, the identity that one chooses to exteriorize is certainly going to be responsible for the level of Otherness in which one is going to be inserted. Woodward explains that identities are assumed within a system that builds oppositions by means of binary relationships: good/evil, black/white, insider/outsider, heterosexual/homosexual, One/Other. Depending on the identity a person chooses to display to the world, he/she is automatically going to fit into one of the two elements of those binary models. If the identity displayed fails to fit into one group, the person is going to be inserted into the other group. By choosing to display his homoerotic practices blatantly among people who are thoroughly against this sexual expression, for instance, a gay man is sure to be thrust into the group of outsiders, non-conformists, Others. As a result, this man is likely to suffer strong prejudice, if not violent verbal or physical attack.

Therefore, it is not uncommon to meet homoerotically inclined men who struggle fiercely against their subjectivity in a desperate attempt to be accepted or, in the very least, not to be trapped in the group of outcasts. Such a suffocation of subjectivity takes place since we live in a society that, in its significant majority, feels strongly against relationships between people of the same sex. Thus, outright same-sex oriented expressions of affection and love end up being restricted to marginalized areas, or sexual ghettos, such as gay dance clubs. And when they do take place in the public realm, such as gay parades, for instance, they are viewed as daring and defiant.

Ultimately, one cannot, in any circumstance, neglect the fact that, no matter how hard an individual might fight against his subjectivity, there are going to be consequences to that, since subjectivity is also deeply related to the unconscious, as

Kathryn Woodward observes: "[…] the unconscious, […] is seen as functioning according to its own laws and a very different logic from the conscious thought of the rational subject […]."[26] It is not rare to encounter people with serious psychological complications due to their strong efforts to suffocate and fight back their subjectivity.

In the play *Angels in America*, we are introduced to characters that, each in his own level, initially fight against his subjectivity in an attempt to control it. Those characters, one of which will be meticulously studied later, start the play by portraying disparate identities from their real subjectivities. Consequently, their sense of self is deeply impaired. This suffocation of subjectivity is one aspect that goes against transgression.

Since Kathryn Woodward's identity and subjectivity concepts were developed without taking into consideration the element of time, I felt the need to confront her assumptions with those of Stuart Hall, a scholar whose name weighs considerably in terms of identity issues. Unlike Woodward, Hall places a lot of importance upon the effects of time in the conceptualization of identity, showing how the flow of centuries has contributed to the transformation of the concept. Roughly speaking, Hall does not seem worried about the concept of subjectivity, or else, takes both identity and subjectivity to be so intricate that he neither makes a clear distinction between them, nor grants the matter too much thought. Notwithstanding, his considerations regarding identity are of extreme importance to my work; as his and Woodward's concepts intertwine, I strongly believe they are highly complementary.

In the chapter "The Question of Cultural Identity", Hall explains three concepts of identity, the ways by which each concept eventually replaced the other, and the factors that caused (and keep causing) those changes to occur. In order to understand each mode of identity, Hall situates the subject within three comprehensive historical periods and classifies those subjects as: the "Enlightenment subject", the "sociological subject" and the "post-modern subject."

The "Enlightenment subject" emerges at around the movement by the same name, having its principles rooted in the movement's beliefs. As mankind concentrated

[26] WOODWARD, K. (2002) p. 43

on man's capability and potential, praising such prowess as rationality and consciousness, the aforementioned subject was believed to be:

> […] a fully centered, unified individual, […] whose "center" consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or "identical" with itself – throughout the individual's existence. The essential center of the self was a person's identity. [27]

Though very simplistic, this first assumption bears the signs of Woodward's concept of subjectivity and somewhat takes it to be mingled with that of identity, inasmuch as it understood the inner self (what Woodward would label "subjectivity") to be a subject's "identity". Moreover, it accounted for the **development** of identity since an individual's birth, even though the very core of that identity would remain essentially unaltered throughout one's life. Put this way, identity seemed to comprehend each and every aspect of an individual, who would have very little chance of escaping it.

The "sociological subject" concept, which would find itself situated in a more "modern world", sees identity as a dialectical matter, one that does not form itself alone, but in its relations with the environment. Hall develops the theme explaining that, in this case: "[…] identity is formed in the "interaction" between self and society. The subject still has an inner core or essence that is "the real me," but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds".[28]

Once again, Woodward's concept of subjectivity shows itself in between the lines, when Stuart Hall talks about an "inner core or essence". However, the notion of identity thoroughly changes from an almost inert one to a moving instance that shapes itself in dialectical relationships. The autonomy and self-sufficiency that one would find in the first concept cannot be found in the second one, and instead of being continuous and unchangeable, identity now assumes a more flexible status.

Stuart Hall, then, leads us to the "post-modern subject", one whose identity reaches a level of fragmentation never reached by the previous two. This new subject would be completely de-centered and, as a consequence, identity would be multiple, varied and extremely fragmented, taking its shape and changing continually, as interaction with an ever-changing outside world takes place. According to Hall, several factors have contributed to this fragmentation of the self: globalization and its breaking

[27] HALL, S. (1996) p. 597
[28] HALL, S. (1996) p. 597

of earthly boundaries such as time and space; advances in late-modern philosophies such as Marx's, Freud's, Sausssure's, and Foucault's theories; and feminist thinking. Although I will not grant further discussion of these factors in this thesis, since it would deviate from my main objective here, it is understandable that the interpersonal relations that once contributed to the formation of the "sociological subject" have greatly expanded and become more complex with the above mentioned factors.

This last identity concept takes me extremely close to Kathryn Woodward's views on identity. As Stuart Hall explains:

> The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self." Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. […] The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. [29]

Therefore, although each chooses a distinct approach to studying the matter, Woodward and Hall end up meeting in the agreement that there is no such notion of a one/unified individual who forms his/her identity without the influence of outside factors. Both seem to agree that identities are multiple and fragmented and that, depending on the environment where the subject is inserted, the identity he/she develops and displays may (and will) vary considerably. Both scholars' arguments help me prove that conformity, continuity and standardization are utterly impractical.

3.2. Transgressing through AIDS: Susan Sontag and Marcelo Secron Bessa

Especially at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, back in the middle of the 1980s, the syndrome took up the label of a "gay cancer". The great majority of first cases of the syndrome were evidenced to affect same-sex oriented men (although a number of hemophiliacs were inflicted too). For this reason, whenever a male individual found out about his contamination by the HIV virus, whenever this same individual portrayed any aspects that directly associated him with AIDS (physical symptoms, such as the Kaposi Sarcomas), or whenever this individual made a choice to be completely

[29] HALL, S. (1996) p. 598

honest and open about his health condition, he was straightforwardly linked to homoeroticism. AIDS, then, quickly became an evidence of transgression. The affliction immediately became a symbol of boundary-crossing, assuming greater significations beyond those of a mere ailment. But what contributed to this sudden surge of ideologies directly linked to AIDS?

The first years that constituted the discovery of the virus and the syndrome were obviously very turbulent due to world-wide uncertainties in relation to the new manifestations of the illness, which swept through the planet and killed millions at one strike. Humanity was taken by assault. Whole nations were frightened and insecure. Scientists were thoroughly unfamiliar as to the causes and effects of the new discovery. According to Susan Sontag, in her book entitled *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1991), whenever humanity cannot find plausible answers to whatever disturbs stability (such as a new disease), a tendency to turn to metaphorical meanings becomes quite noticeable. Due to the mysterious element of such disease as AIDS, even its name becomes a taboo word. It happened to tuberculosis throughout the nineteenth century; it happened to cancer in the twentieth century. In the '80s, it happened to AIDS as well.

It did not take long for the label of "plague" to be attributed to AIDS. In yet another insight on the transformation of diseases in metaphors, Sontag's book explains the meaning of the label and why it has been linked to AIDS:

> Plague, from the Latin *plaga* (stroke, wound), has long been used metaphorically as the highest standard of collective calamity, evil, scourge […] The most feared diseases, those that are not simply fatal but transform the body into something alienating […] are the ones that seem particularly susceptible to promotion to 'plague'.[30]

In the sense that AIDS deprives the body of its natural defenses and strongly impairs physical conditions (thus "alienating" the body), added to the fact that it reached to a considerate number of victims at once, the syndrome became a fitting repository for the label of "plague". Consequently, in the search for explanations for such an infliction (as for other inflictions as well), metaphors abounded. Another element that, even before the appearance of AIDS, reinforced and, to a certain extent, encouraged this metaphorical application of meaning towards diseases was the establishment of

[30] SONTAG, S. (1991) p. 130-131

Christianity, of which Sontag concludes: “With the advent of Christianity, which imposed more moralized notions of disease, as of everything else, a closer fit between disease and ‘victim’ gradually evolved. The idea of disease as punishment yielded the idea that a disease could be a particularly appropriate and just punishment”.[31]

Certainly, Susan Sontag referred to tuberculosis and cancer in this particular passage, but her assumptions can surely be applied to AIDS as well. Moreover, Sontag specifically analyzes the idea of punishment attributed to AIDS: “This is a traditional use of sexually transmitted diseases; to be described as punishments not just of individuals but of a group (‘generall licentiousnes’ [*sic*]) […] And the assignment of fault is not contradicted by cases that do not fit”.[32]

As it is clear, in a Judeo-Christian society, diseases sometimes take on a punishment status and people who suffer from specific cases end up being believed to deserve such ordeal, given some circumstances of their behavior. Therefore, in the beginning of the AIDS epidemic (and even until current days, in some segments of society such as religious or conservative groups), individuals who suffered from such ailment were believed to deserve that “punishment”.

Another decisive metaphor that haunts people with AIDS is that of “pollution”. Since the virus is known to invade the bloodstream, taking control of cells and killing them, an understanding of the contaminated individual as dirty, corroded and polluted arises. This is yet another intensifier for the idea of punishment. Since most of the infected people were gay men (in the beginning), the blame fit perfectly: it was God’s way of expressing His disapproval of such sexual conduct. The ones affected by the syndrome embodied the metaphorical role of punishment. This notion is also stressed when Sontag talks about such metaphors: “Diseases have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust. Traditional disease metaphors are principally a way of being vehement […] Disease imagery is used to express concern for social order […]”.[33]

[31] SONTAG, S. (1991) p. 44
[32] SONTAG, S. (1991) p. 140
[33] SONTAG, S. (1991) p. 73

As a final consideration about Sontag's contributions, it is necessary to underline that AIDS became one more stamp of transgression attributed to gays. In acquiring the virus and making that a public fact, gays received their share of scrutiny and persecution, as Sontag considers:

> […] to get AIDS is precisely to be revealed, in the majority of cases so far, as a member of a certain 'risk group,' […] The illness flushes out an identity that might have remained hidden […]. It also confirms an identity and […] has been a creator of community as well as an experience that isolates the ill and exposes them to harassment and persecution.[34]

Marcelo Secron Bessa also analyzed this metaphorical characteristic of the syndrome in his *Histórias positivas: a literatura (des)construindo a AIDS* (1997). About the social context in which the new virus emerged, Bessa discusses: "[…] what becomes really important is that the epidemic appears in a particular historical moment in which neo-conservative forces try to take advantage of it, resuscitating the pest metaphor – among others – for the sake of metaphorical maneuvers".[35] (My translation)

In an attempt to understand the new situation that afflicted great part of the globe in one stroke, the people who were mostly affected by AIDS were put under a meticulous microscope. The persona of the gay man was studied in detail. About that, Bessa provides us with further insight:

> It is discovered that this persona – the homosexual –, among other things, escapes the familial monogamy; it is a "promiscuous" type. And it is exactly the promiscuity that encloses an apparently simple syllogism: if homosexuality = promiscuity, and promiscuity = AIDS, then homosexuality = AIDS.[36] (My translation)

Whence the direct connection proven. That was how the new epidemic was associated with gays. The mystery led to the necessity of explanations, which led to the aid of metaphors. As such metaphors brought the idea of punishment within themselves, the notion of homoeroticism blame inevitably arose.

In his other book, *Os perigosos: autobiografias & AIDS* (2002), Bessa exemplifies the extent to which blame and guilt inflicted by society's pressures act upon an individual when he discusses an article from the Brazilian magazine *Veja*, issued September, 1987. In it, five HIV-positive patients talk about their condition, on which Bessa comments:

---

[34] SONTAG, S. (1991) p. 110-111
[35] BESSA, M. (1997) p. 22
[36] BESSA, M. (1997) p. 52-53

> Of the five [patients] depicted, there is one who, besides piety, inspires, too, a certain dose of antipathy in the reader. […] his discourse is condemnatory – "the disease is a punishment from God," he says, "to wipe out homosexuality and immorality off the world". Nothing out of the ordinary, since those are the feelings of certain religious institutions and of part of the public. What bothers the reader might originate from the reporter's revelation that, in his hospital profile, there is record that such patient has had sporadic homosexual intercourses.[37] (My translation)

The above mentioned scenario is not infrequent, as a significant number of gays with AIDS, deeply influenced by society's claims that the syndrome is a sort of punishment, ends up internalizing self-destructive feelings of guilt. Moreover, within the scope of the binary system guilty/innocent, one may also discover that gays find themselves once again trapped in the "guilty" group. Since the beginning, AIDS was considered a disease of the "Other", which affected outsiders, marginal citizens, and sodomites. Later, as case histories among hemophiliacs came to records, society found yet another way of casting gays away as the guilty party. As Bessa noted, about hemophiliac cases in Brazil:

> […] the hemophiliacs' drama, […] also stressed a division of the HIV infected ones and the ones who were sick with AIDS: the victims and the deserving, that is, those who were infected through blood transfusion, or contact with contaminated blood, babies etc., and those who were infected through sexual intercourse, in which cases were male homosexuals and bisexuals.[38] (My translation)

It becomes clear that, whatever perspective one takes, gays with AIDS are caught in a close-knit web of transgression and punishment. It is impossible for those men to experience the syndrome and avoid falling into the trap of metaphors. Briefly speaking, these are the contours of AIDS assuming a highly metaphorical positioning towards homoeroticism. It was directly linked to transgression, and thus punishment. And since such sexual expression was also associated with a moral/social/physical disturbance, the identification with AIDS gained extremely "monstrous" aspects.

Another aspect that contributed to the reinforcement of the idea of AIDS as a "monstrous" ailment was the fact that, at the end of their lives, sick people were harshly disfigured: deprived of bodily mass and afflicted by sickly eruptions on the surface of their skin, those people conveyed a disturbing image of the human being - that one of a deformed body, with bones showing: the personification of the "monster". The homosexual man who, since the beginning of times following the invention of the

[37] BESSA, M. (2002) p. 52
[38] BESSA, M. (2002) p. 51

concept, had always had a “monstrous” image associated with him, added a new image to his list of “monstrosity”: that of the man with AIDS.

At this point in time, men who displayed homoerotic inclinations and, in addition to this transgressive element, found their lives linked to the HIV virus acquired a new body, a new representation, a new metaphor. Marcelo Bessa concludes:

> Being a bearer of the virus or being sick with AIDS implies ceasing to be whom one is in order to be one who “suffers from AIDS” [Marcelo uses the Portuguese term “aidético”, which has no equivalent in English], in order to have a defined body, face and history.[39] (My translation)

And right afterwards, exploring the imagery of the mirror (which enables the individual to identify with his physical self), Bessa explains:

> To look at oneself in the mirror, thus, does not mean seeing one’s own image, but the image of one “who suffers from AIDS” [once again “aidético”] and *that which this image represents*. To see the other in one’s place, to watch the other in the mirror.[40] (My translation; author’s italics)

Here, the concept of the binary system One/Other shows up. And these considerations remind me of Jamake Highwater’s assumptions about insiders/outsiders discussed in the previous chapter. Homoeroticism by itself excludes individuals from the insiders’ group, casting them out of the boundaries of the carefully erected walls built around that group and making them be outsiders, transgressors. At the moment this individual identifies himself with AIDS, a whole new level of “monstrosity” surrounds him and pushes him out and into the outsiders’ realm even harder. The identification with the Other is complete and consolidated. Homoeroticism equals total transgression.

3.3. Transgressing through Language: Jurandir Freire Costa and Jamake Highwater

Before I can start discussing two of the play’s main gay characters, it is still necessary to understand some ways through which an individual may transgress. Language classification is one very important field that characterizes transgression.

[39] BESSA, M. (1997) p. 109
[40] BESSA, M. (1997) p. 109

Concerning this area of knowledge, a renowned scholar provided me with solid information: Jamake Highwater.

Since the construction of the concept of homosexuality (and the term "homosexuality" itself), back in the nineteenth century, with the rise of science and its need to categorize every single aspect of human personality and behavior, it has become impossible for same sex-oriented individuals to just be, without necessarily having to transgress. Similarly to Judeo-Christian ideologies, biology has clearly shown a predisposition to identify norms and order.[41] Jamake Highwater, the author of *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor*, explains that, whereas physics always busied itself with a "mythology of chaos", philosophy and biology, on the other hand, have always been concerned about order.

Moreover, in spite of its outright disregard for the belief in an almighty deity who is responsible for creation, the theory of evolution, through its deep stress on natural selection, places extreme importance upon procreation and evolution, the cornerstones of survival. Whence Darwinists' and socio-biologists' awe at a kind of sexual practice that does not serve the purpose of spreading the species. Such a thought leads to the belief that homoerotic sexual practices, in their very essence and conceptualization, are useless.

However, how did this conceptualization begin? According to earlier records, the terms which preceded the "invention" of the concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality, as they are known nowadays, were coined by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German attorney. He sacrificed his career in favor of "theoretical elaboration of and political activism on behalf of"[42] same-sex oriented individuals.

Although Ulrichs was gay himself and his studies were meant to advocate same-sexers, his newly invented terminology inadvertently gave room to pejorative interpretations of gay sexual practices. Basically speaking, Ulrichs named those whose sexual attraction tends to the same sex "Urnings", and those who feel attracted to the opposite sex "Dionings". In doing so, he paved the way to the creation of the harmful binary homosexual/heterosexual, even though his intentions were benign.

[41] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 106-107
[42] BLASIUS, M. & PHELAN, S. (1995) p. 61

In the chapter entitled "The Third Sex Theory and the Creation of Political Subjects", Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan comment on the negative consequences of Ulrichs's term creation:

> For Ulrichs, sexuality remains inextricable from reproduction and gender roles; so, for example, a male *Urning* is defined negatively as someone with a female soul in a male body, and not a "true" male (one who would be sexually attracted to women). This left Ulrichs's third sex open to pathologization […][43]

Therefore, in spite of Ulrichs's position as a supporter of gay rights (he even penned a petition to the legislatures of Austria and northern Germany against the criminalization of male same-sex practices), his terms were later used by scientists for the development of new terms under a negative light. Hence the deprecating conceptualization of homosexuality, as opposed to heterosexuality.

In his studies about transgression and its close relationship with science, Jamake Highwater articulately comments on our Western society way of thinking:

> Wherever we look, we find that a consuming idea of transgression is at the heart of Western mentality. The idea that there are moral laws of nature is so deeply entrenched in the West that we tend to see breaches of those laws every time someone's behavior confuses or outrages us. The language of transgression changes from time to time, but the process of vilification remains very much the same. Whatever the categories of sin, whatever the categories of normalcy, in the West we seemed to be continually on the hunt for offenders. It seems to me that we are famished for demons, as if our very sanity depends on a kind of moral cannibalism. Whether we speak of the wickedness of breaking divine law or the degeneracy of breaking natural law, essentially we are describing the same transgression – the violation of a boundary established by a mysterious power variously called God and Nature.[44]

In this "search for demons", society has endorsed a list of transgressive aspects. And in the midst of this list some aspects stand out a little more than others in the contribution to the construction of this "monstrous" identity.

Transgression may be evidenced in a diversity of ways. In the midst of this variety, society makes use of specific mechanisms in order to ascertain one's position as a transgressor. One might be singled out and identified as transgressor by being cast away in ghettos, by only being allowed to obtain certain jobs (usually underpaid jobs), by being denied access to certain societal segments, and by being called names, among other ways. In this section, I am going to concentrate on the mechanism responsible for language exclusion.

[43] BLASIUS, M. & PHELAN, S. (1995) p. 61
[44] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 109

"Being called names" goes beyond the mere implication of receiving a title. It does not only imply having a name to which one identifies oneself. It also implies incorporating such identification and taking a stand within the ever-recurrent binary systems used by society in order to organize itself. Society tends to conceptualize ideas in terms of binary elements: that which is hot is whatever is not cold. A man is whoever is not a woman. A homosexual is one who is not heterosexual. On top of it, embedded in this binary system comes the judgment of worth: one element is always more valued than the other one. Within this linguistic conceptualization of transgression, Jurandir Freire Costa has largely contributed to my studies. In his book *A inocência e o vício* (1992), he starts by analyzing some of the roles of language, rather than that of simply representing the world:

> The most interesting task of language, […], is not that of "representing" but that of creating discursive bonds among subjects and/or between them and things and the states of things around them, so as to structure a universe of sense which is minimally compatible with humanity.[45] (My translation)

Therefore, language does not only provide names in order to enable communication, it also establishes relations among whatever it names. In an attempt to attribute meaning to the surrounding world, one establishes a net of significations among elements, each acquiring definition in comparison and contrast with the other. In these relationships, the shadow of worth is also implied. One element is sure to be imbued with a certain value, since comparisons always tend to imply the inferior/superior binary.

Jurandir Costa also explains that the vocabulary one uses is generated by our subjectivities. One can take the example of different cultures to understand this concept. Distinct cultures see one same aspect differently. For instance, one trace of human behavior that is taken to be acceptable in some religions (such as having more than one wife in the Islamic culture) turns out to be unacceptable in others (such as in the Roman Catholic religion). Even within the same country one might find such examples, which is the case of the United States of America. Some acts that are considered crimes in specific states might pass as acceptable deeds in others. In each case, one tends to take one's beliefs as "normal" and, in comparison to that model of normalcy, all the other

[45] COSTA, J. (1992) p. 15

beliefs that fall short of the standard are taken to be “abnormal”. Jurandir Costa affirms that […] “according to the description of our subjectivities, we interpret the subjectivity of the other as identical, familiar or strange, exotic or even inhuman […].”[46] (My translation)

Due to this over-reliance on the binary system, members of society have grown accustomed to judging others based on their own subjectivities, and language has played a crucial role in labeling individuals and sorting out their validity. Jurandir Costa discusses this societal order:

> In general, our moral conducts obey this kind of order. Those who are similar to us, or whose moral ideals come close to the ones we aspire, deserve our respect and have their conducts approved of, that is, taken up as models to be followed. On the other hand, those who distance themselves from the models are disapproved and pointed out as transgressors, abnormalities or criminals, according to the infraction committed.[47] (My translation)

The importance placed upon language models is so impressive that words assume the task of carrying the heavy burden of prejudice. The mere dualism of signifier and signified gets surpassed. Ideological stands leave the background and take on the frontline of language use. Thus, language becomes essential when it comes to defining an individual:

> We […] are that which language allows us to be; we believe in what it allows us to believe and only it can make us take something about the other as familiar, natural, or else, repudiate it as strange, unnatural and threatening. In short, because we are products of the contingency of language and desire our morals are equally *contingent*.[48] (My translation; author’s italics)

Jurandir Costa acknowledges the influence of language so strongly that he affirms language alone is responsible for the way individuals relate and understand one another. In addition, when he recognizes the contingency of both language and society’s morals, he reinforces the uncertainty that such relationships based on multiple subjectivities imply.

In his above mentioned book, Jamake Highwater handles this notion of language and its usage within the binary systems of values. He talks about it by means of the metaphor of “walls”. This metaphor implies being inside or outside the walls and, in this system, words appear once again as an essential tool of classification. Highwater says that “words are so often loaded by social manipulation, often attaining a significance in

[46] COSTA, J. (1992) p. 14
[47] COSTA, J. (1992) p. 17
[48] COSTA, J. (1992) p. 18

one social system that is quite different from their meanings in other systems".[49] Therefore, when one uses words to identify others, one is making sure the identified individual is being placed within a certain classification that encloses him either inside or outside the walls. Ultimately, besides having the power to classify individuals, language is capable of bestowing power to the one who uses it. That is the case of bad names society comes up with in order to underestimate and undervalue same-sex oriented individuals, for instance. Words, as Highwater says, become "weapons".

Words are also used as a reassurance tool in relation to unknown aspects of human behavior. Once again, as in the case of AIDS previously discussed, it just takes an issue that has fallen into the heading of mystery for language to start working towards finding words in order to name it. Whatever is new and unknown poses a threat. It becomes a matter of utter necessity for language to procure a label and definition to enclose the new element. In most of the cases, the neologisms produced carry negative connotations. That way, the inventor of the new language is placed on a pedestal of superiority and the newly named, obviously, is placed at the far distance of inferiority.

As Jamake Highwater recollects his school time, when his fellow classmates applied language they learned from adults in order to classify him as gay, what is really evident is that members of society "created ethical codes, religions, and scientific concepts *to justify their anxiety about the unknown, the darkness beyond the boundaries of the little reality of their looking glass*".[50] (My italics) It is only when something unknown receives a name that one is able to stop feeling deeply disturbed by it.

In order to sustain the idea that language is what enables judgment and prejudice to take place, Highwater comes to affirm that "we know nothing about the rules until someone teaches them to us".[51] This idea is especially complex since it encompasses another greater discussion, that of morality. Is morality a set of values we are born with or one we are taught after birth? What is morality based on? Highwater explains:

> Though religious fundamentalists and sociobiologists would like us to believe that morality is an inborn knowledge based on either "divine law" or "natural law" or on some other fixed and eternal order, there is an overwhelming amount of transcultural evidence suggesting that morality is nothing more or less than *a set of social agreements and arbitrary conventions* about what is good and what is normal as distinct from what is evil and abnormal.[52] (My italics)

[49] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 7
[50] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 26
[51] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 10
[52] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 12

Such a discussion takes one back to the examples of different cultures and different beliefs. What is considered wrong in one culture may be considered ordinary in other ones, all depending on what has been agreed by the majority in control. As for homoeroticism, for instance, Highwater provides us with quite a surprising example. In it, we can see that there are cultures that do not even have such a concept:

> In seventy-six societies studied by American anthropologist Clellan Ford and psychobiologist Frank A. Beach, fully two-thirds consider same-sex activities normal and socially acceptable, and rarely had terms like "homosexual" to designate the persons who engage in such activities. For many societies, past and present, desire is not categorized. It is only when sexual polarities and categories are invented as "normal heterosexual boundaries" that homosexuality comes into existence as an exceptional kind of act that is unquestionably off-limits.[53]

As observed, the problem arises when human desire becomes restricted within categorizations when, ideally, it should not be clipped out by a net of sub-categorizations at all. After all, if there were such thing as "natural law" then it might be valid and true to all individuals throughout the globe and such concepts would not fall under cultural differences. There remains little doubt that language, through ideological maneuvers, is what divides humanity among classes.

Due to my considerations towards language, one clarification must be made as to the terms I chose in order to refer to gays before I can start my analysis of the play *Angels in America*. In this thesis, except for the extracts from texts, I will not use the terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" to refer to same-sex oriented individuals, since I made a personal choice of agreeing with Jurandir Freire Costa's ideas about their prejudicial tendencies.

3.4. Transgressing Society's Rules: Michel Foucault

Are we to believe our society is free, liberal and nonchalant about sex now simply because we are allowed to discuss the matter of sex a good deal more than we were one or two centuries ago? Or is this supposed freedom of speech more linked to the controlling interests of the same society that needs to regulate deviations and arms itself

[53] HIGHWATER, J. (1997) p. 122

against them in the process of having them confessed under the guise of freedom? Michel Foucault believed, since the second half of the twentieth century, this alleged freedom had more to do with getting to **know** and **control** sexual deviations than with a sympathetic acknowledgement of diversity.

According to Foucault, in *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (1998), this drive towards control asserts its necessity when it attempts "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative".[54] Gays, then, do not fit into this necessity. Theoretically, they cannot procreate; they cannot assure the continuance of a labor-force society and thus perpetrate the endurance of a capitalist system that needs workers to strengthen its roots and ideologies. That is why men that display homoerotic inclinations need to be cataloged and controlled.

On the other hand, this obsession about control seemed to be losing its power. However, still bearing Michel Foucault's considerations, the supposed explosion of sexual discourse that started to take place throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not exactly mean a loosening of severity and of the thirst for control. It did seem, though, that the apparent retreat of Church domain was more related to a slight exchange of control forces: with the rise of science and medicine, the exercise of regulation started to gain stronger contours, supported by the belief that science, with all its experiments and results, **proved** a more reliable point and had, therefore, to be strictly abided by. Foucault questions: "What does the appearance of all these peripheral sexualities signify? Is the fact that they could appear in broad daylight a sign that the code had become more lax?"[55] And then, he answers:

> There was permissiveness, if one bears in mind that the severity of the codes relating to sexual offenses diminished considerably in the nineteenth century and that law itself often deferred to medicine. But an additional ruse of severity, if one thinks of all the agencies of control and all the mechanisms of surveillance that were put into operation by pedagogy or therapeutics. It may be the case that the intervention of the Church in conjugal sexuality and its rejection of "frauds" against procreation had lost most of their insistence over the previous two hundred years. But medicine made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple: it created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of the "incomplete" sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into the notions of "development" and instinctual "disturbances"; and it undertook to manage them.[56]

[54] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 36-37
[55] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 40
[56] FOUCAULT. M. (1998) p. 40-41

As a consequence, what was once believed to be unnatural to the eyes of God, and thus, unaccepted behavior to the eyes of the Church, became scientifically proved and was attested as harmful, health deprecating, and pathological. Such notions constitute another burden gay men have to endure, if they are willing to put their sexual subjectivities to practice.

Power institutions rooted their bases in four kinds of operations, according to Michel Foucault. Briefly speaking, the first mode of power operation would be one that controls and totally banishes occurrences such as consanguine marriages and adultery, at the same time that it controls and allows other occurrences such as infantile sexuality. The paradox seems sensible if we understand that power needs deviants ("outlaws") to survive, just as the Church needs a Devil to validate the existence and need of a God.

The second mode of power operation would be one that **singles out** and **categorizes** individuals into **species**. In this sense, individuals such as same-sex oriented men are marked (as if stamped) as simply homosexuals and nothing else. As a result, their sexuality permeates their whole beings and makes itself present in all considerations that might be made of them. Their sole existences become spoiled due to a "monstrosity" that is powerful enough to invalidate any other aspect of their characters and moral values, as Foucault demonstrates:

> The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. *Nothing that went into his [the homosexual's] total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature.*[57] (My italics)

The third form of power operation finds power working as a monitoring system. It presupposes constant watch or, in Foucault's words, "it presupposed proximities; it proceeded through examination and instant observation".[58] Foucault goes on to state:

> […] since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it – as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom – in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behavior. The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments.[59]

[57] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 43
[58] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 44
[59] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 44

Therefore, the body of the gay man assumes a position of health threat, be it physical or psychological, and demands close surveillance and quarantine. Consequently, the network of power relations responsible for sexuality takes in its hands the task of causing those sexual "outlaws" to come to surface, so that they can be controlled. Although the exposure of such sexuality might sound as freedom, it means just the other way around: by speaking themselves, unaccepted sexualities make themselves known and regulated.

The last form of power operation set itself towards legitimizing the heterosexual relations on the one hand, and outlining the peripheral exercises of sexuality (unaccepted sexualities) on the other, thus making a whole mechanism of polarized effects possible: the One and the Other, the in-law and the outlaw. Since these four power forms operated in concomitance, this last form of power exercise guaranteed that groups of sexualities be known and outlined, by means of careful watch, classification and segregation.

Foucault's *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão* (2005) also studies the mechanisms of surveillance and punishment attributed to law infractions of multiple kinds, which, in a way, refers back to the exercise of the third form of power, talked about in *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. In the more recent book, Foucault expands on his considerations about discipline being imposed to bodies:

> [From the eighteenth century on, society makes sure] to exercise coercion without loosening over it [the body], in order to keep it leveled to mechanics – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity. […] These methods that allow strict control of the operations of the body, which realize the constant subjection of its forces and impose them a relationship of docility – utility, are what we can call "disciplines." […] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, those disciplines turned into *domination.*[60] (My translation and italics)

It becomes clear that whatever does not conform to conventions, whatever does not subject to established standards of behavior and function, or, in other words, whatever is **abjected** must be strictly disciplined, conditioned and subjected to power in a system that observes, understands, singles out, and dominates the individual. Within the core of this power institution, which in his *Microfísica do poder* (1995) Foucault calls "microscopic power"[61], individuals are controlled over "their bodies, […] gestures,

[60] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 118
[61] FOUCAULT, M. (1995) p. 131

attitudes, discourses, learning processes and daily lives".[62] (My translations) Therefore, no aspect of human existence must remain unwatched or untamed.

Within the list of "harmful" behaviors whose control power claims to have (among the sexuality of children, women and mad men, and behaviors other than sexual-related ones, such as those of criminals, for instance), that of gay men is one that incites particular care, since its features of abjection ("[…] *confusing, sturdy, escapist pluralities*".[63] – My italics) urgently demand definition. Hence the necessity to discipline those bodies.

Another element that helps reinforce the abjected notion of a body has always been pests. In the scope of a power that segregates and labels, pests become an important factor in order to outline and control the individual. As Foucault considers: "At the bottom of disciplinary schemes, the image of the pest stands for all confusion and disorders".[64] (My translation) In the case of sexuality and gays, AIDS has exercised a powerful role of metaphorical prison, one that besides helping identify members of such captivity, ends up contributing to control sexuality itself. Not surprisingly, it has not been rare to find institutions of control, such as the Church (even up to now) and doctors (especially in the beginning of the epidemic) preaching abstinence as the only way of fighting the syndrome.

However, one may argue that, despite all the efforts to name and keep outsiders at bay, the ultimate objective of power institutions is not to vanquish peripheral sexualities. Indeed, it is not. Foucault explores the issue to show that, without these very outcast sexual practices, power would have little or no reason to exist at all. In a constant exercise of maintenance, such segment of power needs "outlaws" to survive, in order to be able to install its network of control. As Foucault himself concludes in the chapter "Não ao sexo rei", "[…] sexuality is not fundamentally something of what power is frightened; but that it is, undoubtedly and above all, something through which it exercises itself". And what is more, "[…] sexuality is a commuter of which no modern system of power can discharge".[65] (My translations)

[62] FOUCAULT, M. (1995) p. 131
[63] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 123
[64] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 165
[65] FOUCAULT, M. (1995) p. 236

Finally, what would the real objective of all this meticulous watch be, if not to eradicate abjection? Foucault explains it is supposed "[…] to increase production, develop economy, spread instruction, heighten the level of public morale; *to make grow and multiply*".[66] (My italics) Understandably, there must be a balance between the level of outlaw behavior that is "permitted" (in order to assure the continuity of power relations), and the one that is regulated (since a capitalist society must grow and concentrate on production, by the same token), and it is power's duty to ensure the existence and control of peripheral sexualities.

As a final note, it is important to underline that, although Foucault's *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão* does not direct its aims to homoeroticism, its teachings can be surely applied to sexuality in that it also deals with mechanisms of control towards "threats" and "deviations" that endanger society's natural flow of growth and maintenance of ideologies. Whenever individuals refuse to be disciplined by the system, what is left to them is a transgressive life, which they sure live. Foucault himself considers transgression the necessary result of such strict surveillance and control. As he concluded about punishment in the eighteenth century western society, "torture did not re-establish justice; it re-activated [the sovereign's] power".[67] (My translation) Moreover, Foucault eventually understood that "A penal system must be conceived as an instrument designed to manage illegalities accordingly, not as one designed to suppress them all".[68] (My translation) Therefore, in addition to underlining and evidencing the power of the system in charge, transgressors guarantee that such system will never cease to exist. After all, what purpose would a controlling mechanism serve if there were no individuals to be controlled?

Ultimately, it is under the light of all these facets of power that same-sex oriented men confront the exercise of their sexual subjectivity, and consequently fall into the marginalized concepts that pervade mere sexual orientation. Sexuality then, becomes an essential piece in producing the truth about the individual, something which Foucault was determined to deconstruct and understand.

[66] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 172
[67] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 43
[68] FOUCAULT, M. (2005) p. 75

3.5. *Angels in America:* Setting the Grounds

Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* (1991) is not just another play. It has, since its first performance, significantly contributed to include its author's name in the list of most prominent and successful playwrights of all times, one that is able to cause an impact in the audience by means of a mix of elements that are highly critical, witty, comical (not to mention ironical), politicized, and absurd, all at the same time. It is not surprising that such a play has been awarded several important prizes in the theater community. In the 2005 edition of the play, from the Theatre Communications Group, there is a final note entitled "About the Play" that informs:

> *Angels* received two Fund for New American Plays/American Express Awards, two Drama Desk Awards for Best Broadway Play of 1993 and 1994, two Outstanding Theatre Awards from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, two LAMBDA Literary Awards, the 1993 Los Angeles Drama Critics' Award and Tony Awards for Best Play of 1993 and 1994. *Millennium* [the first part of the two-part play] was awarded the New York, London and San Francisco Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Play; the 1993 Outer Critics' Circle Award for Best Broadway Play; the 1991 National Arts Club's Joseph Kesselring Award; the 1991 Will Glickman Award; London's *Evening Standard* Award for Best Play and the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.[69]

Moreover, the play accomplished further recognition, as mentioned below:

> In 2003, *Angels in America* was named one of the top five Tony Award-winning plays of all time. It shared this honor with *Death of a Salesman*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Crucible* and *Long Day's Journey into Night.* It was also chosen by London's Royal National Theatre as one of the Best 100 Plays of the 20th Century. (p. 292)

Apart from its outstanding record of prizes, *Angels in America* has been performed worldwide, from the United States of America to Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay. As a final reverence to the play's grandeur and significance, it was made available to greater masses, when its two parts were "made into an epic movie by HBO Films, directed by Mike Nichols". (p. 292)

There remains no doubt, whatsoever, of the play's importance to modern American drama. Its appeal has swept the whole world and called the attention of the most varied array of cultures, religions and political agendas. In a comparison to the

[69] KUSHNER, T. (2005) p. 291-292. All subsequent references to this play will be made exclusively by page number in the text, since they refer to the same edition.

Shakespearean theater, David Savran points to the encounter of reality and fantasy within the play, its multiple plot lines, and the mix of comedy and tragedy.[70] Moreover, apart from further comparisons, in the introduction to their *Approaching the Millenniumm: Essays on* Angels in America (1997), Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger consider that Kushner has created at least two brand new genres in which to enlist his play: those of the "Theater of the Fabulous" or the "Postmodern American Epic Style".[71]

Angels in America's plot has given room to a multitude of discussions due to its varied themes all revolving around its central theme, which is that of same-sex oriented men's ordeal to survive a particular hard historical moment – the outburst of the AIDS epidemic in America (and in the world), all of society's claims that it was a gay cancer, and the moral implications imbued in such a claim. Besides this theme, the play's characters punctuate their lines with speeches that deal with politics, ethics, morality, punishment (spiritual and physical), transgression, psychology and personal growth through suffering and self-realization. Not too much coming from a playwright who believes art is supposed to shock and bring the audience to think. Definitely not too much coming from a playwright who is extremely politicized, critical of his own country's views on individual's worth and religious doctrines, and first and foremost, from a human being who is a great observer of human behavior and social mechanisms.

Tony Kushner interweaves this melting pot of themes in the stories of five gay main characters and their familial and social dramas: Joseph Porter Pitt (henceforth Joe), Louis Ironson, Prior Walter, Belize, and Roy M. Cohn (a character based on a real person, with some liberties taken). These five characters have subtle and outright aspects in common. Nonetheless, the one aspect that stands out first is certainly their sexual orientation. All of them are sexually attracted to men. For sure they deal with this aspect of their lives their own way, which means to say that each one suits himself differently in the scale of level of transgression. Be it by expressing their sexual identity open and nonchalantly, like Belize, by working their way out of the closet and into transgression timidly first, then confidently, like Joe, or by refusing to be labeled as "victims" in a system that legitimizes certain practices while discrediting others, like Prior, they all share the heading of transgressors.

[70] SAVRAN, D. (1997) p. 15
[71] GEIS, D. R. & KRUGER, S.F. (1997) p. 2

Finally, *Angels in America* would deserve neither academic acclaim nor sociological accomplishment if its treatment of the gay issue had simply been a reproduction of society's dogmas and prejudices. Notwithstanding, as David Savran calls our attention:

> […] unlike the work of most of Kushner's predecessors on the American stage, *Angels* does not pathologize gay men. Or, more exactly, gay men as a class are not pathologized. Rather, they are revealed to be pathologized circumstantially: first, by their construction (through a singularly horrific struck of ill luck) as one of the "risk groups" for HIV; and, second, by the fact that some remain closeted and repressed (Joe's ulcer is unmistakably the price of disavowal). So, it turns out, it is not homosexuality that is pathological but, rather, its denial.[72]

Therefore, there should remain no doubt concerning the importance of *Angels in America* to the literary canon. With that in mind, it is now about time I started analyzing some of those characters in detail. For matters of specificity and depth of analysis, I will only take into consideration two of them: Joe and Prior Walter.

3.6. Joe

When the play opens, Joe has been a chief clerk of the Federal Court of Appeals for four years. He has also been married to Harper and this bit of information is quite essential to understand the extent to which he has transgressed in the play, since the moment the reader comes to meet him. No one should hesitate to affirm that Joe was the most repressed character out of all five main gay ones by the time the story begins. He is literally what one can call a closeted case. Surely there are men who consider themselves heterosexual, but who occasionally sleep with other men, but that is definitely not Joe's situation. Although he realizes there are some quite different sexual feelings in him, he bravely fights them off and does not put them into practice.

As a matter of fact, Joe is so repressed and closed within a shell of self-protection that it is hard to understand his emotions and to get an idea of his true self. As a consequence, I feel the need to hunt for clues about Joe's personality in other sources apart from him. I would dare to say that we, readers, start getting to know Joe when we

[72] SAVRAN, D. (1997) p. 35

allow ourselves to ponder deeply about his wife's behavior, since his behavior does not convey much information. Joe himself is very shadowy: he does not allow people into his thoughts and musings, not even his own wife. He is a very practical man, mostly concerned about his job at the Federal Court of Appeals and caught up in his own inner conflicts. In a summary, his life and feelings are a mystery.

Harper, on the other hand, is straightforward in her display of richer shades of personality disturbances and confused emotions. She is an agoraphobic with an addiction to Valium who tends to think that the universe revolves and exists to threaten her. She hears sounds in the bedroom, talks to imaginary people and feels anesthetized by the effects of continual medication most of the times. For sure she suffered hard times among her family circle as a child (not all the reasons for her condition can be traced back exclusively to Joe), but there is a lot about her husband that influences her numbed behavior. Harper is deeply distressed: she displays great insecurity towards her marriage and her husband's mysterious behavior. In Scene 3, Act I, as she talks to one of her imaginary friends, Mr. Lies, Harper refers to Joe in the midst of her befuddled state:

> I'm undecided. I feel… that something's going to give. It's 1985. Fifteen years till the third millennium. […] maybe the troubles will come, and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light, or maybe my life is really fine, *maybe Joe loves me and I'm only crazy thinking otherwise, or maybe not, maybe it's even worse than I know, maybe… I want to know, maybe I don't. The suspense, Mr. Lies, it's killing me.* (p. 24) (My italics)

Through Harper's first speech to mention her husband, one can immediately grasp a sense of insecurity in her words. She does not feel loved, and there is something about Joe that quite frightens her, something she is scared to even know, although she keeps wondering about it constantly. The fear of knowing the truth quite paralyzes her. In a desperate attempt to escape reality and run away from what she unconsciously knows is true, from what she knows is lurking in her husband's shadowy manners, she keeps herself under effect of anti-depressives most of the time. Nonetheless, she cannot escape the pain of suspense and longs for a revelation.

Later, in Scene 5, same act, she and Joe have a minor argument. In it, Joe has just confronted his wife for not wanting to move to Washington with him, since he has been offered a job position there. After admitting to being afraid of sharp changes and hearing from Joe (whom she knows has some very deep issues going on inside his

head) she has emotional problems, Harper gathers some will power to face her husband and confront him about his long walks at night and his little secrets:

> HARPER: Where do *you* go? When you walk. *(Pause, then angrily)* And I DO NOT have emotional problems.
> JOE: I'm sorry.
> HARPER: And if I do have emotional problems it's from living with you. Or…
> JOE: I'm sorry buddy, I didn't mean to…
> HARPER: Or if you do think I do then you should never have married me. You have all these secrets and lies. (p. 33) (Author's italics and capitals)

Harper's speech is highly contradictory. First she denies she has mental or emotional problems. However, she immediately blames her husband for the issues she has just denied having. From this we, readers, understand that most of the damage done to her mental health is due to Joe's indecision. As he keeps her hanging for an answer, he not only harms and sets his own life back, but does the same thing to hers as well.

Joes keeps secrets he shares with no other person. His long wanderings around Central Park are a mystery to Harper and us readers. However, if I do take a closer look at the way this married couple nurture their relationship, answers start to abound. Young couples that have been married for a short time usually treat each other with fondness and affection. Nonetheless, Joe does not treat his wife the way a young husband is expected to do. In fact, he treats her like a colleague (which is not even close to a friend). The way he behaves next to her and the kind of words he uses to address her themselves establish and maintain a huge distance between the two of them. As Joe arrives home, he greets his wife with a "buddy kiss". (p. 24) He calls her "Buddy" (p. 24), which, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2001) means: "1. a friend. 2. […] a man you do not know".[73] Not only does he not see his wife as a loving companionship, but he also treats her the same way male friends treat one another. There is no sexual desire involved in their relationship, at least not on his behalf.

In the eyes of Kathryn Woodward, Joe would be the perfect example of someone whose identity displayed to the world does not match his subjectivity, his self, his real feelings. It is clear that he struggles against his inner sense of self in order to put up some sort of image he believes is ideal, although he does not reveal which trace of subjectivity he fights so fiercely against at this point of the play. Not until a scene later, in

[73] SUMMERS, D. (2001) p. 163

Scene 6, do we start to see some light regarding him. As Joe and Louis meet in the restroom at work, the former stops in his tracks in order to help the latter, who has been crying. Surprised by Joe's act of kindness in spite of their unacquaintance, Louis starts a conversation during which, at some point, he gets to know a little about Joe's political stand:

> JOE: I voted for Reagan.
> LOUIS: You did?
> JOE: Twice.
> LOUIS: Twice? Well, oh boy. A Gay Republican.
> JOE: Excuse me?
> LOUIS: Nothing.
> JOE: I'm not… Forget it.
> LOUIS: Republican? Not Republican? Or…
> JOE: What?
> LOUIS: What?
> JOE: Not gay. I'm not gay. (p. 35)

As it becomes clear in this conversation, Joe fiercely denies his sexual orientation. And although attentive readers of the play have little difficulty figuring out the secrets his wife first mentioned, it is only at this time they get to witness his befuddled state of mind at the first moment he finds himself referred to as being gay. The hesitation, the ellipsis, and the repetition of the denial (as though to make it true) are definite giveaways of his desperate struggle to convince, not only others, but himself that he is not homoerotically inclined. In fact, it is he who needs to be convinced, since it is evident to others that he has not been true to his sexual inclinations. Therefore, in the beginning of the play, Joe makes an impressive attempt to construct an outside image, an identity (that of a heterosexual man), which does not match his true sexual subjectivity. However, though Kathryn Woodward believes one individual may display different identities when it is convenient, she makes a fine point about the dangers implied by such attempt. A clash between identities is bound to take place, and this is what happens with Joe as he gradually unfolds his character.

After this particular confrontation by Louis and throughout the play, one gets plenty of evidences of Joe's real sexual feelings as he allows himself to be more open about his fears and insecurities. The following passage (taken from one of his arguments with Harper) exemplifies this, together with the ones that are analyzed as follows. The speech is quite palpable, since Joe's desperation is pulsating, and an urgency to break free could not be more evident:

> Does it make any difference? That I might be one thing deep within, no matter how wrong or ugly that thing is, so long as I have fought, with everything I have, to kill it. […] What do you want from me, Harper? More than that? For God's sake, there's nothing left, I'm a shell. There's nothing left to kill. As long as my behavior is what I know it has to be. Decent. Correct. That alone in the eyes of God. (p. 46)

Joe makes tremendous efforts to suppress an important trace of his subjectivity. More than that, his speech shows how deeply ingrained and one-sided his concepts of decency and correctness are. In his mind, being gay clashes directly against being a person of morals and principles. Being a Mormon himself, the feeling of indecency and immorality is greatly aggravated, since Joe strongly believes his sexuality is something unholy, sinful. For him, the only way to break the chains from conventions he considers himself indebted to is to do away with those very conventions, something he does not feel likely to happen:

> I just wondered what a thing it would be… if overnight everything you owe anything to, justice, or love, had really gone away. Free. It would be… heartless terror. Yes. Terrible, and… Very great. To shed your skin, every old skin, one by one and then walk away, unencumbered, into the morning. (p. 78-79)

These lines are one of the few occasions in which Joe opens his troubled heart to the readers/audience and to another character in the play. It is when the reader gets a glimpse of the contradictions of his soul: at the same time he feels terrified at the prospect of breaking free from social and emotional debts, he also longs for freedom. As Kathryn Woodward points out, the unconscious does not share the same laws of the conscious world. On the same page of the above speech, Joe partially admits he is trapped in a condition he cannot keep for much longer when he says: "I can't *be* this anymore. I need… a change, I should just…" (p. 79) (Author's italics) Joe's constraints are so strong he can barely finish thoughts and sentences, a serious sign that his conscious counterpart tries to silence the manifestation of his unconscious one.

Ultimately, after having lived under pressure for so long, Joe gathers courage to admit to his wife, mother and self his same-sex oriented sexual condition. In Woodward's understanding, conformity for its own sake is utterly hard to achieve, since the unconscious constantly seeks self-fulfillment, and Joe painfully realizes that. In Scene 8, Act II, he phones his mother from a pay phone in the middle of the night to say: "Mom. Momma. I'm a homosexual, Momma. […] I'm a homosexual". (p. 80) And finally, in the following scene, he is honest with his wife:

> […] You want the truth. This is the truth. I knew this when I married you. I've known this I guess for as long as I've known anything, but… I don't know, I thought maybe that with enough effort and will I could change myself… but I can't… […] I'm losing ground here, I go walking, you want to know where I walk, I… go to the park, or up and down 53rd Street, or places where… And I keep swearing I won't go walking again, but I just can't. […] I try to tighten my heart into a knot, a snarl, *I try to learn to live dead, just numb*, but then I see someone I want, and it's like a nail, like a hot spike right through my chest, and I know I'm losing. […] My whole life has conspired to bring me to this place, and I can't despise my whole life. I think I believed when I met you I could save you, you at least if not myself, but… *I don't have any sexual feelings for you, Harper. And I don't think I ever did.* (p. 83-84) (My italics)

Finally, the moment of truth. Although Joe does not use a word to represent his sexual inclinations (except when talking to his mother), and frequently leaves his sentences unfinished when he feels they will lead him to the confession itself, he is surely clear enough about his feelings. Harper eventually gets to know her husband does not feel attracted to her and that he desires other people. Therefore, the wife's suspicions since the beginning of the play are confirmed. Moreover, in his fear of giving his sexual feelings a name, Joe shows evidences of the fear of being labeled and secluded. The "title" society offers people like him implies limitations he cannot bear to have. It is language serving as a way of categorizing and segregating, such as Jurandir Costa has discussed.

By analyzing Joe's speech attentively, some very important issues come to surface: so far, Joe has been terrified by the fear of punishment and wrongdoing. In the above-mentioned passages, he refers to his sexual feelings as "wrong" and "ugly" (p. 46) and speaks of living "dead" and "numb" (p. 83) in trying to control his urges. Joe is a Mormon, from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to the Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia in the web, "Mormons are not Protestans and do not consider themselves part of any larger branch of Christianity, but do consider themselves Christians".[74] Being part of a religion that dates back to the 1830s, Mormons strictly follow the thirteen teachings and doctrines called "The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints", which is a list of commandments written down by Joseph Smith, Jr. (who was believed to have been deemed a prophet of God) that work as basic beliefs of the religion. The second and thirteenth Articles of Faith rule: "2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's

[74] Wikipedia. At http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon

transgression. 13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men […]"[75]

Perhaps more importantly, as Harper says in one of her hallucinations: "[…] In my church [the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] we don't believe in homosexuals". (p. 38) Therefore, Joe has all these ideas of punishment and deformity ingrained in his mind. Giving vent to his sexual desire equals transgression in such a straightforward way that he will be automatically damned.

Such narrow-minded ideas concerning damnation provoke the necessity of the "Political Economy of the Closet", which Joe certainly abides by, as Jeffrey Escoffier classifies sexual self-repression, and notes in his book *American Homo: Community and Perversity* (1998): "They [gays and lesbians] lied to their families and heterosexual friends – often to their sexual partners. These deceptions, along with the strict bifurcation in their lives [public x personal], created enormous emotional stress for lesbians and gay men".[76]

The level of stress in Joe's life is undeniable. He is trapped in insecurities and inactivity. As though all of that were not enough, in addition to moral fears, Joe also feels indebted to social constraints, such as job positions. He is an ambitious man who craves to climb the corporate ladder; however, that is another obstacle against his self-acceptance. Escoffier also explains that "By remaining in the closet, homosexuals were able to maintain career and employment opportunities. Being publicly gay often meant forfeiting jobs and economic security".[77] Even though Escoffier uses the verbs in the past to refer to a pre-Stonewall era, Joe undeniably clings on to those assumptions in spite of the little advancements the sexual liberation movement has made. Indeed, in an article entitled '"Dramaturging" the Dialectic: Brecht, Benjamin, and Declan Donnellan's Production of *Angels in America*', Art Borreca reasons about Joe's self-imposed obstacles: "Joe's conservatism denies his sexual impulses and any awareness that the contradiction between those impulses and his belief system is socially constructed and

[75] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,106-1-2-1,FF.html
[76] ESCOFFIER, J. (1998) p. 70
[77] ESCOFFIER, J. (1998) p. 71

therefore changeable".[78] Once again, various social forces prevent Joe from setting himself free.

Eventually, due to his unsustainable life condition, Joe tries his first unbalanced steps in the walk of transgression. He breaks free of some of his constraints and touches Louis on the face, after showing considerable resistance. His first comment after the attempt is such: "I'm going to hell for doing this". (p. 122) The speech shows that, although there is still some guilt involved in the act, Joe has finally reached a moment in which, at least, he is willing to pay the price and be true to his sexual subjectivity.

Subsequent to this first little act of liberation, Joe moves rather faster and ends up giving in: he has his first night of love with Louis at the end of Act I, Part II. After this, the reader meets a new Joe, a changed one, in Scene 4, Act III of *Perestroika*. As Joe and Louis sit together at a beach, Joe confesses to his partner: "I'm actually happy. Actually". (p. 203) And he goes even further as to tell Louis: "I love you". (p. 205) It is only after Joe admits to himself he is gay and, more than that, gives himself permission to experience his same-sex attraction, that he is able to feel true happiness. This is a turning point in the development of this character: the moment he breaks free of his restraints and, by transgression, affirms and exercises his individuality, his sexual subjectivity. However, Louis demonstrates no inclination to keep their relationship going. As he conveys a desire to go back to his former boyfriend, Prior, Joe pleads:

> Anything. Whatever you want. *I can give up anything*. My skin. […] I'm flayed. *No past now*. I could give up anything. […] *I want to live now. And I can be anything I need to be. And I want to be with you*. […] *Sometimes self-interested is the most generous thing you can be.* (p. 206-207) (My italics)

By now, a complete switch in Joe's way of thinking can be witnessed. Not only does he give in to his inner needs by admitting he wants to be and live with a man, he also changes from a position in which he completely annulled his feelings for the sake of conformity (in other words, for the sake of **others**) to one in which he can allow himself to be self-interested. Since he no longer worries about what society is going to think, or what sort of religious or moral punishment he will eventually have to endure, he enables his transgressive sexual inclinations to just be. In addition, he is still quite aware that there are certain aspects of his life which he will not be able to cope with, due to his

[78] BORRECA, A. (1997) p. 249

transgression. Notwithstanding, he is finally willing to give them up. As Kathryn Woodward sees it, there are prices to pay for a true subjectivity display and Joe has finally realized that the price of happiness is, in fact, worth paying.

Near the end of the play, Joe takes another important step towards his self-liberation, when he admits to Roy Cohn (his professional mentor) that he is gay. Cohn is a homophobic lawyer whom Joe nearly venerates and who puts up strong attitudes towards life in general. Being honest about his sexuality to Roy represents Joe's ultimate claim of freedom, since Roy embodies both his paternal figure (and a very powerful one) and his professional advisor and protector. Moreover, Roy feels really strongly against homoeroticism (although he himself is gay too), which makes Joe's confession even more daring and defiant:

> JOE: I left my wife. […] I needed to tell you.
> ROY: It happens.
> JOE: I've been staying with someone. Else. For a whole month now.
> ROY: It happens.
> JOE: With a man. […]
> ROY: A man?
> JOE: Yes.
> ROY: You're with a man? (p. 217-218)

In this short passage of very few words and clipped sentences, a lot of essential information is given: first, Joe has left his wife, something he never imagined he would be able to do. Second, he felt the need to tell Roy, whom he could scarcely feel obligated to tell at all, since everything he owed Roy was gratitude for the professional guidance and advising he received. Third, he admitted he left his wife in order to live with another man – the last piece of information he needed to disclose. Indeed, Joe has come a long straining way from self-repression to transgression, something he fortunately realized was necessary if he wanted to live a full, satisfactory life.

It is true that, when Louis leaves Joe in order to try to go back to Prior, Joe's first reaction is to attempt to go home to Harper. This could certainly be construed as a step back in his road towards self-acceptance. Nonetheless, at least he comes from a state in which his feelings were deeply suffocated to the point of denial, to another one in which he could allow himself to sustain a romantic relationship with another man and admit his true sexuality to his mother, wife and business colleague. At the moment Joe realizes his life is a complete waste and that he is a living dead man, he takes a stand and dares to transgress.

At the end of the play, there is no saying where Joe has gone or what has been made of his life. The only information we, readers, have is that his wife leaves him for good and they part ways. Neither does Joe end the story with Louis. One might speculate he found himself another wife in order to hide himself again. Others may argue the other way around, suggesting that he finally broke free for good and may have found another boyfriend. But there is no concrete information about Joe's future. If anything, at least we know he was capable of transgressing. If he had not done so, his life would have remained meaningless and empty, a farce, a lie. If he had stayed with his wife, he would have remained the shallow, secretive man he was at the opening of the play. Therefore, Joe is a clear example of sheer transgression; transgression towards life. A "monster" that needed to gather strength to show his face in order to *be*.

In his article entitled "Identity and Conversion in *Angels in America*", Steven F. Kruger talks about the profound changes undergone by Joe in the following terms:

> Indeed, in the course of the play all its characters undergo startling shifts in identity. […] Louis and Joe each move out of "marriages" and into a new relationship with each other, a movement that, for both, entails a radical rethinking of the self. […] And Joe, the character whose fate is left least resolved at the end of *Perestroika*, is also perhaps the character who has undergone the most radical conversions. He admits his at first denied homosexuality. He moves from a heterosexual to a homosexual relationship, from a commitment to Reaganism and Mormonism to a willingness to "give up anything" for Louis (2:74), from "never [having] hit anyone before" to a violent attack on Louis (2:111-12) […][79]

For sure, Joe's transgression is evident, even though it is a secondary product of his newfound identity. The primary aim is to live fully; the consequence of that decision is transgression. At the very last scene Joe shares with Harper, as she demands to have his credit card so she can escape from her miserable life, she throws the bottle of Valium to him and tells him to "Get lost" and "Go exploring". (p. 273) In her article '"The Delicate Ecology of your Delusions": Insanity, Theatricality, and the Thresholds of Revelation in Kushner's *Angels in* America', Deborah R. Geis understands this symbolic gesture as follows: "It is only by being willing to test the boundaries of sanity, the borders between real and imagined worlds, Harper seems to tell Joe, that he will be able to acknowledge and discover his plural subjectivities".[80]

[79] KRUGER, S. F. (1997) p. 156
[80] GEIS, D. R. (1997) p. 203

In other words, Harper herself is able to grasp Joe's needs in a stroke of thorough understanding. Unlikely as it would seem for a person whose mental skills are seriously impaired, she is the one to give Joe the ultimatum, the final verdict to a plentiful life. Let go of reality, keep it suspended. Live.

After going through all these aspects of Joe's life, since the beginning, towards the end of *Angels in America*, one is left with plenty of evidences of the complete turn in the character's life and attitudes. More than that, one is able to acknowledge the health impairing conditions in which he lived in earlier stages to the liberating state he experienced by means of his transgression.

Indeed, as the play opens, Joe is a man who sustains a fake marriage, which not only harms his sense of self and personal satisfaction, but also brings terrible consequences to his wife herself. Joe's behavior reflects the requirements from a society that prioritizes family relations and reproduction for the sake of specific practicalities, as Michel Foucault envisages in *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. A respectable man is one who constitutes a family and breeds. Although Joe and Harper do not have any children, it is evident that Joe gets married in order to pass as "normal", to be included. He sees absolute, unquestionable truth in institutionalized beliefs. By setting too much store on medical and religious biases (which, according to Foucault, reinforce and complement each other), Joe blindly believes that the expression of his own subjectivity can only bring damnation.

Consequently, in his desperate attempt to keep his real subjectivity controlled and unfulfilled, Joe's attitudes and feelings suffocate his abjected self. In doing so, he conforms to a society that, still under Foucault's terms, categorizes and disciplines the subject. In other words, as the play opens, Joe is a victim of what Foucault called the "microscopic power"[81] – the complex societal engine that watches, classifies, segregates and controls deviations.

Up to a certain point in the play, it is correct to say that society's institutions (religion and morality, for instance), manage to restrain Joe's behavior within the margins of the acceptable, or the "normal". His "peripheral sexuality"[82], as Foucault names it, is, not without an effort, fought off and kept at a distance.

[81] FOUCAULT, M. (1995) p. 131
[82] FOUCAULT, M. (1998) p. 40

Notwithstanding, even though he conforms to a respectable life, one comprising a traditional family, religious faith, and decent, hardworking behavior, Joe cannot feel farther from happy. His life is empty, shallow, and unfulfilled. There is always a feeling of hollowness, hopelessness and incompletion. He has sex (in a forged attempt to mimic "normal" standards of sexuality), but does not make love. He has mechanical, unavoidable orgasms (since he keeps having sexual intercourse), but has no satisfactory pleasure. He longs to touch and feel other men, but does not allow himself the required indulgence. His self-repression and imprisonment externalize themselves in a materialized way: he comes down with an ulcer and coughs blood. In his "Identity and Conversion in *Angels in America*", Steven F. Kruger notes: "Joe's disavowed depth makes itself known not just internally but externally; he develops a "bleeding ulcer" (1:106) that forces the messiness hidden inside to appear on the surface, with blood coming from his mouth […]".[83]

In spite of all the unhappiness he is immersed into, Joe pushes himself to the limit, and forces his existence to the most senseless level, until he cannot take it any longer. The next step is necessarily transgressive. As he lets go of the normality status and climbs up the wall into the land of the outcast (the Others, as Jamake Highwater sees them), he enables his true sexual subjectivity to emerge and his life starts making some sense. Therefore, Joe's authenticity regarding his sexual subjectivity costs him the label of transgressor.

On the other hand, in spite of his outcast status, Joe's release introduces him to new horizons and opens his eyes to several previously forbidden possibilities. Now he can "shed [his] skin […] and then walk away, unencumbered, into the morning" (p. 78-79) as he once wished he could. However, as he so appropriately puts it, he needs to disentangle himself from the skin he has been wearing, one imposed by exterior pressures. What Joe needs to do is to move from one identity to another, in a clear display of what Stuart Hall defends when he talks about the "post-modern subject" in his chapter "The Question of Cultural Identity". Such a subject displays evidences of multiple, fragmented identities, constantly changing in a close relationship with the environment, and being constructed according to the surrounding world. Joe shows

[83] KRUGER, S. F. (1997) p. 163

signs of this fragmentation as he finally gives in to the clash between what his self longs to be, and the image he hopes to show people.

At this point, I believe it is of utmost importance to point out that, for millions of gay men like Joe throughout the world, the pleasure in transgressing is not a pleasure enclosed in itself. As a matter of fact, it is less a matter of rejoicing in transgression than in the feelings of freedom and self-fulfillment it enables an individual to experience. Transgression, then, is no more than an inevitable consequence of self-realization. It is a consequence imposed on gays by those who consider themselves the Ones, those who believe their heterosexual behavior is the only accepted pattern of human relations.

While Joe forces himself to conform to society's standards, he is deeply unhappy and seriously disturbed. When he gives vent to his oppressed sexuality, he encounters great freedom and satisfaction. In other words, he starts living for the first time in his life. If society were more flexible regarding sexual orientation, if binary relations such as heterosexual/homosexual, and normal/abnormal did not exist and play such a strong part in our psyches, there would be no need for Joe (and gays in general) to be a "monster". He would just be.

3.7. Prior

Prior is an extremely rich character due to his display of behavioral nuances, and the way through which his character is developed. From an early stage of apparent surrender to external societal pressures, to a later phase in which he becomes a kind of spokesperson for the gay/AIDS cause, Prior regales the reader with a strong, perseverant figure. His transgression is twofold: besides being gay (which is a powerful sign of boundary-breaking in itself), he is infected by the HIV virus and develops AIDS. In the process, he loses the companionship of his boyfriend Louis (with whom he shared his life for the previous four years before the opening of the play), but builds up in physical and emotional strength. Finally, instead of succumbing to the disease in a state of self-commiseration and resignation for his alleged sins, he refuses to be victimized

and firmly rejects the idea of death, since it is laden with punitive metaphors. Due to his bifurcated transgression, I will grant each a separate discussion, in two distinct sub-sections, in order to honor both.

3.7.1. AIDS

In his book entitled *The Gay Metropolis: 1940 – 1996*, Charles Kaiser opens the chapter dedicated to the eighties with the following sentence: "The seventies had been a time of amazing progress and almost nonstop celebration for most of the gay community".[84] Indeed, after the Stonewall riots back in 1969 and throughout the seventies, gays experienced a period of visibility previously unknown to them. Within the years that comprised such advancement for the gay cause, same-sex oriented men were able to show their faces and state their wishes. Political movements abounded and the unprecedented attention given by the media raised gays' hopes that they were finally emerging as a group.

However, in the beginning of the eighties, a serious blow hit them right in the face: the AIDS epidemic. As it was first diagnosed in gay men, it was immediately referred to as a kind of gay cancer. Indeed, when the first cases were registered, doctors did not know the origins of the syndrome, its causes and forms of transmission. The only palpable fact available was that it affected mostly gay individuals. In a footnote in his aforementioned book, Kaiser comments on the first name given to the syndrome:

> The first name given the disease was Gay Related Immune Deficiency. At a meeting in July 1982 about the blood supply, leaders of the blood industry, hemophiliac groups, gay community organizations, and representatives from the federal government agreed to rename it Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.[85]

The point is that determined characteristics in the pattern of gay behavior favored the dissemination of the HIV. In his book *Comportamento sexual e AIDS: a cultura gay em transformação*, Gabriel Rotello shows that *possible* early cases of the disease were diagnosed back in the thirties. Notwithstanding, due to underdeveloped medical

[84] KAISER, C. (1997) p. 269
[85] KAISER, C. (1997) p. 295-296

techniques and sparse occurrences, such cases were discarded as other types of infections. In the sixties and seventies, however, after feminist and sexual liberation movements and, especially for gays, after Stonewall, gay behavior assumed a different pattern in which the diffusion of the virus found its ideal conditions.

That does not mean to say that gays indeed are to blame for the origin of the epidemic. Rotello affirms that:

> To accuse a group of people of contributing to the dissemination of diseases is a fierce way of stigmatizing it, for it places the group in the position of contaminator of others. Such a fact is particularly troublesome when the group in question is already marginalized and unpriviledged, as is usually the case. […] In the case of gays and AIDS, there have been attempts to deal with the gay community as a center of contamination.[86] (My translation)

Gabriel Rotello's opinion somehow comes close to that of Susan Sontag when she discusses the dangers of attributing meanings to diseases. Nonetheless, gays were, in fact, accused of being the reason why AIDS even existed. Bearing the signs of the syndrome equalled a full confession to the transgressive status of being gay.

Charles Kaiser calls the reader's attention to the widespread cases of AIDS in the city where the plot of *Angels in America* takes place: "New York had far more AIDS cases than any other city in America".[87] It is in the midst of such mass occurrences of the disease that Prior finds out he has AIDS himself. He breaks the shocking news to his boyfriend Louis while at the funeral service for the latter's grandmother. As a proof of his certainty, he shows Louis some of his Kaposi's sarcomas (henceforth K.S.): dark purplish/blackish lesions that usually erupt all over the body of those who have AIDS. The K.S. lesions constitute some of the first visible marks of the active disease (although hair fall and weight loss are also marks, the K.S. lesions are more peculiar and are responsible for an immediate link to AIDS). As Prior shows his lesions to Louis, he says: "K.S., baby. Lesion number one. Lookit. The wine-dark kiss of the angel of death. […] I'm a lesionnaire. The *Foreign* Lesion. The American Lesion. Lesionnaire's disease". (p. 27) (My italics)

In this first passage, I find evidences of what Jamake Highwater talks about when referring to walls that separate insiders and outsiders. In Prior's own lines, the spots on his body are signs of "the *Foreign* Lesion", one which singles individuals out and thrusts

[86] ROTELLO, G. (1998) p. 67
[87] KAISER, C. (1997) p. 300

them into the group of "the Other", the outcast, the foreigner. At the same time it is an "American Lesion", it is not a lesion of all Americans, but that of the "foreign" ones, the outsiders. It becomes evident, in practical terms, that belonging to the group of people who are contaminated means belonging to the group of "Others". It is important to notice that, in this first encounter with Prior, the image he conveys is that of a man who has succumbed to the certainty of death, knowing he is a marked person. He even shows signs of resignation as he asks Louis: "Don't you think I'm handling this well? I'm going to die". (p. 27) Insofar as Prior has never been part of the group of insiders (for being gay), he now leaves the group of healthy individuals to join that of the dying ones, which constitutes a double transgression.

In acknowledging his new health condition to himself (and to others), Prior adds one more factor of "monstrosity" to his already maimed image. Together with the K.S. lesions, other elements and signs contribute, little by little, to the process that transforms gay individuals who suffer from AIDS into "monsters". Added to his status of same-sex oriented man, which is a major "monstrous" characteristic in itself, having AIDS greatly builds up the intensity of "monstrosity". Being gay **and** infected with the virus/sick with the syndrome become strong allies in the process of "abjectification" of a person (I take the freedom to coin this term, based on the theories of Julia Kristeva). As an example, some characters in *Angels in America* are abjected for subverting accepted sexual practices (by "refusing" to reproduce heteronormative standards), whereas Prior is twice abjected: for sustaining same-sex relationships and for being seropositive. He, thus, becomes twice a "monster", twice marked by his transgressions. In the book *Os anormais*, Michel Foucault develops the concept of the social "monster", which contributes to a better understanding of Prior, as follows:

> The context of reference of the human monster is the law, for sure. The notion of the monster is essentially a juridical one. Juridical, obviously, in the broad sense of the term, since what defines the monster is the fact that he constitutes, in his very existence and in his form, *not simply a violation of the laws of society, but a violation of the laws of nature*. […] The working field of the monster is, therefore, a domain we could call "juridical-biological". On the other hand, in this space, the monster appears as a phenomenon both extreme and extremely rare. He is the limit, the point of law inflexion and is, at the same time, the exception that can only be found in extreme cases, precisely. *Let us affirm the monster is what combines the impossible with the forbidden*.[88] (My translation and italics)

[88] FOUCAULT, M. (2002) p. 69-70

Prior ends up impersonating several characteristics of "monstrosity". Not only does he break the laws of nature by seeking sexual pleasure and affectionate comfort in gay relationships, but he also experiences the impossibility of his sexual practices in a homophobic society and its consequential prohibition. Prior, like other gays, is a creature of the shadows, one that can only exist behind the walls Highwater refers to, suffering the constant threat of being punished. The syndrome, however, becomes a more than visible sign of Prior's transgression. Naturally, as his body starts to show its effects, his "monstrosity" becomes inevitable. In his article entitled "Identity and Conversion in *Angels in America*", Steven F. Kruger ponders: "Closely wrapped up with the play's analysis of sexuality is a recognition of how AIDS – identified in the popular imagination with a gayness conceived of as always already diseased and weak – becomes not just a category of health or illness but also of identity".[89]

For society, or, in better terms, those members who boast about their supposed status of normalcy, Prior incorporates another distinguishable feature of identity: his disease. It becomes easy to understand why most gay men are afraid to make their transgressive sexuality public and even easier to determine why AIDS was (and perhaps still is) such a taboo topic whose victims constantly lurk in the shadows of suspicions and hiding places. Especially in the eighties, in the beginning of the epidemic, when people were taken by surprise, assuming contamination meant signing one's double certificate of "monstrosity". The "monstrous" image of AIDS was freely broadcasted by media and mouth-to-mouth propaganda. The gay man sick with AIDS became a character. In his book *Os perigosos: autobiografias e AIDS* (2002), Marcelo Secron Bessa displays the results and effects of the media scrutiny in relation to the disease and its deformed face:

> If the tabloidish construction of the people suffering from AIDS in the media served to, step by step, fabricate a characterization of the sick ones in a bifurcation between "innocent" and "culprit", and between "victim" and "deserving", it ended up bringing up diverse feelings too: piety or antipathy, and yet, for another reason, fear.[90] (My translation)

From the moment the syndrome was discovered by medical authorities, its physical effects bore marks of transgression and dislocation. However, in addition to serving the purpose of singling out gay individuals and keeping them at a distance, the

[89] KRUGER, S. F. (1997) p. 152
[90] BESSA, M. S. (2002) p. 52

same marks of transgression called people's attention and incited their judgment. Gay people were seen (I use the verb in the past, although some people insist on keeping this opinion) as rightfully deserving the physical punishment the syndrome represented, whereas hemophiliacs, for instance (another group of individuals afflicted by AIDS), were seen as innocent sufferers, struck by ill luck. The paradoxical characteristics of abjection Kristeva talks about, those of attraction and repulsion working together, are easily found in the epidemic's scenario: society's aversion and attention are incited at the same time. Indeed, people sick with AIDS have the power of exercising both piety and repulsion. There remains no doubt, then: Prior has inserted himself into the group of abjected ones for the second time in his life.

Going back to Prior's body, it is evidenced that, since the beginning of the play, it has been going through a process of gradual degeneration due to his disease. Such degeneration represents a strong factor in building his new "monstrous" feature. The physical spots spread all over his body enable people to leave the field of unconfirmed suppositions about his transgression and enter the firm grounds of visually confirming proofs. Prior's incursion into the world of "abnormalities" proves itself an unquestionable fact. Even if he does not externalize his condition through speech, even if he does not confess (which he does), his body speaks for itself and there is no way he can deny it. In a scene in which he lies in bed in a feverish delirium, he gets the visit of two of his ancestors, Prior I and Prior II, who have come to herald the arrival of the Angel. Both ghosts (or emanations) have died of plagues themselves, each in his own time (13th and 17th century, respectively). At seeing Prior's spots, Prior I comments:

> PRIOR I: The pestilence in my time was much worse than now. Whole villages of empty houses. You could look outdoors and see Death walking in the morning, dew dampening the ragged hem of his black robe. Plain as I see you now.
> PRIOR: You died of the plague.
> PRIOR I: *The spotty monster*. Like you, alone. (p. 92) (My italics)

Later, Prior I repeats, this time directly referring to Prior's affliction: "The spotty monster". (p. 93) Thus, having AIDS means personifying the "monster" and making it public, both features applicable to Prior. By showing off signs of the ailment on his own body, Prior incorporates a "monstrous" image and externalizes it to people in a way that he can be readily classified and singled out. For him, it is impossible not be identified as a transgressor, a "monster". His very health condition entraps him in the group of

Others. And the very nature of his lesions, which contributes to the deformity of his body, enforces his newly acquired level of inhumanity.

Around the middle of the eighties, the exact same time when the action of the play is situated, the media seized the opportunity to use the somber effects of AIDS in order to spread fear among the population. All the unknown aspects of the disease were manipulated to the advantage of a society that has always feared and misunderstood deviant sexualities. Marcelo Bessa talks about an article in the Brazilian *IstoÉ* magazine that says that a thirty-year-old man, desperate after having found out he had been contaminated by the virus, had sex with thousands of people and later committed suicide.[91] Stories like this one were commonplace at the time, not only in Brazil, but also throughout the world. They stressed the homicide facet of the disease and contributed to add up extra layers to its already alleged "monstrous" nature. In the course of people's insecurities and fears, the media took the opportunity to feed the world with horrific stories that, apart from their informative duty, did a good job in raising people's aversion to AIDS.

In the eye of this hurricane of emotion, Prior becomes a representative of such a "monster". Besides having been put under the microscope for his sexuality, he now has his analysis magnified even more due to AIDS. For him, there is no way out of scrutiny and surveillance. His own body testifies his condition, and there is no hiding or denying. His marks are badges to a society that needs to identify deviant individuals and keep them controlled, as Foucault argues in *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão*.

In our homophobic Western society, regulated by religious and moral principles, identifying oneself with the exclusionary characteristics of AIDS tends to be unbearable to a great number of contaminated individuals. In such an environment, it comes as no surprise that most people who get sick go through the consequences of their ailment in silence and seclusion, in fear of being judged, condemned, or simply labeled. As a result, disguising, hiding or even masking the signs of the problem is a very usual concern among the ill ones, although masquerading the symptoms is a very hard endeavor to undergo. And here lies the second level of transgression in Prior:

[91] BESSA, M. S. (2002) p. 35

3.7.2. Refusing to Be the Victim

As previously mentioned, a great number of individuals who suffer from AIDS tend to make a tremendous effort to hide their symptoms in an attempt to pass as insiders. Those who are successful in concealing their contamination (especially before the opportunist diseases start showing themselves), manage to find a breach in the wall that separates the Ones from the Others (in Jamake Highwater's understanding) and live "normal" lives. Prior, on the other hand, transgresses this boundary as well. He neither hides his symptoms, nor accepts his death fate. In refusing to hide behind a mask, in daring to show his bruised face, he refuses to play the role of the victim. In Scene 7, Act I, one finds Prior having a feverish dream in the midst of which Harper comes in, characterizing some sort of collective delirium. Before the arrival of the woman, though, the reader encounters Prior halfway through his characterization of Drag Queen (which he was in the past), in the process of applying some makeup. However, as he looks at himself in the mirror while putting on face powder, he delivers these lines:

> One wants to move through life with elegance and grace, blossoming infrequently but with exquisite taste, and perfect timing, like a rare bloom, a zebra orchid. … One wants. … But one so seldom gets what one wants, does one? No. One does not. One gets fucked. Over. One… dies at thirty, robbed of… decades of majesty. *Fuck this shit. Fuck this shit.* (p. 36-37) (My italics)

The italicized line indicates the moment when Prior gives up the task of applying the face. Though he was trying to cover up the unmistakable signs of his fragile frame in the beginning of his delirium, he then gives it up as a bad job. Such decision and gesture indicate that he refuses to conform or belong. He abdicates his part in the world of "normal" people and decides to let his real (transgressive) face show in all its colors. Later, when Harper comes in and asks why he was wearing makeup, he answers: "I was in the process of applying the face, trying to make myself feel better […]". (p. 37) That is the first sign of his refusal to hide his condition, his refusal to be a victim. In front of the mirror, Prior refuses to disguise his "monstrous" image with makeup in order not to shock people. He rejects the pseudo-protection that the makeup would provide him, and assumes his own self. Evidences of such will power become much stronger as Louis

decides to abandon Prior, in an alleged inability to cope with his boyfriend's disease. At such a point, facing a situation in which most people would find themselves weakened, Prior shows great strength and determination not to plead for help and protection. The following passages (harsh arguments between Prior and Louis) should prove how headstrong and controlled Prior is:

> PRIOR: Bastard. Sneaking off while I'm flat out here, that's low. *If I could get up now I'd beat the holy shit out of you* [my italics]. […] Apartment too small for three? Louis and Prior comfy but not Louis and Prior and Prior's disease?
> LOUIS: […] I won't be judged by you. This isn't a crime, just – the inevitable consequence of people who run out of – whose limitations…
> PRIOR: Bang bang bang. The court will come to order. […]
> LOUIS: I love you, Prior.
> PRIOR: I repeat. Who cares? […] We have reached a verdict, your honor. This man's heart is deficient. He loves, but his love is worth nothing.
> PRIOR: *(Shattered;* ***almost*** *pleading; trying to reach him)* [author's italics; my bold] I'm dying! You stupid fuck! Do you know what that is! Love! Do you know what love means? We lived together four-and-a-half years, you animal, you idiot. […] GET OUT OF MY ROOM! (p. 83-85)

I called the attention to the adverb "almost" specifically to refute the idea that Prior pleads for Louis's pity. Surely, he feels a mixture of anger and despair at his boyfriend's impending abandonment, but at no moment does he beg for the other to stay. Quite the contrary: for a convalescent person, he shows a huge strength (even a disposition to fight physically) as a response for Louis's coward act. While someone else might have cried desperately, implored for sympathy, or asked for help in an outright way, Prior displays a great deal of self-assurance and control that allow him to attack Louis on his act of cowardice, but never to put himself in a humiliating, self-deprecating position. Therefore, despite his fragile condition, Prior maintains his dignity. Other examples of his resistance follow below. Once again, after a month's separation, the ex-boyfriends meet:

> LOUIS: Hello.
> PRIOR: Fuck you you little shitbag. (p. 215) […]
> PRIOR: Louis? Are you really bruised inside?
> LOUIS: I can't have this talk anymore.
> PRIOR: Oh the list of things you can't do. So fragile! Answer me: Inside: Bruises?
> LOUIS: Yes.
> PRIOR: Come back to me when they're visible. I want to see black and blue, Louis, I want to see blood. Because I can't believe you even *have* blood in your veins till you show it to me. So don't come near me again, unless you've got something to show. (p. 221) (Author's italics)

At no moment does Prior implore for pity and sympathy. At no moment does he dismantle himself in desperate tears or sorrowful cries. He is a gay man in New York, living in the midst of the AIDS explosion, showing the signs of the disease in his own body, and to make matters worse, living alone. Nonetheless, in spite of all the difficulties

he goes through and against all odds, he shows great dignity and pride. Such feelings do not usually represent a luxury people sick with AIDS can boast of. Prior once again subverts the role which society expects of him, that of a pitied, fearful and defeated person. In this other level, he transgresses once more.

This refusal to be the victim is furthermore evidenced in the rejection of the role of Prophet Prior receives. As the Angel first shows herself to him, she announces: "Greetings, Prophet; The Great Work Begins […]". (p. 125) This line makes one wonder what work she could possibly be announcing. In times of great despair, fears and insecurities, she might be talking about hope and expectancy. As for the precise meaning of the Angel's line one can only guess. However, the continuity of the Angel's speech points to a request from Prior (and mankind in general): "YOU MUST STOP MOVING" (p. 178) to what Prior responds: "Stop moving. That's what you want. Answer me! You want me dead". (p. 179) In his article entitled "Prior to the Normans: the Anglo-Saxons in *Angels in America*", Allen J. Frantzen comments on Prior's refusal to succumb to the Angel's will of death:

> […] Prior rejects the advice to stay put. He ignores the Angel's command precisely because "THE END" is written in his blood; he interprets these words as the Angel's wish that he die; […] No longer the Prior who joked fatalistically about his lesions outside the funeral home in act I of *Millennium*, he refuses to die.[92]

Here we learn that, although Prior's serostatus represents a death sentence to him, and in spite of the fact that the Angel's presence seems to announce that his end is impending (and that he should accept that as inevitable), he steadfastly refuses to surrender. The man who told Louis, with apparent resignation, that he was going to die, turns out to decline his own "destiny" in quite a stubborn way. Prior turns down his own death certificate.

In Scene 5, Act V of *Perestroika*, Prior goes to heaven for a while, during a particularly complicated night spent in a hospital, and meets the six Continental Principalities. As they try to convince him to stay (in other words, as they try to convince him to accept his death), due to the chaotic situation going on on Earth, he declines the "invitation" and asks to be sent back. Moreover, not only does he request life, he requests health as well: "I want to be healthy again. And this plague, it should stop. In

[92] FRANTZEN, A. J. (1997) p. 144

me and everywhere. Make it go away". (p. 264) Once again, Frantzen proclaims his opinion of such refusal: "Prior succeeds in subverting the angels' design and persuading them to become his messenger; he has refused to become theirs. Their message is that the clock should be turned back to old values and stasis, staying put. His message is that change is good".[93]

Instead of succumbing (which is what some segments of society expect gay men to do), Prior gathers strength to stand and fight. Rather than acknowledging the angels' request of immobility and backward movement, he professes the necessity to change and highlights the advantages of such progress forwards. At the end of the play, in the Epilogue, when conventional readers expect Prior to die (for the only way out for transgressors in literature always seems to be death), he subverts our expectations once again by surviving and delivering the following speech:

> This disease will be the end of many of us but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and *we are not going away*. We won't die *secret deaths* anymore. The world only spins forward. *We will be citizens*. The time has come. Bye now. You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you: *More Life* [Author's italics]. The Great Work Begins. (p. 280) (All other italics are mine)

This final speech is crucial because it subverts everything that is expected from people with AIDS. Mostly among religious segments, the disease was commonly taken to be the solution God found in order to vanquish same-sex oriented men from the surface of the planet. And Prior not only refuses to be inserted in this situation, he also takes the opportunity (perhaps out of his Prophet's duties) to free all other gays from the burden of punishment. He blesses them (and everyone) with "More Life". He affirms gays "are not going away", and even claims their rights to citizenship. He also declares the end of an era of hiding and disguising. He longs for a future in which every gay man will dare to show his face, whether bruised or maimed by AIDS or not. In Frantzen's words:

> So Prior moves ahead, not in spite of AIDS but, rather, because of AIDS: the "virus of time" has jolted him out of torpor and self-pity and eventually transforms him into the play's strongest character, a position from which he waves an affectionate goodbye to the audience.[94]

After reading this passage, I justify my agreement to the fact that AIDS has played a crucial role in the development of Prior's strength. The syndrome becomes the

[93] FRANTZEN, A. J. (1997) p. 146
[94] FRANTZEN, A. J. (1997) p. 146

basis on which he constructs his will power and self-assertion. Contrary to what would be normally expected, having been infected with the HIV virus does not set Prior back or make him stop. Neither does it make him feel ashamed of his condition. It shoots him forwards and keeps him moving. In spite of all adversities, Prior goes through his pain in a dignified way, and stands in a position that allows him to claim the right to his welfare and that of many others who suffer from the same infliction as he does. In his refusal to fall, to kneel to the consequences of his acts, and to interpret his disease as punishment, Prior transgresses.

Prior's contribution to the hall of strong fictional characters in literature is noteworthy and therefore, he could not be left out of my thesis. He displays a gradual but continuous development, which is especially significant due to his condition of beaten man in the beginning of the play. First of all, he is openly gay and sustains a relationship with another man for four years during which they share an apartment and the responsibilities of a traditional family. By doing so, he subverts everything that society believes in and preaches as valuable, as Foucault discusses in his *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*: the heteronormative family, male hierarchy, the necessity to procreate.

Second, he acquires the HIV virus, which normally represents a death sentence and a punishment, but he bears the burden with a disposition few people are able to muster and, most important of all, with a sense of dignity that even fewer seropositive people have. In him, AIDS ceases to be some sort of divine punishment. He is successful in deploying the syndrome of its metaphorical interpretations, a feat Susan Sontag advocates in her *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors.*

Finally, in his final speech, Prior consolidates his status of defiant transgressor by claiming every right of which gay men are deprived. His words reaffirm his deviant sexuality, at the same time that they request respect, dignity and health. Ron Scapp understands the power of that last speech, as the following passage taken from his article "The Vehicle of Democracy: Fantasies toward a (Queer) Nation" demonstrates: "This moment [Prior's last lines] evokes a universal act of transgression, of trespassing the boundaries of some prior state of exclusion and denial (and political wickedness)."[95]

[95] SCAPP, R. (1997) p. 92

Indeed, Prior does not only act in favor of his dignity. He does so in favor of every gay man who is oppressed and persecuted for his sexuality. If such behavior is not an invitation for a "universal act of transgression", as Scapp names it, then I will not presume to call it any other name.

As he describes the state of befuddlement and powerlessness that took hold of gays during the height of the epidemic, the time in which Prior lives, Charles Kaiser comments:

> There are no weapons to defend yourself, no medicine for the wounded, and if you want to flee, when you start running you won't know whether your own wounds are fatal – or nonexistent. […] If you're still standing – one of the "lucky" ones – you keep running faster and faster, but you can never outpace the inferno.[96]

After taking a close look at Prior, I believe it is fit to affirm that he both outpaced the inferno and brought some sense of hope and endurance to it.

[96] KAISER, C. (1997) p. 279

CHAPTER 4

Everlasting “Monsters”: A Lifetime Transgression

There is no possibility of measuring the happiness of others,
and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation
in which one wishes to place them.
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

A few years ago, when I first laid hands on a copy of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, I saw much more to it than a mere frightening story. In fact, I could hardly conceive the story as scary at all. At least to me, it spoke chiefly of transgression, ambition, rejection and certainly “monstrosity”, but not in the sense of deformed shapes and unearthly features. What seemed “monstrous” to me was the way in which Shelley’s nameless character was treated by his fellow human beings, and the ways through which he was construed as dangerous, evil-natured and scornful. I am aware of the adjective “fellow” used above and I choose to employ it deliberately, for I do not consider the character inhuman in any way. Though raised from the dead and composed of several body parts from distinct men, I honestly believe in his ability to love and care, both of which completely humanize him.

As I found myself reading the tale of the “monster” in his desperate attempt to be accepted and loved, even the atrocious consequences of his anger at failure were soothed in my judgment. Not that any of his murders would ever be justifiable, but the pain and isolation he feels speak strongly to the reading audience. Such feelings of hatred and despise he is forced to experience, even though he tries to be gentle and loving, led me to wonder about other “monsters” who tread the face of this planet, the ones who really exist, who most certainly have always existed, but whose existence has been pushed into anonymity by societies who are rarely ready to acknowledge them. This is where gays gained access to my musings. These gay “monsters” of yore and of today have always felt in their skin the consequences of so-called inhuman characteristics, just like the creature in *Frankenstein*. However, I grew to understand that

the characteristics that shape their “monstrosity” are imposed on them, and their transgression is a natural result (and a necessary one) of the imposition they suffer.

At the dawn of this connection, I set myself to analyze some gay literary characters until I reached a copy of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*. After reading the story focusing on the lives of the five gay characters, I started wondering about why they necessarily embody “monstrosity”, why their lives are punctuated by transgression and why the denial of their subjectivities cause them so much pain and trouble. That was when I craved to understand society’s mechanisms that render such individuals “monsters”, and it was about that time when I put the idea for this thesis together.

As I started analyzing Victor Frankenstein and his motivations to make a human being out of dead bodies, the connections between the nameless character and gays were even clearer to me. In my readings, I was able to learn that Dr. Frankenstein was a very repressed person as a young man, having been deprived of a world of enterprises and discoveries he could only hope to know. Otto Rank’s discussions about the Double gave me room to understand Frankenstein’s suffocated desires and his necessity to unleash everything he kept locked inside for such a long time. Therefore, the nameless character he produces is a product of his longing for recognition and power, his craving for success and acknowledgement, all the accomplishments that his male ego always aspired to, but which have been restrained within by his overprotective upbringing.

However, the result of his scientific experiments falls beyond the boundaries of humane definition. The unnamed character does not fit into any categories or classifications. Within his status of extreme novelty, outside the realm of possible explanations, he fails to be accepted in a world he obviously does not belong. In subverting the notion of natural reproduction methods, the creature is abjected. Having failed to be directly associated with “normal” men, the nameless character is seen as an aberration. Therefore, as he cannot be acknowledged as a member of the group of the Ones, he is immediately cast into the outside group of the Others.

Hence the creature’s proximity to any group of minorities who are ostracized because they fit into the least valued side of ever recurrent binary conceptualizations. Same-sex oriented men are no strangers to this system which fails to recognize their distinct subjectivities as valid and acceptable. Due to a series of factors that range from

ideological stands, scientific truths and religious beliefs, gays have come to constitute a threat to any society that overestimates the worth of capitalism, mass production of labor force, biased religious dogmas (most of the times interpreted quite partially) and over reliance on binarisms.

The failure in understanding that mankind is formed by plural subjectivities and that the contemporary sense of self is deeply fragmented (as Stuart Hall believes it to be) steadfastly leads to the rejection of whatever is not the same, but distinct. Another result of such failure is the "abjectification" of those individuals who, in a way or another, do not conform to the standards of "normality" defined hegemonically. "Normality", thus, can be interpreted as a social construct that is regulated by sets of rules and morals that are convenient to specific ideologies.

In my analysis of *Angels in America* I could testify to the complications inherent in those who fear to be identified as Others and to be trapped behind the walls that restrain such individuals. Joe is a character that displays a complex case of self-condemnation and the consequences show in a serious clash of identities. As attested by both Woodward and Hall, the possible occurrence of multiple identities in one single individual due to outside influences may also be a troublesome feature, as is Joe's case. At first unwilling to transgress, the character suffers from severe self-hatred and obsession with conformity. As a result, his life and marriage are a nightmare, and the harsh effects of suffocation can be felt not only in him, but in his wife as well. Both physically (he develops a stomach ulcer) and mentally impaired, Joe gradually grows to accept that transgression is inevitable in his life, if he wants to spare himself most of his problems. The turning point in the narrative of his plot is when he realizes he cannot surrender to a society that closely surveys him, watching his every move and attitude in an attempt to have his "illicit sexual urges" under siege. When Joe becomes aware of the need to transgress, and when he finally gives himself permission to do so, he feels happy and free for the first time.

To a certain extent, Prior is even more of a transgressor than Joe, since he has never denied his attraction to men. Such an assertiveness in transgression makes Prior an easier character to analyze and a much deeper one than Joe as well. It is not by chance that my analysis of him was, in a way, more substantial. Prior's "monstrosity" is

aggravated by AIDS as his body shows evident signs of the disease. In Marcelo Secron Bessa's understanding, the physical features of the individual who suffers from AIDS have contributed, since the beginning of the world epidemic, to the image of aberration already easily associated with gays. Moreover, as Susan Sontag attests, plagues such as AIDS have always been seen as being loaded with meanings (most of them extremely depreciating) that cast monstrous shadows onto those who are sick.

Notwithstanding, in spite of the destructive scenario and imagery pre-assigned to his disease, Prior refuses to succumb to metaphors and death itself. In addition, he declines to fear the label of "monster" by showing reluctance to conceal his new body frame. In a number of levels, he embraces the label of transgressor for he knows that that is the only way towards the path of dignity and self-acceptance. If his attitudes had been otherwise, he would have kneeled himself before a society that expects gays to admit they are wrong and that they deserve punishment.

I believe that my point has been made when I affirm that same-sex oriented "monsters" have a whole system of rules and machinery working against them, and that allegiance to their true sexual subjectivity can only be achieved by means of transgression. It is not a matter of rebellion, then. It is a matter of self-reliance. The assumption that gays choose their sexuality has been widely and exhaustingly discussed by society. However, choosing to **express** their sexuality is quite different from choosing their sexuality itself. In his book *American Homo: Community and Perversity*, Jeffrey Escoffier opines:

> Apart from differing over interpretations of biblical and religious texts, lesbians and gay men do not feel that they choose, by and large, to be homosexual. The Right's religious injunctions cause enormous (and unnecessary) pain to those whose families believe that homosexuality is sinful and evil. Homosexuals are not inherently unethical or evil people. Therefore, homosexuality should not be the basis for stigmatization, discrimination, or abuse against a significant minority in our multicultural and multireligious society.[97]

Indeed, to feel attraction to one of the same sex cannot be more of a choice than to feel attraction to one of the opposite sex. Therefore, same-sex relations should not be construed as a conscious choice. It should be deemed just as innate as heterosexual desire is. On the other hand, the decision to put such attraction into practice is in fact deliberate, but its transgressive status is entirely accounted for due to society's

[97] ESCOFFIER, J. (1998) p. 218

intolerance. If it were not for society's narrow-mindedness, gay relationships would not matter much.

It has been more than proved that clashes between the "ideal" behavior (as seen by a controlling, homophobic society) and the true sexual subjectivities within gays have led to really harsh consequences, which always present themselves on the side of the minority members. Joe's severe case of self-entrapment is not unknown to a big number of his real life counterparts. The belief that AIDS is some sort of punishment sent by God to eliminate gays tortures many of them. High suicide rates among gay adolescents and young adults throughout the world are an unquestionable fact. Thus, transgression becomes a necessity since freedom from conformity makes itself a must for those individuals' physical and mental welfare. There is no escaping the label.

I believe my studies may contribute (and I hope they do) to raise the discussion about how and why gays are abjected. If my readers understand the reasons why "monstrosity" is directly linked to those individuals, they will be halfway through understanding that the issue lies with those who see the matter from an outside perspective, not with gays themselves. If I accomplish the objective to make my readers carefully reconsider the patterns they reproduce mechanically and without questioning, I will know I have done my job. The type of enlightenment I aim to achieve only comes through reasoning. For sure, that is when "The Great Work Begins".[98]

[98] KUSHNER, T. (2005) p. 280

Bibliographical references:

ABREU, Maria Zina Gonçalves de. “O pensamento político de Mary Wollstonecraft”. In: MONTEIRO, Maria Conceição & LIMA, Tereza Marques de (ORG). *Entre o estético e o político: a mulher nas literaturas de línguas estrangeiras*. Florianópolis: Editora Mulheres, 2006. p. 269-279.

BEAUVOIR, Simone. “Introduction”. In: ___. *The Second Sex.* London: Vintage, 1997. p. 13-29.

BESSA, Marcelo Secron. *Histórias positivas: a literatura (des)construindo a AIDS*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1997.

_____. *Os perigosos: autobiografias e AIDS*. Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2002.

BLASIUS, Mark & PHELAN, Shane, ed. “The Third Sex Theory and the Creation of Political Subjects”. In: ___. *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics.* New York: Routledge, 1995. p. 61-66.

BORRECA, Art. “‘Dramaturging’ the Dialectic: Brecht, Benjamin, and Declan Donnellan’s Production of *Angels in America*”. In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 245-259.

BURKE, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited with an Introduction by Conor Cruise O’Brien. London: Penguin Classics, 1986.

COSTA, Jurandir Freire. *A inocência e o vício: estudos sobre o homoerotismo.* Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002.

ESCOFFIER, Jeffrey. *American Homo: Community and Perversity*. Berkeley & Los Angeles:University of California Press, 1998.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Microfísica do poder.* Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1995.

_____. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge.* London: Penguin, 1998.

_____. *Os anormais*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002.

_____. *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão.* Petrópolis: Vozes, 2005.

FRANTZEN, Allen J. "Prior to the Normans: the Anglo-Saxons in *Angels in America*". In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 134-148.

GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F. "Introduction". In: ___. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 1-10.

GEIS, Deborah R. "'The Delicate Ecology of your Delusions': Insanity, Theatricality, and the Thresholds of Revelation in Kushner's *Angels in America*". In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 199-207.

GODWIN, William. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.* London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976.

HALL, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity". In: HALL, Stuart, *et ali*, ed. *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,1996. p. 596-632.

HIGHWATER, Jamake. *The Mythology of Transgression: Homosexuality as Metaphor.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

JOHNSON, Diane. "Introduction." In: SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Bantan Books, 1981. p. vii-xix.

KAISER, Charles. "The Eighties". In ___. *The Gay Metropolis: 1940 – 1996.* Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. p. 267-328.

KRISTEVA, Julia. "Approaching Abjection". In: ___. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. p. 1-17.

KRUGER, Steven F. “Identity and Conversion in *Angels in America*”. In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 151-168.

KUSHNER, Tony. *Slavs!: Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness.* New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 1996.

_____. *Caroline or Change*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2004.

_____. *Angels in America.* New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2005.

RANK, Otto. “Narcissism and the Double”. In: ___. *The Double*. New York: New American Library, 1979. p. 69-86.

_____.“The Statement of the Problem”. In: ___. *The Double*. New York: New American Library, 1979. p. 3-7.

ROTELLO, Gabriel. *Comportamento sexual e AIDS: a cultura gay em transformação.* São Paulo: Edições GLS, 1998.

SAVRAN, David. “Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation”. In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 13-36.

SCAPP, Ron. “The Vehicle of Democracy: Fantasies Toward a (Queer) Nation”. In: GEIS, Deborah R. & KRUGER, Steven F., ed. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 90-99.

SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

SMITH, Johanna M. “’Cooped Up’: Feminine Domesticity in *Frankenstein*”. In: SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Boston/New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1992. p. 270-285.

_____. “Introduction: Biographical and Historical Contexts.” In: SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Boston/New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1992. p. 3-17.

_____. “Reader-Response Criticism and *Frankenstein*”. In: SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Boston/New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1992. p. 205-212.

SONTAG, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors.* London: Penguin Classics, 1991.

SUMMERS, Della. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.* Essex: Longman, 2001.

WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Pocket Books, 2005.

WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, edited by Carol H. Poston. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1988.

_____. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Essex: Prometheus Books UK, 1996.

WOODWARD, Kathryn. “Concepts of Identity and Difference”. In: WOODWARD, Kathryn, ed. *Identity and Difference.* London: Sage Publications, 2002. p. 21-61.

Web references:

TONY KUSHNER. *Mother Jones Magazine*, New York, 1995, Jul./Aug. Interview.
Available at: <http://www.motherjones.com/arts/qa/1995/07/bernstein.html>
Accessed on: Jul. 24, 2006.

THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA. Available at:
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08590a.htm>
Accessed on: Jul. 24, 2006.

WIKIPEDIA, THE FREE ENCYCLOPEDIA.
Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_School>
Accessed on: Jul. 24, 2006.

Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Kushner#Awards>
Accessed on: Jul. 24, 2006.

Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon>
Accessed on: February 9, 2007.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS.
Available at: <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,106-1-2-1,FF.html
Accessed on: February 9, 2007.