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May 2, 2022

Global Literature

Comparison Essay 2

### Identity in *The Hour of the Star* and *Born A Crime*

*The Hour of the Star* written by Clarice Lispector, is a short novella narrated by an author named Rodrigo. Rodrigo struggles to write a novel about a poor, young, uneducated, undesired, virgin girl named Macabéa from Northeast Brazil, who resides in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. The novella is predominantly a reflection of Macabéa's experiences from the perspective of the author, drawn in with his own experiences and how they both struggle to find themselves and answer the question, "Who am I?". *Born A Crime* is an autobiographical novel written by Trevor Noah who discusses his experiences growing up as a mixed boy during the apartheid in South Africa. He shares the lessons he learned trying to survive with his family during this time. He was literally born a crime being mixed from his black mom and white father. He faces many instances with racism, poverty, family, and the world constantly trying to tell him who he is and who he should be. With all of these lessons, we are able to understand and reflect on his journey full of the things that shaped him into who he is today. Both of these novels discuss experiences of oppression and how the world tries to identify them, but instead they found ways to define themselves.

*The Hour of the Star* is a novella that reflects on Macabéa's life and her experiences growing up in poverty. She was raised with many inconveniences, that you may even call her unlucky. She is alone, sick and worst of all judged for it. Everyone demeans her, but she does not allow that to weigh her down. This may seem optimistic, but it is because she is naive and

faithful. Macabéa never really had a chance to turn her life around. At the age of two, both of her parents died from typhoid and she was then raised by her aunt. Her aunt was abusive and manipulative and tried to make her believe that she deserved everything that was handed to her. “For example her aunt rapping her upside the head because, her aunt imagined, the crown of the head must be an essential point. She always used her knuckles to wrap that head with its bones weak from a calcium deficiency. She hit her but not only because the beatings gave her great sensual pleasure(pg.28).” Macabéa didn’t have a choice from them to understand what being mistreated was because she was only gracious to her aunt for taking care of her. Therefore, as she grew up and got older she allowed people to mistreat her, because she couldn’t even take care of herself. It states that “The typist lived on a kind of stupefied nimbus, between heaven and hell. She’d never thought “I am I.” I suspect she didn’t think she had the right, she was a fluke(pg.35).” Her naiveness and struggles didn’t give her the same opportunities as others. The main opportunity being free will and thought, she was too poor and mistreated that she accepted everything as is. “She didn’t[even]think about God, God didn’t think about her...since there wasn’t anyone to answer she herself seemed to have answered: that’s how it is because that’s how it is(pg.27).” However one day she went to a fortune teller who gave her an overview of all of her experiences and how she allowed everyone to walk all over her. That information opened her eyes and caused her to come to the realization of her life and seek her to live a more fulfilled life. “Just as you can be sentenced to death, the fortune-teller has sentenced her to life. Everything suddenly was a lot and a lot and so wide that she felt like crying. But she didn’t: her eyes glistened like the dying sun(pg.69).” With all that life threw at her, she was able to form a perception of her own worldview based with faith and optimism as she discovered ways to find herself.

As stated before, Macabéa experiences many misfortune experiences. Her whole life was truly misfortune and unlucky. Though, she wasn't miserable and didn't live sulking about her life. "But there wasn't any human misery in her. Because she had within her a certain fresh flower. Since, as strange as it may seem, she believed...she existed. That's it. And me? The only thing known about me is that I breathe(pg.37)." It is interesting to know that she was able to simply be. Is it better living simply to live or stressing out trying to find a purpose? "Only once did she ask a tragic question: who am I? It frightened her so much that she completely stopped thinking. But I, who can't quite be her, feel that I live for nothing. I am gratuitous and pay my light, gas and phone bills. As for her, she sometimes occasionally on payday bought a rose(pg.31)." Maybe, it was fear that allowed her to live peacefully, but at least she was able to find happiness in nothing, unlike the narrator.

After Macabéa went to the fortune teller she looked at life differently. Her eyes opened and she realized that she was living her life in limbo before. However, as she walked out and crossed the street, she was hit by a car and died. Even though she died, she died feeling fulfilled as if her life was now made officially full. "She was so alive that she moved slowly and drew her body into the fetal position. Grotesque as ever. That reluctance to give in, but that longing for the great embrace. She embraced herself longing for the sweet nothing. She was cursed and didn't know it. She clung to a thread of consciousness and mentally repeated over and over: I am, I am, I am. Who she was, was what she didn't know. She'd gone to seek in the very deep and black core of herself the breath of life that God gives us ...Then — lying there — she had a moist and supreme happiness, since she had been born for the embrace of death(pg.74)." In this moment of death, it exposes her final time of full peace and acceptance of her life and everything else that came before it didn't even matter.

In, *Born A Crime*, Trevor Noah shares his experiences in his autobiographical novel about being a mixed race boy during the Apartheid in South Africa. He encountered many different instances where everyone around him treated him differently including his family. He learned things about both black and white people that formed his beliefs and values about people. Understanding racial and classist oppression as he did, caused him to always try to fit into a category, but it was never the right one. “As a kid I understood that people were different colors, but in my head white and black and brown were like types of chocolate... I didn't know any of it had anything to do with ‘race.’ I didn't know what race was... So when the other kids in Soweto called me “white,” even though I was light brown, I just thought they had their colors mixed up(pg.46)” He was young and being mixed was different from only experiencing racism as fully black people did. Although he also had advantages being that he was fairer skinned, his depiction of what being black was internalized and it self reflected onto him. He wrote, “Colored people had it rough. Imagine: You've been brainwashed into believing that your blood is tainted... For centuries colored people were told: Blacks are monkeys... Then all of a sudden it's Planet of the Apes, and the monkeys have taken over(pg.94).” This mindset of his, that was engraved in his ideals from all of his experiences and surroundings left him feeling confused.

Even with all of these different prejudices that infiltrated his young mind, Trevor's mom tried her best to give him all that he could and to teach him all about how the world treated him. Many people questioned why should we even bother being that they believed that their circumstances would never change and they would never have full access to other opportunities. “Neighbors and relatives used to pester my mom. “Why do all this? Why show him the world when he's never going to leave the ghetto(pg.62)?” Though, it never bothered her because she

was on her own path, and so Trevor followed along as well, which eventually allowed him to escape from the same cycle of poverty and racism:

“I grew up in a world of violence, but I myself was never violent at all...I just didn't see myself that way. My mother had exposed me to a different world than the one she grew up in...When you love someone you create a new world for them. My mother did that for me, and with the progress I made and the things I learned, I came back and created a new world and a new understanding for her(pg.205).

Trevor's mom helped him get through everything. She didn't treat him as if he was special, but she did clearly know that he was different so, instead of special treatment she gave him lessons. Hi mom made sure that he received his education and learned about the things that they experienced. This was different for most black households in South Africa because of the lack of opportunities from poverty. Though, “ she would say, ‘even if he never leaves the ghetto, he will know that the ghetto is not the world. If that is all I accomplish, I've done enough(pg.62).” With her mentorship, Trevor was able to build his own perspective of the world and learn how to keep working through his difficulties. Being “born a crime” for simply being mixed, changed all aspects and even infiltrated his relationship with his father. He wasn't able to be seen with him/affiliated with him so it berated them from really building a connection and being consistent in each other's lives. However, one day when Trevor was older, his mother persuaded him to seek his father and when he did, he was able to connect and understand his father more than he ever was:

“ He was smiling so big as he took me through it, looking at the headlines...I felt a flood of emotions rushing through me. It was everything I could do not to start crying. It felt like this ten-year gap in my life closed right up in an instant, like only a day had passed

since I'd last seen him. For years I'd had so many questions. Is he thinking about me? Does he know what I'm doing? Is he proud of me? But he'd been with me the whole time. He'd always been proud of me. Circumstances had pulled us apart, but he was never not my father(pg.88).”

Even after this they never connected much, but he came to the realization that it was really never his fault why their relationship was so inconsistent. He learned from his experiences that, “as the outsider, you can retreat into a shell, be anonymous, be invisible. Or you can go the other way. You protect yourself by opening up. You don't ask to be accepted for everything you are, just the one part of yourself that you're willing to share. For me it was humor. I learned that even though I didn't belong to one group, I could be a part of any group that was laughing(110)”. Trevors ideals and sense of self was at first infected with the opinions of others and the law, but as he grew older, with the help of his mother and better understanding, he was able to differentiate what was morally correct and what should or shouldn't have an effect on him. He was able to step out of his shell of conformity and find his true identity. Now we are able to reflect on his life and see how he became a top writer and comedian, as he shares the experiences of his life.

Trevor Noah and Macabea worked through everything and became aware of themselves despite all the things everyone else told them to be and who they were. Even with the different outcomes of each novel in the end they were aware of their circumstances but instead of allowing it to bring them down, they were able to discover who they are. Not only the “characters”, but both novels were written by authors who somehow went on that same identity journey. Obviously Born a Crime is an autobiographical novel, written by Trevor Noah so we know that it was a reflection of his life and experiences that made him who he is today. Though, in *Hour of*

*the Star* many readers suspected that Clarice Lispector wrote this novella as a reflection of her life, being that she was dying when she was writing this book, and died shortly after.

Additionally, in an interview she said, "I went to a fortune-teller who told me about all kinds of good things that were about to happen to me, and on the way home in the taxi I thought it'd be really funny if a taxi hit me and ran me over and I died after hearing all those good things." It

may not be autobiographical but it may have been an exploration into her own self and purpose of being. Another quote from the novella that may have depicted this is when she wrote that

"She(Macabéa) was finally free of herself and of us. Don't be afraid, death is an instant, it passes like that, I know because I just died with the girl(pg.74)". These novels were made as a journal for the journey of self reflection and discovering identity for not only the authors, but for the readers as well.

## Bibliography

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