“A Basket of Mysteries”

A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of Rita Dove’s reworking of Greek myths

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To my parents

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0. General Introduction

This dissertation consists of a cognitive linguistic analysis of two works written by the American poet Rita Dove, the play *The Darker Face of the Earth* and the collection of sonnets *Mother Love*.[1] My aim is to analyse, from a cognitive perspective, the creative process involved in the reception and interpretation of ancient Greek myths and their re-adaptation and reinvention in a specific African American context. The primary sources of the study are Dove's works and her interviews, in which the author is explicit about her use of myth and its relation with the modern and contemporary world.

In section 0.1., I introduce the author Rita Dove and explore her poetics, highlighting its main features and themes. In section 0.2., I give an overview of the relationship between African American writers and the classics, focusing on Dove's re-use of ancient Greek myths. In section 0.3., I present my study, its theoretical foundations and methodology. Sections 0.4., 0.5., 0.6., 0.7., are devoted to the main theoretical tools being used, such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory. In section 0.8., I explain the structure of the dissertation and present the research questions.

0.1. Exploring Rita Dove's poetic and artistic vision

Pulitzer Prize winner, Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995, and Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia, Rita Dove is one of the most acclaimed poets of the United States. She is the author of seven collections of poetry, a play, a novel, a collection of short stories, and several essays. Moreover, she edited *The Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry*. Her first collection of poetry, *The Yellow House*

[1] In the work abbreviated in *DFE* and *ML*.

on the Corner, was published in 1980, and her latest, *Playlist of the Apocalypse*, in 2020.

Rita Dove was born in Akron, Ohio, on August 28, 1952. Akron, as many other cities in the northern United States, was at the center of the "Great Migration", one of the largest migration wave in United States history. Between 1910 and 1970, millions of black people moved from southern states to northern and western states, in order to escape from racial violence, inequality, and poverty, and to seek economic and educational opportunities. This phenomenon also involved Dove's family. Her maternal grandparents, in fact, were part of this great movement to the North. Her grandfather Thomas Hord, born in Tennessee, moved to Akron in 1919, when he was a young man. Her grandmother, Georgianna Jackson Hord, born in Georgia, moved, as a child, with her family to Akron in 1906. This familial, personal event is recounted in a fictionalised way in the work *Thomas and Beulah*, a work that made Dove the second African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1987.

Dove's parents belonged to the black middle class. Ray Dove was the first black chemist at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, but before that, he worked as an elevator operator for the same company, where he was passed by "the same white classmates he had helped through Organic Chemistry" ("Elevator Man, 1949"). In many of her poems,[2] Dove explores the father figure and her relationship with him. Her mother, Elvira Hord Dove, received a full scholarship at Howard University but attended a secretarial school instead. Education was very important to Dove and her siblings (two younger sisters and an older brother) in their household. In 1970, she was selected as a Presidential Scholar and was invited to the White House. In several interviews, Dove has remarked on her passion about books and writing which began at a very young age:

> [0.1] My idea of a bargain was to go to the public library, wander along the bookshelves, and emerge with a chin-high stack of books that

[2] Among others see: "Elevator Man, 1949", "My father's telescope", "Flash cards".

> were mine, all mine, for two weeks—free of charge! (Dove, *Selected poems*, 1993: 1)

Dove started writing when she was ten years old. She would take her book of spelling words, which she was given every week at school, and write stories based on the list of words as an exercise. From this exercise, she wrote her first complete unpublished story, "Chaos":

> [0.2] The only rules I set for myself were: (1) each spelling word had to be used in the tense/conjugation presented, (2) the order of the list must be honored, and (3) no peeking at next week's list. Needless to say, I had no idea what developments in plot or character were going to occur. Again, it was the language itself that led me on; I was open to the adventure. (Dove, *The poet's world*, 1995: 74)

The relevant element of these memories is Dove's fascination with language, which started at an early age; a single word, like the one contained in the spelling notebook, could contain and lead to a story, if the author let herself go and followed it.

In her 1991 interview with Taleb-Khyar, Dove tries to explain what fascinates her about language and why she writes mostly poetry rather than prose:

> [0.3] "One of the things that fascinated me when I was growing up was the way language was put together, and how words could lead you into a new place. I think one reason I became primarily a poet rather than a fiction writer is that though I am interested in stories, I am profoundly fascinated by the ways in which language can change your perceptions". (Taleb-Khyar, 1991: 350)

Language as a space to inhabit (Dove, 1995), as a powerful tool to shape, craft, and modify reality is a constant in Dove's works and reflection on poetry. This is the main reason she is a poet.

The transformative power of words is the theme of the last poem of her first collection *The Yellow House on the Corner*.[3] Dove considers "Ö" to be her first declaration of poetic and a turning point in her writing and

[3] Abbreviated in *YH*.

exploration of her own voice. In the poem, a family moves from Sweden to a yellow house on the corner (which gives the name to the collection) of a neighborhood in the United States. The native language of the family has the power to modify the entire, foreign, landscape. A single unfamiliar word, Ö, the Swedish word for island, transforms the house into a "galleon stranded in flower" that could take off and float away. A single word becomes the vessel to navigate through geographical boundaries and to cross the limits between the real and unreal.

A powerful tool requires extreme attention and dedication. Dove's word choice is accurate and precise; her linguistic sharpness creates space for epiphanic moments that change the world around the poet and the readers alike:

[0.4] […] Sometimes
a word is found so right it trembles
at the slightest explanation.
You start out with one thing, end
up with another, and nothing's
like it used to be, not even the future. (Dove, *YH*, Ö)

A single word redefines space and time and nothing is as it was.

After graduating from college, Dove became a Fulbright scholar, attending the University of Tübingen for two semesters. Her experience of living in Europe, and in Germany in particular, has played an important role in her life on many levels. Germany is present in many of her works in the form of history ("The Bird Frau"; "Sightseeing"), or biography ("At the German Writers Conference in Munich"), art ("The Spray Paint King"), and language; many poems contain German words and expressions (for example, "*Wiederkehr*", "return"). Moreover, Dove recognizes that the immersion in the German language was a crucial element in her evolution as a writer:

[0.5] "German syntax showed me ways in which English could be stretched to accommodate consciousness. If there's a past participle in German, for instance, the entire verb always comes at the end of the sentence. I thought it was so amazing that Germans were able to hold onto incredibly complex clauses until the verb brought it all

> together. And I thought: If you could do that in poetry, you'd get the epiphany—ping!—right at the end. That changed the way I was working in my own poems". (Schwartz, 2016: 169)

Often in Dove's poetry, the final stanzas or lines provide a twist that forces the reader to reconsider their interpretation of the poem or, on the contrary, can offer a kind of revelatory closure. This seems to confirm the influence of the German language on her poetics and the way she structures her poems.

Back in the United States, Dove enrolled in the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop program. There she was assigned as translator for the German Fulbright student Fred Viebahn, whom she later married. In 1977, she received her Master of Fine Arts degree. In this period, she completed the poems that would become part of her first published book, *The Yellow House on the Corner*.

After spending three months in Jerusalem, where she first had the idea and drafted the plot of the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*,[4] Dove and her husband moved to Germany to work as freelance writers. Here she composed several poems that would be included in her second collection of poems, *Museum*. The collection, characterised by some autobiographical poems, an entire section ("My father's telescope") focused on her father, presents a multitude of different inputs from Greek myth, Chinese history, and Italian literature, all of which show Dove's eclectic, multiform, and diverse avenues of inspiration.

Dove's multiculturalism permeates her poetry and prose. It is perhaps for this reason that one of her only two literary essays focuses on the intellectually challenging figure of the writer Melvin Tolson (1898-1966). In his work *Harlem Gallery* (1965) there are "allusions to Vedic Gods, Tintoretto, and Pre-Cambrian poetry, as well as snippets in Latin and French" (Dove, 1985: 109). There is also an echo of classical Greece: he uses the Greek alphabet letters as titles for the twenty-four sections of the book, just

[4] See chapter 1, section 1.2.

as in the Hellenistic division of the Homeric poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in twenty-four scrolls.

One of the most important features of Dove's poetics is that she approaches history and myth from marginal, lateral, and liminal spaces. In *Museum*, as in several of her other works, Dove assembles different voices and points of view, creating spaces from which those who have been suppressed or excluded from history, myth, and legends could emerge. In many poems, Dove challenges the subjected and subservient role of women by giving them a voice and the possibility to express their perspective.

In "Fiammetta breaks her peace" (in *Museum*), the lyric voice is that of Fiammetta, the semi-fictionalised woman idealised by the Italian writer Boccaccio. As any idealised woman, Fiammetta is limited and chained by Boccaccio's own ideal of femininity.

[0.6] And to think he wanted me beautiful!
To be his fresh air
and my breast two soft
spiced promise. *Stand still*, he said
once, *and let me admire you*.
(Dove, *Museum*, "Fiammetta breaks her peace")

The poem represents the other side of the object of admiration, a speaking subject that rejects the admiring projections of another's gaze.

Dove's "inclusive sensibility" (Rampersad, 1986: 53) allows her to bring to life well-rounded characters distant from her experiences in gender, class, time, and space. Nevertheless, the author does not transcend her experience as a black woman. For example, as Dove explains in her 1991 interview with Georgoudaki, Fiammetta, the white woman from 14th century Italy, becomes a metaphorical source for expressing and talking about Dove's experience as a black woman in Europe:

[0.7] "Also as a person going to Europe, I was treated differently because I was American. I was Black, but they treated me differently than people treat me here because I'm Black. And in fact, I often felt a little like Fiammetta; I became an object. I was a Black American, and therefore I became a representative for all of that. And I some-

> times felt like a ghost, I mean, people would ask me questions, but I had a feeling that they weren't seeing me, but a shell. So there was that sense of being there and not being there, you know." (Georgoudaki, 1991: 419)

Both Fiammetta and Dove lose their complexity in the eyes of the others (Boccaccio and white Europeans, respectively) and become emblems, objects of contemplation or inquiry, dispossessed of their unique identity ("but I had the feeling that they weren't seeing me, but a shell"). Blackness is a lens that allows Dove a wider scope of analysis and a deeper level of contemplation; a filter through which to explore multiplicity and encapsulate the similarities within the diversity.

[0.8] > "As a black woman, from a very early age I was acutely aware of the discrepancies between history as I experienced it and History as it was reported. In the words of W. E. B. DuBois, such a marginalized position gives you binocular vision, because when you're not in the mainstream you must still understand and be able to "go with the flow" if asked, and yet you have knowledge from another vantage point as well. So these interstices are fascinating; they are the nodes where we can be most aware of the ways in which we negotiate life, from the innermost feelings to the outward presentation. My poetry often emanates from that crossroads; I love the view it gives me". (Dungy & Dove, 2005: 1030).

The interest in the underside, the unseen and ignored incidents of history, is present in *Museum*, its dedication is a declaration of intent "for nobody who made us possible", the same in *Thomas and Beulah*.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning book is a collection of forty-four poems centered on the fictionalised story of Dove's maternal grandparents. These two "nobodies in the course of history", as Dove defines Thomas and Beulah (Georgoudaki, 1991: 421), are investigated in their inner life and in the connection between the private and the public, as they experience important changes and events in the history of the United States, such as the Great Migration, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement and the March on Washington.

History, one of the main themes in Dove's work, is characterised by two dimensions in Dove's conceptualisation:

[0.9] "History with a small h consists of a billion stories. History with a capital H is a construct, a grid you have to fit over the significant events in ordinary lives. Great historians, those who can make history "come alive," realize that all the battles lost or won are only a kind of net, and we are caught in that net. Because there are other interstices in that large web". (Bellin, 1995: 19)

History is refracted in a multiplicity of particular experiences and individualities. Individual and historical, private and public, are connected and mutually shaped. There are different versions of the same event, as people experience them from different and often divergent perspectives (Stein, 1995: 1). Dove explains that she is interested not only in the event as such, but also and above all in the emotion and the different attitudes involved:

[0.10] "History isn't merely facts and isolated events to be memorized, but-that -it is lived through people. […] History with a capital H led me to the realization that the underside of History, as it were, was infinitely more interesting. So in my work I make a conscious effort to treat History and history equally". (Bellin, 1995: 18)

Dove does not examine history in its mere facts, events and concatenations of actions, but rather as the intersection of the individual, the ordinary people left out of official historical narratives, with History.

Exploring every situation, its facets and angles, and inhabiting different perspectives and subjectivities makes her poetry dynamic. This is one of the most relevant characteristics of her poetics. Many poems present a multitude of voices and perspectives. In the collection *Grace Notes* (*GN*), Dove writes more personal poems, exploring autobiographical events such as the experience of motherhood. The poem "Pastoral" shifts from describing a mother's feelings after breastfeeding to those of a man lying in bed with his lover:

[0.11] I like afterwards best, lying
outside on a quilt, her new skin
spread out like meringue. I felt then
what a young man must feel
with his first love asleep on his breast:
desire, and the freedom to imagine it
(Dove, *Grace Notes*, "Pastoral")

Dove's shift of perspective and identity does not only involve gender roles in different spatial and temporal experiences, but she even imagines herself as an object, an inanimate entity. In the poem "Meditation at fifty yards, moving target" in the collection *American Smooth*, Dove meditates on the pleasure of shooting at a target with a gun. The first section focuses on a male shooter, the second one on a female shooter, and the third section is the perspective of the bullet.

In the poem "Ars Poetica" contained in the collection *Grace Notes*, the author presents the main features of her poetics. Dove defines the poem as "a self-conscious declaration of literary philosophy" (Walsh & Dove, 1994: 150). In the poem, Dove's statement on poetics stands in opposition to two male writers. The first one, a "terribly important essayist" looks for an epiphanic revelation by stepping into the outside world, but runs away from it when he is unable to see anything relevant to him. The second one, an Australian novelist, who never wanted to learn how to cook in order to preserve his genius, attempts to be contemplatively mute: however, he writes a huge amount of pages.

A second brief and very compressed stanza contains Dove's poetic identity, which might seem modest and humble in relation to the overconfidence of the male writers. Rita Dove wants her poem to be a "ghost town" ("What I want is this poem to be small, a ghost town on the larger map of wills"). If the essayist of the first stanza runs away crying because he found nothing meaningful outside, Dove recognises and sees what is overlooked, what is considered irrelevant, but that has been imprinted and has left a trace in time, like a ghost town. The unseen emerges through her poetry and imagination.

In the poem, she identifies herself as a hawk: "Then you can pencil me in as a hawk: a travelling x-marks-the-spot". The metaphor of the hawk is used to conceptualise the nomadic nature of the author, who, as a bird, is an entity flying over different times and spaces. The hawk is a bird of prey, it hunts, and so does the poet, catching, hunting moments where truth is

revealed. The excellent sight of this bird is mapped onto the sharpness of Dove's poetic vision. Moreover, the bird is the metaphor for freedom par excellence and, therefore, represents an important element in Dove's poetic consciousness: the need to desert any kind of rule of how her poetry should be, and what it should be about.

Dove excludes any prioristic dogma, and her art lacks ideological and propagandistic aims. This allows her to bring to life characters and individuals who are not limited or flattened by any purpose other than artistic truth. What she has always been researching and looking for is to be true to herself and her work:

> [0.12] "My feeling, my mission if you will—though I don't usually think of it in those global terms—is to restore individual human fates to the oeuvre. Literary portrayals of women and African-Americans have been flat, and since the sixties they've been predictably angry. This stock characterization allows the reader to fall into certain categorical thinking. I want to resist that; I don't want you to think of a particular character simply as "this black angry person," I want you to think of him as Joe or Mary or Martin". (Ratiner, 2001:182)

She takes a stand against coercive dictates about the forms or subjects appropriate to poetry. In addition to this, Dove's experience of growing up in a middle-class family in the American Midwest informed the kind of literature she was influenced by and that resonated with her, and therefore the stories she wanted to write, as Dove states in the 2001 interview with Steffen:

> [0.13] "I did not grow up in the ghetto of the South. And though there were instances of discrimination, the general tenor of my childhood was more nourishing than confrontational. So I wanted to pay tribute to this kind of upbringing as well". (Steffen, 2001: 174)

Although Dove's poetry does not explicitly intersect with political issues, in her latest collection *Playlist for the Apocalypse* (2020), there are several political poems and there is a clear resonance with specific contemporary events. The hopes for a possible change of racial and social issues in the United States, present in poems like "Lady Freedom Among Us" written in

1993, "did not come to fruition",[5] so the anger of poems like "Beside the Golden Door" and the series "Eight Angry Odes", "came out of that kind of hopelessness".[6]

0.2. African American reception of Classics

The relationship between Greco-Roman mythology, literature and African American writers and scholars dates back to the eighteenth century. From the beginning of African American literature (1746)[7] and throughout the nineteenth century, the study and re-elaboration of the classics[8] often assumed a symbolic and political value. The authoritative artistic legitimacy detained by ancient Greek and Latin literature was also used to assert and affirm the human status of African Americans and those formerly enslaved. The knowledge of Latin and Greek was a weapon to fight for equality.[9] The ability to learn and understand the classics was, in fact, central to the debate on the possible education of African Americans.

In the eighteenth century, white intellectuals promoted the racist belief that knowledge of classic Antiquity was accessible only to white scholars. Mary Church Terrell, an African American activist for racial equality and women's suffrage, and one of the first black women to graduate from college, reported that, when the poet Matthew Arnold visited Oberlin College and heard her recite in ancient Greek, he was shocked because he, like the majority of white people, believed that the black people could not pronounce Greek correctly (Walters, 2007: 7). Mastering Latin and Greek grammar, language and literature was a political and social act, a way of trying to gain

[5] Rita Dove, personal communication.

[6] Rita Dove, personal communication.

[7] The first known African American text is the ballad poem "Bars fight" composed in 1746 by Lucy Terry.

[8] The term "classics" refers to the study of the literature, art, history, material culture and ideas of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and to the academic disciplines included in the curriculum of Classics. I use the term here primarily to indicate the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature and related languages.

[9] See Malamud (2013).

respect and validity in the all-white literary circles, but it also showed the affinity between the Greco-Roman and African cultural legacies. All these elements are present in Phillis Wheatley' poems.

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) was born in Gambia, and brought to America in 1761 to be sold as a slave to John Wheatley. Wheatley was taught to read and write and she was introduced to the Bible, Greek and Latin classics, and British literature. She began writing poetry in her early teenage years, and she became the first African American poet to be published in 1773. Walters, in her study on black female writers and their use of ancient Greek and Latin myths, points out that:

> [0.14] Wheatley was drawn to the classics because she recognized that those who wrote within the classical tradition garnered respect and acclaim from their literary peers. (Walter, 2007: 5)

Phillis Wheatley's collection *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, published in 1773, opens with the dedicatory poem "To Maecenas". Maecenas was the famous patron of many Latin writers, including Horace (65-27 BCE) who dedicated his collection of *Odes* to him. Wheatley's dedication to Maecenas reclaims the classical and neoclassical convention of worshipping the patron, but is also linked to her subjugated condition as an enslaved person (Bennett, 1998). There are subtle references to her subordinate position throughout the poem: "Oh! could I rival thine and Virgil's page" ("To Maecenas": 23), "But here I sit and mourn, a groveling mind/ That fain would mount and ride upon the wind" ("To Maecenas": 29-30). Greenwood (2011: 170) points out that self-deprecating expressions are conventional in dedicatory poems, but in Weathley's poems this convention achieves a "rare sincerity" (Greenwood, 2011: 170) because the poet's condition as an enslaved individual prevented her from competing with authors of the Western literary tradition such as Virgil in the passage quoted above.

In the same poem, Wheatley mentions the poet Terence (195-159 BCE), who was born in North Africa, enslaved and taken to Rome, where his patron

gave him an aristocratic education. Terence later became one of the most important and renowned playwrights and was freed by his patron. Wheatley highlights Terence's African birth by mentioning it in a footnote, and in one stanza describes the "happier Terence" ("To Maecenas": 37) as "one alone of Africa's sable race" ("To Maecenas": 39) blessed by the Muses to reach the realms of fame, whose works have survived through time. Smith (1989: 587) argues that Terence was "happier" because the social and cultural conditions were more favourable to him than the present situation for Wheatley. Nevertheless, Wheatley recognises the similarities between the Roman-African playwright and herself, such as the condition of captivity and the need to navigate a different language and culture (Smith, 1989: 587).

Wheatley's use of Latin conventions, her re-elaboration of classical patterns and literature, her explicit reference to the Roman-African playwright Terence, can be seen not only as borrowing, but also as relying on a perceived "interconnectedness" (Royon, 2013: 164) between the classics and African and African American traditions and as reappropriating a heritage that was "never either pure or white" (Royon, 2013: 164). The beginning of African-American literature was therefore marked by the first signs of affinity between African, African-American and Greek and Roman cultures, and by the use of the classics as a political statement.

Looking at the development of classical reception and African American writers' reflections on black poetics and aesthetics in the twentieth century, it becomes clear that the relationship with the classics is sometimes problematic because, for some black theorists and writers, they represent a white and Eurocentric aesthetic. With the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, the radicalisation of political struggle and the emergence of political theories of black nationalism, artists sought to create a new form of popular and political art for the African American people.

The Civil Rights Movement was characterised by a wide range of political and social activism in the United States in the mid-20th century for the equal rights for African Americans. It focused primarily on ending racial

segregation and discrimination against African Americans, as well as advocating for equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of race. Alongside the Civil Rights Movement and in the wake of the Black Power Movement (a political and social movement for black liberation), around 1965 it developed "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal, 1968: 1): the Black Arts Movement. Larry Neal, writer, poet and theorist, together with Amiri Baraka, of the Black Arts Movement declared that the movement "envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America" (Neal, 1968: 1). In order to perform this goal, the movement "proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology" (Neal, 1968: 1).

The movement sought political and social change as well as cultural and aesthetic reform. One of the main features of the new black aesthetic was the articulation of artistic forms of expression for black people, the celebration of Afrocentrism and African American history and experience. This was also achieved by refuting the poetic conventions and cultural heritage of the West.

The Western classics were seen as a purely white discipline that had nothing to offer black people and communities. The abandonment of the ancient Greek and Latin myths was replaced by a return to African origins and black folklore. As in the beginnings of African American literature, the relationship to the classics in the Civil Rights Movement was imbued with political value, but this time the rejection of Greek and Latin mythology was characteristic of black empowerment and cultural identity.

There was an attitude of dismissal of anything that had to do with the classics, and those writers who did not fully adhere to this aesthetic agenda and used the classics in their work were often received negatively by African-American critics, who accused them of elitism and of turning away from black communities and abandoning protest (Rankine, 2006: 31).

The reception and fortune of Phillis Wheatley's work is a case in point. As showed in this section, her writing is full of allusions and references to

ancient Latin and Greek literature. Henry Louis Gates, critic, theorist and editor of African American literature, summing up the criticism of Wheatley's work, wrote: "Too black to be taken seriously by white critics in the eighteenth century, Wheatley was now [the nineteen sixties] considered too white to interest black critics in the twentieth" (Gates, 2003: 10). The "black critics" to whom Gates alludes are twentieth-century critics such as Amiri Baraka, who sought "black expression" and "cultural affirmation" in African American literature (Gates, 2003: 10).

The Black Arts Movement had many prescriptive and essentialist aspects, yet many writers such as Ralph Ellison (1914-1994), did not fully adhere to this aesthetic agenda and continued to reuse the classics in their work. Ancient Greek and Latin literature was not an isolated place for the politically disengaged artist, but rather was often used "to comment on, subvert, and undermine dominant cultural models of identities" (Schliephake, 2016:54). Ancient Greek mythology provided a form and structure to express the circumstances of African American people and a tool to explore racism, inequality and marginalisation in alternative ways.

The first research on the relationship between the classics and African and African American literature revolved around concepts of race in the field of classical studies and Greco-Roman relations with black Africans. Frank Snowden, in *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970) and *Before Color Prejudice* (1983), was among the first to "transfer modern racial issues to classical antiquity" (Rankine, 2006: 24). Using a considerable amount of evidence from written papyrus, epigraphs and coins, Snowden drew conclusions about the relationship between Greeks and Romans from the Classical period to the early Christian era with regard to Africans, especially Ethiopians. Snowden argued that there was no colour prejudice in antiquity and that skin colour was not a determining factor in the enslavement of groups of people.

Although Snowden's works represent the first attempt to focus academic attention on the relationship between race, racism and ancient Western culture, it was not until Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: Afroasiatic*

roots of classical civilization (1987) that the issue of race and Afrocentrism finally entered the wider academic debate and was no longer the exclusive concern of black scholars. In *Black Athena*, Bernal explored the origins of ancient Greek civilisation, arguing that it had its roots in Africa and the Middle East. Egypt, in particular, was at the root of ancient culture, but, Bernal added, Egyptian influence in Greece had been dismissed on cultural and ideological grounds.

Bernal's work provoked intense debate among scholars, including Mary Lefkowitz, who took on Bernal and other Afrocentrists in her work *Not out of Africa: how Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history* (1996), accusing them of lacking evidence for their claims. In 1996, Lefkowitz and MacLean Rogers published an anthology of contributions from eighteen scholars who opposed and attacked Bernal's thesis: *Black Athena Revisited*. This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the debate; suffice it to say that the diatribe between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism was the main, if not the only, way of approaching the relationship between the classics and people of African descent.

Scholar Michele Valery Ronnick has played an important role in changing this perspective. Ronnick explicitly expressed the need to address other issues, concerns and questions and to move away from the circular controversies and arguments around *Black Athena*: "It is time for scholars and educators to look beyond the debate between Martin Bernal and Mary Lefkowitz and turn to other forms of research" (Ronnick, 1997: 1). By departing from the question of origin and cultural authority at the heart of the Bernal-Lefkowitz debate, Ronnick has pioneered a new field of scholarly interest, coining the term "Classica Africana". The new field is not limited to the study of the element of race in Greco-Roman antiquity, but includes more general considerations of the study of the classics in America, and above all, focuses on the role that the classics have played in the cultural traditions of black America and Africa.

Ronnick's work, and, as Rankine points out, the first work in the field, was characterised by the "cataloging" and "data-gathering" (Rankine, 2006: 24) of African American classicists, their biographies, professional lives and publications. In particular, Ronnick reconstructed the life and academic career of the black classicist William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926), writing his biography, *The Autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough: an american journey from slavery to scholarship* (2005), and curated and published his works in *The works of William Sanders Scarborough* (2006).

In the last decades there has been a surge of studies within Black Classicism,[10] a field of research revolving around the influence and transmission of texts, images and ideas of Greco-Roman antiquity and their re-adaptation and creative reinvention in a specifically African American or Caribbean cultural context. Jacqueline de Weever in *Mythmaking and metaphor in black women* (1992) analyses the reworking of Western, African, and African American myths by black female writers. Patrice Rankine's *Ulysses in black* (2006) is an introduction to the field of black classicism and to the complex and longstanding relationship between African American literature and the classics. Moreover, the scholar focuses on three specific authors, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Countee Cullen and on classical themes and motifs present in their works. Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson in their work *Black Aegean* (2007) explore the preeminence of the Theban myth in African theater and the black diaspora. Another work relevant to this field is Tracey Walters' *African American literature and the classicist tradition* (2007). Walters is specifically concerned with African-American female writers (Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison, and Rita Dove) and their adaptation of myths that center on motherhood.

[10] The difference between black classicism and Classica Africana has been summarised by Greenwood (2009) as follows: "the former [black classicism] is closely tied to the African American context, while the latter [Classica Africana] — which is not exactly synonymous — evokes the role of Africa in the construction of black identities in the New World" and: "[p]otentially black classicism encompasses a much larger field and differential receptions" Greenwood (2009: 102).

In my work, I focus exclusively on Rita Dove's use of Greek myths. Dove re-elaborates and reworks Greek myths in several poetic compositions and works. Despite the opposition to Western mythology manifested by several African-American authors throughout the twentieth century, Dove claims that Greek mythology is "a natural kind of thing for African Americans" (Steffen & Dove, 1997: 113). Dove makes this statement for several reasons. The stories of Greek heroes and gods were part of the cultural background of many Black Americans, just as they were for her. They are stories learned at school and read at home. More importantly, when asked about the presence of a multitude of different cultural inputs in her works and those of other black artists, Dove states that African American culture and literature, shaped by the "experience of being brought over the Atlantic on slave ships and arriving in a terrifying foreign country" (Steffen & Dove, 1997: 113) is characterised by the memory and act of absorbing other cultures and making them one's own. Dove continues by using the metaphor of jazz improvisation: taking a standard, a song that already exists, and using its structure to create something different and new is similar to the essence of African American literature. Therefore, Greek and Latin Ancient myths are not only part of her cultural heritage and personal background but, more generally, of a country, like America, that "is founded on the concept of diaspora" (Steffen & Dove, 1997: 113), with an instability of cultural identities and a continuous dynamic process of re-negotiation of influences and different cultural formations.

Classics are not only part of an African American cultural background in terms of stories and myths. Dove sees a parallel between the Greek choral form and the call-and-response communication process, a spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and audience or singer and listener, typical of black worship. This is also connected with the notion that the audience can participate, talk back. Dove establishes contact between the function of the Greek chorus and "chitlin circuits",[11] exhibitions performed

[11] Rita Dove, personal communication.

by black artists for black communities, in which the audience takes on the role of the chorus by interacting and talking back to the actors on stage.

Rita Dove explores the similarities between Greek myths and the modern world. Dove recognises myth as a tool for engaging with modern issues and expanding our knowledge of the human condition. In her 1995 interview with Bellin, Dove states that: "By exploring a myth (...) by reimagining the myth, we can find so many resonances to our own lives", and she adds that: "they [myths] explain some of the mysteries of our existence and our relationship with each other" (Bellin, 1995: 22). Notwithstanding the particular link between every single myth and different practices, rituals, religions, and social and cultural roots, myth constitutes a universal world of meaning. Dove states that the reason why ancient myths are a source for human knowledge and are still re-enacted, re-told and repeated is "because they touch the yearning inside us; they explain our impulses on a level deeper than logic" (Bellin, 1995: 22).

Under the particular surface of myths, there are patterns and archetypical images (symbols) that transcend culture and history, universal and common concerns about life. Dove explains that her personal approach to myth is "nothing anthropological or psychological, I am not into rooting out all the extant variations [of the myth] or analyzing every symbol" (Bellin, 1995: 22). Dove adds that she works and re-writes myths to find similarities with modern experiences and "to get at the ineffable" (Bellin, 1995: 22).

By reworking Greek myth and setting it in another time and space, Rita Dove is testifying its explanatory power. At the same time, by mapping Greek myths onto African American contexts the author allows particular experiences of individuals who have been ignored and silenced by History to reach trans-historical and transnational magnitude. There are mythical echoes in several of Dove's compositions like the poems "Medusa", "Euridyce, turning" and in the novel *Through the Ivory Gates*, but only two works are structured entirely as re-elaborations of Greek myths. In *The Darker Face of the Earth* and *Mother Love*, the author blends structures, themes and

characters from the Ancient myth with structures and characters of modern and contemporary world.

In *The Darker Face of the Earth*, the Greek myth of Oedipus is used as a metaphor to investigate and represent social and moral realities in the pre-Civil war South Carolina, to show its ambiguities, and to let denied individualities emerge from the major events of History and reach mythic and heroic peaks. In *The Darker Face of the Earth*, one of the most famous familial dramas is combined with racial dynamics within a slaveholding family: denial of the birthright of mixed-race offspring, cancellation of black families and the problem of origins. The result, I would like to advance, is a precious and unique piece of art, a complex blend of different input spaces, one of which, although not the only one, is *Oedipus the King.*

In *Mother Love*, Dove rewrites the story of Demeter and Persephone. In her re-elaboration, the mythical story of abduction is blended with modern drama, black motherhood, American women's folklore and realm. The myth is re-enacted in contemporary urban settings, by a multitude of different Demeters and Persephones. In fact, the author, with constant shifts in point of view and perspective, shows the continuity and recursivity of Demeter and Persephone's mythical patterns and themes (motherhood, mother-daughter relationship, rite of passage, male violence, gender inequality) that can be aptly applied to all the girls in any society, across space, time and culture. As Dove said, "the course of the power of myths is that they keep coming around".[12]

0.3. A cognitive linguistic analysis of Rita Dove's reworking of Greek myths

[12] Rita Dove, personal communication.

I had the privilege of meeting Rita Dove and the unique opportunity to speak to her directly during her visit to the University of Cologne from 21-26 May 2023. The conversation with her was more than inspiring and enlightening. It also enabled me to better understand Dove's mythic consciousness and the role of ancient myth in her works.

My own research on literary texts is based on cognitive linguistic theories such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory,[13] the notions of image schemas and scripts. The application of cognitive studies to literature is eclectic, characterised by different methodologies, assumptions, and commitments. General interest in the field grew in the last decades after the general cognitive turn "in the contemporary study of human beings" (Turner 2002:1). The general assumption at the base of cognitive literary studies is that literature is a product of the human mind, which is intrinsically embodied (Johnson, 1987), and that literature is, therefore, the result of general cognitive and mental activities and processes. Cognitive linguistics and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, together with Mark Turner's theory of the literary mind (1996) played an important role in the convergence of cognitive science and literature. In the monograph *The literary mind* (1996), Turner argues that the literary mind is not different from the everyday mind. He applies the term "literary" to basic cognitive operations of everyday life and to small stories[14] (e.g. a mother pouring milk into a glass, the wind blowing clouds in the sky). He challenges the traditional definition of literature and of stories, by proposing a theory of mind in which "cognitive analysis is a form of literary analysis, and literature becomes the empirical testing ground of the mind's ordinary work" (Frawley, 1998: 430). In other words, cognitive tools are used to give an account of literary analysis and interpretation. Literary works and works of poetry are used as linguistic data and objects of inquiries to describe cognition and cognitive processes; the workings of the mind.

A vast area of literary studies dialogue with cognitive science, by engaging with different fields within Cognitive Science: theory of mind, artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, philosophy of mind,

[13] Usually abbreviated in the work in CMT and CBT.

[14] See Herman (1999) for a critic of Turner's use of the term story and for a general overview of Turner's theory.

neuroscience, evolutionary biology, neurophenomenology, reading sciences, cognitive psychology, and cognitive linguistics to name a few approaches.[15]

My own approach to literary study is based on cognitive linguistics. The starting point for my interpretation of literary works is, in fact, a linguistic analysis with a cognitive orientation of the literary texts. I follow the developments of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (see below, section 3.) and Turner and Fauconnier's theory of blending applied to literature.[16] I also make use of the notion of script as applied to literature by scholars such as Minchin (1992).

In my dissertation, the literary text is interpreted as a network of mental representations prompted by the language being used; the result of the blend of multiple mental spaces (see section 3.). CBT and CMT are used to give an account of the complexity of large discourse units that merge different stories, situations, and literary traditions. *DFE* and *ML* are rich and creative complex network systems of different input spaces, of which the Greek myth is not the only one. By means of a close reading and a linguistic analysis of Dove's texts, I individuate connected sets of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985: 1997) and the mappings across mental spaces. A micro (lexical, syntactic aspects; local level of the text) and macro (themes topics, conceptual structures) linguistic analysis of Dove's text together with a linguistic analysis of Greek parallels explain the blend of structures, episodes, characters and experiences of modern and urban world with features of ancient myth and literature.

The work is not a comparative literary analysis, nor is it a checklist of the elements of ancient Greek myth inserted into Dove's works. I do not suggest which individual phrases and sentences could have been directly translated by Dove in her works from ancient Greek sources, in order to prove and show individual linguistic correspondences. Rather, I try to show how

[15] For an overview on Cognitive Literary Science, see Zunshine (2015).

[16] For the foundational works on Conceptual Blending Theory and its application to literature, see Turner (1996) Fauconnier and Turner (2002); Schneider and Hartner (2002); Fludernik (2010); Dancygier (2011).

one story, one input space (from a Greek myth) is selectively and partially projected onto another in a transformative way.

Through a cognitive linguistic analysis of Dove's works, I single out the image-schematic patterns, the conceptual metaphors and the macro conceptual structures that give fundaments and coherence to the works. Moreover, I show how these cognitive structures are the result of a blend with structures, elements, and characters beyond Greek myths. The result of the blend between Greek myths and episodes, events, stories of modern and contemporary worlds, is the emergent meaning, the new structure not derived directly from the input spaces but developing from the meaning construction process (see section 2.) of Dove's works. Through the re-elaboration of Greek mythology and its blend with characters who have been usually marginalised, like enslaved individuals and black women, the author writes a new mythology.

In the following sections, I provide an overview of the main cognitive linguistic theories and concepts that I apply in my analysis: Conceptual Blending Theory, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, image schemas and scripts.

0.4. Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) or Conceptual Integration Theory was first elaborated by Fauconnier and Turner in their seminal work *The way we think* (2002). Blending is a "general cognitive operation" (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998: 133) that informs the way we think, the way we construct new meanings and "assemble new and dynamic mental patterns" (Schmid, 2011:219). Blending underlies everyday mental activities as well as scientific reasoning, artistic and literary creations and other cognitive and linguistic phenomena (e.g. comprehension of grammatical constructs, analogy, metaphor, counterfactuals). CBT derives "from the observations that we often

construct meaning that do not seem to derive from available conceptual or linguistic structure" (Tucan, 2021: 35).

The theory makes use of Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier, 1985; 1997). A mental space is a conceptual structure, "a partial and temporary representational structure which speakers construct when thinking or talking about a perceived, imagined, past, present, or future situation" (Grady, Oakley & Coulson, 1999: 102). Mental spaces are partial packages of knowledge, which structurally rely on conceptual domains (conventionalised knowledge structures based on long-term memory). Unlike domains, mental spaces are dynamic and on-line representations operating in working memory.

Within CBT, meaning is described as a dynamic process, which emerges from the projection and combination of conceptual structures in a network of mental spaces. As Freeman points out in her study of cognitive mapping in literary analysis, and in particular in the works of Emily Dickinson, cognitive linguists explain that the human mind "thinks analogically" (Freeman, 2002: 467) and that meaning is a dynamic process of projection, mapping, blending and integration. CBT is a theory that provides a theoretical framework to represent and give an account of all kind of "human integration information" (Coulson & Oakley, 2000: 176)

Figure 0.1 represents the most basic form of conceptual integration network, my own variant of the original diagram first occurred in Fauconnier & Turner (2002: 43). It is composed of two input spaces, one generic space, and the blended space. The input spaces are activated by various prompts (verbal, visual, sonic) when we talk or think, imagine or remember. The generic space is characterised by a skeletal structure that is shared by the input spaces. Input spaces are characterised by elements that are partially mapped across spaces and selectively projected onto the blended space. The blend receives the selected projection of elements from the input spaces along with the emergent meaning and structure that "arises out of the imaginative processes of blending" (Coulson, 2006: 190).

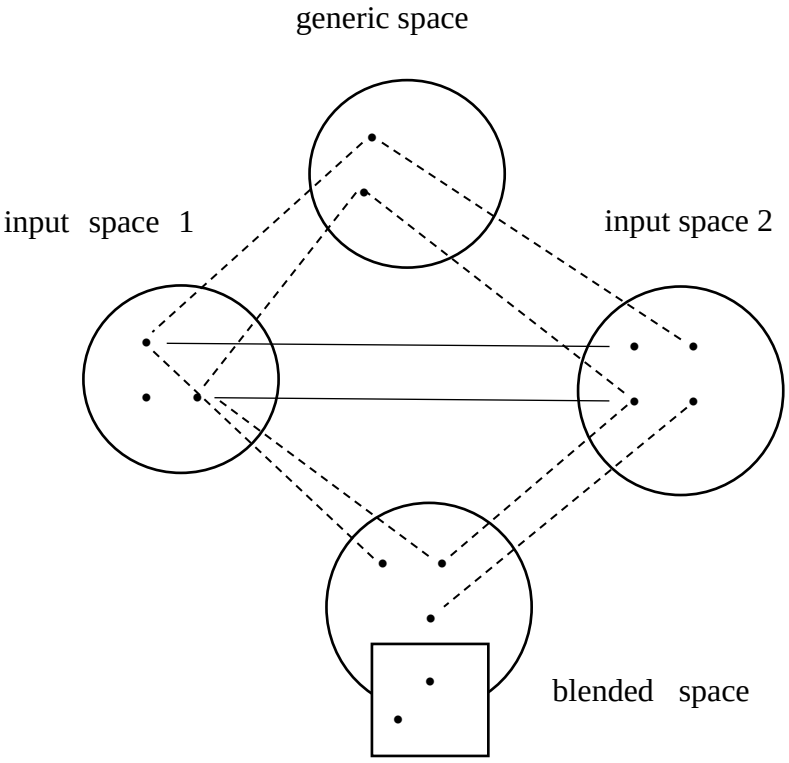

Figure 0.1

The solid lines indicate the mappings between mental spaces, and the dotted lines represent the elements projected from the generic space onto the input spaces, and from the input spaces onto the blend. The square inside the blended space represents the emergent meaning, the new structure that is not present in none of the input spaces. As figure 0.1 makes clear, not all the elements have counterparts across spaces, and not all the elements are projected onto the blend.

The blending involves three crucial processes: composition, completion and elaboration (Fauconnier & Turner: 2002). The composition is the projection of elements from the inputs onto the blend. The completion is the matching of the structure of the blend with information stored in long-term memory. Elaboration is the third part of the process, also defined as “running the blend”, and it is the mental stimulation and development of the blend.

One of the most important benefit and aim of blending is to provide global insight and access to non-human scale and complex ideas or concepts. One of the way to simplify and reduce the complexity is through the process of the "compression". Compression is a crucial component of blending and it is defined as:

> [0.15] transforming diffuse and distended conceptual structures that are less congenial to human understanding so that they become more congenial to human understanding, better suited to our human-scale ways of thinking. (Turner, 2006: 18).

The blending process is therefore characterised by the compression of elements and relationships across mental spaces. These connections between input spaces are called "vital relations". Fauconnier and Turner counted around seventeen of them (Fauconnier & Turner, 2000: 290) including the vital relations of time, identity, space, role value, change, cause effect, and part-whole. Vital relations can be compressed and unified into the blended space.

In the example of the "Regatta" blend (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002: 63), the boat trip of the clipper ship Northern Light from San Francisco to Boston in 1993, is blended with the trip of the ship Great American II that made almost the same voyage in 1853. In the blend, the ships remain two separate entities, but the element of time and space are compressed. In this way, two different events that took place in different times and spaces are projected onto the blended space and merged into a new situation, that of a race, where both ships are present in the same place at the same time.

Theorists of the Blending Theory state that, once the input spaces have been blended, the new structure and the new properties of the blend might be projected back to the input spaces and influence our previous knowledge, the way we can think of them. This phenomenon is called "backward projection". In the "Regatta" blend, as pointed out by Fauconnier and Turner, the blend remains connected to the input spaces and we can draw inferences from the blend and project them back to the input spaces; for example, that the

Northern Light sailed faster than the Great American II. Moreover, we can re-conceptualise the emotions of the Northerner Light crew, "in terms of the familiar emotions linked to the frame of racing" (Fauconnier & Turner 2003: 59).

0.4.1. Blending and Literature

Blending Theory is used to analyse everyday cognitive operations, mental activities, and linguistic phenomena, but it is potentially suitable also for the comprehension of the creation, interpretation, and reception of narrative and poetics. Turner points out that literature should be analysed as the expression of everyday capacities, as a product of the everyday human mind (Turner 1996: 7). Stories are mental activities that are essential to human thought: they are constant and largely unnoticed (Turner, 1996: 12). Turner asserts that the same cognitive process underlies everyday stories and literary stories. Therefore, although literary texts present peculiar characteristics and specificities, "the instruments of thought used to invent and interpret them are basic to everyday thought", because "the everyday mind is essentially literary" (Turner, 1996: 7).

In *The Literary Mind*, one of the examples used by Turner to illustrate blending in literature is the one of the talking ox and donkey from the Shahrazad's story. "The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey" is not one of the thousands of tales told by Shahrazad, but a story told to her by the Vizier in an attempt to dissuade his daughter Sharazad from marrying. Talking animals are a common feature of literature, and Turner explains the conceptual process behind them as a blend. The talking ox and the talking donkey do not belong to the input space of "normal" farm animals, and do not belong to the input space of Shahrazad's story. It is in the blended space that human characteristics (e.g. intentionality, talking, foreseeing) are blended with animals and theirs characteristics.

As Schneider (2012) points out, blending in literary studies has mostly been applied at the micro-linguistic level of individual metaphors and small-

scale conceptual integration networks. Sinding points out how application of CBT in literature rarely attempts to analyse "textual wholes (even of short texts), never mind the larger structure of genres" (Sinding, 2005: 597). Nevertheless, several studies have used Blending Theory for macro-linguistic analysis and the representation of large-scale conceptual integration networks.

In particular, I would like to draw attention to Semino (2006; 2009). In these studies, the scholar applies CBT to explain the characters' mental functioning in Woolf's story *Lappin and Lapinova* and the reception of the Greek myth of Midas king in Duffy's poem "Mrs Midas". Sinding (2005) uses Blending Theory for an analysis of Joyce's mixing of literary genres in *Ulysses.* Another example of a cognitive approach to whole literary works is Busse (2011) in which the scholar focuses on the metaphorical blend WRITING IS MEDICINE which is central to the narrative structure and characters' mental life in two novels written by the American writer Paul Auster. Dancygier (2012) discusses narrative meaning, engaging with a variety of literary texts by authors such Margaret Atwood, Philip Roth, William Shakespeare, using the concept of mental spaces and Blending Theory.

0.5. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory was elaborated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson for the first time in 1980 in their work *Metaphors we live by*. Their view on metaphor completely changed the way metaphor was earlier understood, and it represented a turning point. In a cognitive perspective, metaphor is not only considered a linguistic phenomenon but most importantly, a conceptual phenomenon.

A cognitive understanding of metaphor was not completely new. As recognised by Lakoff himself, Michael Reddy (1979) focused on the

conceptual underpinning of linguistics metaphorical expressions related to the concept of communication (Conduit Metaphor), according to which ideas are objects and communication is a transfer of physical objects between minds through language. Reddy explained that the conduit metaphor is not a single expression, but a system of metaphorical expressions linked by the same conceptual structure that underlies the everyday English language.

Although the idea that metaphor is not just a matter of language has existed before, it was Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphor we live by* that provided a systematic theory of metaphor. Rather than focusing on one particular metaphor, as Reddy did, Lakoff and Johnson analysed a large number of metaphorical linguistic expressions in everyday English to show that metaphor is conceptual and mostly conventional. Far from being just a consciously decorative device and the result of poetic visionary imagery, metaphors are effortless and unconscious and cognitive associations used to understand and talk about fundamental concepts like time, states, and causation. Metaphor is, therefore, central in everyday language because it is pervasive in our thought: "our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 3).

Lakoff and Johnson's definition of metaphor is: "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5). Therefore, metaphor is a matter of thought ("understanding") and not just a matter of using different words to talk about something to which they are not literally related. Lakoff and Johnson's definition is reformulated by Kovecses in these terms: "[a] conceptual metaphor is a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience" (Kovecses, 2017: 2).

Each domain is defined as a conceptual package (e.g. journey) characterised by connected elements, named slots (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 61). The set of correspondences between domains is called "conceptual mapping". The frequently quoted conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A

JOURNEY,[17] for example, displays the source domain "journey" and the target domain "life". The domain of journey is part of people's common background knowledge, and it includes elements such as travellers, paths, routes travelled, starting point, and destination. Knowledge of the journey domain is used to structure and understand aspects and structures of different domains, such as the domain of "life". Elements (slots) of the source domain "journey" are mapped onto slots of the target domain "life". In LIFE IS A JOURNEY, the living individual is conceptualised as a traveller, the goal in life as the destination of the journey, and life's choices as different paths that a person can take.

A general assessment of CMT is that abstract concepts such as time, life, death are hard to grasp for the human mind and they "require metaphorical definition" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 118). Complex concepts and abstracts are understood metaphorically in terms of concepts that are grounded in our everyday experiences. CMT, therefore, assumes that the source domain, the concept we use to understand a different one, is more familiar, concrete and embodied, while the target domain is a more abstract and complex concept.

Lakoff and Turner, in *More than cool reason* (1989) point out that it is necessary to distinguish between the cognitive level of conceptual metaphors and the linguistic manifestation of these metaphors. Metaphorical language is the surface indication of underlying conceptual metaphorical thinking. One conceptual metaphor might have hundreds if not infinite ways to be expressed. Linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphor can be highly conventionalised and rooted in everyday language, such as the conventional linguistic metaphors "pass away", "gone" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 56), expressions of the conventional conceptual metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE. They may also be less conventional, more creative and poetic, or novel linguistic expressions.

[17] Within CMT, conceptual metaphors are conventionally notated as follows: TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN.

Even though Lakoff and Johnson did not focus extensively on poetic metaphors, in *More than cool reason* (1989), Lakoff and Turner analyse and re-think the relation between metaphor in everyday language and metaphors in literature. They state that poetic metaphors, despite being elaborate, complex, not immediate, rely on the same conceptual mappings of conventional everyday conceptual metaphor: "great poets, as master craftsmen, use basically the same tools we use; what makes them different is their talent for using these tools, and their skills in using them" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: xi). Poetic metaphors are a linguistic manifestation of a conceptual metaphorical structure and "poetic thought uses the mechanisms of everyday though", in an extended, more elaborate and combined way (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 67). Either writers extend conventional metaphors (by mapping elements and aspects usually not mapped in conventionalised metaphors), or elaborate them in non-conventional way, or construe new combination by forging new composite metaphors.

Central to the notion of conceptual mapping is the one of the "invariance hypothesis" (Lakoff, 1990), which assumes that "the portion of the source domain structure that is mapped preserves cognitive topology" (Lakoff, 1990: 39). In the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, for example, the "invariance hypothesis" constrain us from saying: "First I was getting somewhere in life and then I got off to a good start" (Turner 1990: 249). This means that the physical and logical order of starting the journey from the starting point, passing through the intermediate points and finally reaching the destination cannot be violated.

Associated with the invariance hypothesis is the claim of the unidirectionality of the mapping: we re-conceptualise the target domain via the source domain, not vice versa. These two principles have been criticised in later developments and revisions on CMT.[18] In particular, Stockwell (1999) has criticised the invariance principle as an obstacle to cognitive poetics and stylistics. An analysis and interpretation of novel and creative examples of

[18] See Vandaele (2021).

conceptual metaphors would be limited by a strict application of the invariance principle. It would not give an account of the ability of creative metaphors to create new sense and meaning and would prevent other, new and challenging understandings that do not fit with our previous knowledge.

The statement that metaphors are a matter of thought, and not only a linguistic device, implies the necessity to find also non-linguistic examples of conceptual metaphors. Therefore, in the last decades there has been an increase in the number of studies of non-linguistic metaphors; pictorial metaphors in advertisements (Forceville 1996; 2002); metaphors in movies Coëgnarts & Kravanja (2012), Coëgnarts (2017); metaphor and gestures (Cienki & Müller 2008), to name just a few.

CMT and CBT share several aspects: for example, both theories describe the process of meaning formation as a projection of elements from conceptual structures (Dancygier, 2016: 29); both theories treat metaphor as a conceptual rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon. CMT and CBT have been applied to the analysis of much of the same linguistic data. However, there are several differences between CMT and CBT. CMT describes the metaphorical process as a mapping from a source domain to a target domain. CBT describes the metaphorical process as a more complex process involving the selective projection of elements from two input spaces onto another mental space (the blend). Not only is the nature of the projection different, but CBT accounts for a much wider range of phenomena than Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Conceptual metaphors are, therefore, seen as a specific type of blend, with specific aspects that distinguish them from other non-metaphorical blends. Grady and Oakley point out that one aspect that distinguishes metaphorical blends is the asymmetric topicality of the input spaces:

> [0.16] one of the inputs is topical and the other provides a means of re-framing the first for some conceptual or communicative purpose; these are, respectively, the target and source inputs of the metaphor. (Grady, Oakley & Coulson, 1999: 117)

Moreover, in metaphorical blends, prominent counterparts of input spaces are fused into a single element in the blend.

0.6. Image schemas

Image schemas are one of the fundamental concepts in the explanation of the "embodied origins of human meaning and thought" (Johnson, 2005:1). Image schemas are defined as basic, non-propositional structures, which operate at a "pre-conceptual" level (Johnson 1987, xxxvii). Johnson specifies that: "image schemata are not rich, concrete images or mental pictures, either. They are structures that organize our mental representations at a level more general and abstract than that at which we form particular mental images" (Johnson 1987: 23). Image schemas arise from our bodily and sensory motor experiences, and they are developed since early infancy (Mandler & Cánovas, 2014).

Image schemas have a basic internal logic (for example, the CONTAINER image schema is characterised by the following structure: an interior, an exterior and a border). The skeletal and unfilled structure is used to construct more complex concepts and abstracts and provide the fundaments for conceptual mappings (the UP-DOWN image schema is at the base of many conceptual metaphor such as GOOD IS UP; HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN). These kinds of metaphors are called by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) "orientational metaphors", and their source domain is characterised by an image schema.

One of the most analysed image schema is the PATH schema. It arises from the almost universal bodily experience of movement/motion. It is characterised by the following elements: starting point; path (a sequence of contiguous locations); destination. This schema is one of the most recurrent and pervasive image schemas as the action of moving along a path is something we experience on a daily basis and informs the way we function and interact with the exterior world. Therefore, the PATH image schema

shapes our cognitive structure and it is used to ground and understand a large number of concepts and abstract. For example, it underlies the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The path image schema is at the basis of the concept of the journey, which is mapped onto a variety of target domains (e.g. moral life, love, politics). The notion of image schemas has been applied to different areas, such as grammar and semantics; philosophy, politics (Hart, 2011; Oakley, 2005), and gestures (Mittelberg, 2018).

My reading of image schemas in Dove's works is inspired by Freeman (1995) and Stockwell (2002) who used them to give an account of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Richard II* respectively. Also relevant for my use of the image schema in the analysis of the conceptual metaphors underlying the re-use of the Greek myth in *Mother Love* is also Ginevra's study (2021) of the journey to the Underworld by the goddess Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

0.7. Scripts

A script is described by Stockwell as a "socioculturally defined mental protocol" (Stockwell, 2002: 77); a conceptual structure containing fixed roles, sequences of scenes, events and actions, that is stored in our long-term memory knowledge and guides the process of understanding. An example of script provided by Stockwell is the "going to a pub" script. This is characterised by several elements that we would expect to find in a pub: tables, chairs, service behind the bar, glasses, people. In addition, the script is characterised by specific actions and procedures that are enacted in order to order a drink (e.g. standing at the bar, using specific words, waiting for the bartender's response). Stockwell defines scripts like the pub script as "'situational scripts'. We use these to negotiate commonly experienced events such as being in a restaurant, taking the bus, or weeding the garden" (Stockwell, 2002: 77).

Minchin (2001), among others, applies this cognitive notion to narrative discourse, specifically to Homeric epic. A narrative script is characterised by an expected causal and chronological sequence of actions; therefore, the reader, through one or two key actions is able to activate the whole script and is able to fill in the gaps, make inferences, and expect fictional scenarios.

0.8. How the thesis is structured

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part, characterised by chapters 1, 2 and 3, gives an account of the work *The Darker Face of the Earth* and its relation with the Sophoclean tragedy of the *Oedipus the King*. In chapter 1, by a close reading of one of Dove's interview, I explain her intuition and creative process of juxtaposition, cultural exchange and classical reception in terms of conceptual mappings. For example, Dove metaphorically conceptualises white power as the implacable will of Zeus, and the institution of slavery as the ancient Greek notion of ineluctable fate. In the elaboration of this intuition, the plot is complicated by the blend with the Greek tragedy *Oedipus the king*. By mapping the ancient characters of Jocasta and Laius onto a slave plantation, Dove creates a play in which the system of slavery acts as a curse on the whole land, damning not only the enslaved, but also the enslavers.

The last part of the chapter is devoted to a cognitive linguistic reading of Dove's dramatisation of the traditional narrative pattern of the "exposed child". I suggest the presence, in *DFE*, of a sequence of narrative motifs present in the traditions (oral and literary) of many cultures, transformed in a unique way through the blend of multiple input spaces. Using the notion of script, and the application of CBT, I demonstrate that Augustus is conceptualised as a hero since the beginning of the play, and that the reader is able to infer and have specific expectations about future events in the play.

In chapter 2, I argue that the concept of miscegenation has the same role and function as the concept of incest in *Oedipus the King*, and has

therefore been blended with it. In the first part of the chapter, I make use of CMT to suggest the activation of the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST within American discourse of family in the nineteenth century. Then, through a close reading of specific passages from *DFE* and from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, I set up a system of cross-domain mappings between the input spaces of incest, miscegenation and the input space of incest in Sophocles' *Oedipus the king*, and I analyse the selected projection from the input spaces onto the blend. I argue that the metaphorical association of incest and miscegenation rooted in American thought in the nineteenth century, is active in Dove's mind and it partially explains why the myth of Oedipus could have been re-elaborated and re-rooted in the American soil. A CBT approach allows us to recognise the often unseen significance of the theme of incest in Dove's play, and the transformative and subversive power of rewriting the myth.

Chapter 3 presents a blending-based approach to the analysis of the character of Augustus. I attempt to show how a cognitive linguistic approach can account for the complex characterisation of a fictional figure. From a close reading of Augustus' appearances, words, and actions, I identify textual clues to the mental spaces of the various character types on which I suggest Augustus is articulated. In this chapter, I present a conceptual network integration in which Augustus, the blended space, receives projected elements, relations and details from several distinct input spaces.

The second part of the thesis centers on the work *Mother Love*. In chapter 4, I use the cognitive concepts of image schemas and CMT to analyse the cognitive structure underlying Dove's metaphorical reworking of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. I suggest that the metaphorical conceptual opposition between UP and DOWN, on which Persephone's journey to the underworld is structured in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, is mapped onto women's modern life experiences. Through a cognitive linguistic analysis, I explain that the conceptual metaphors HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP, SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN underlie the

narrative structure and a few crucial linguistic expressions of sections III and IV of *ML*. Then, through a micro-linguistic analysis, I show that love relationships and marriage with a man are metaphorically represented as the death of the female partner.

In chapter 5, I make use of CMT to highlight the recurrence of similar metaphorical images and theme patterns that provide continuity to a narration of different episodes and events. I focus on the conceptual metaphors linked to the domain of flowers and plants underpinning Rita Dove's visual imagery. Through a cognitive linguistic approach, I point out Dove's re-use of conceptual metaphors present in the Greek myth as well as of conventional metaphors rooted in everyday language, and I highlight Dove's extensions and creative recomposition of those.

In the first part of the work (chapters 1, 2, and 3), I make use of CMT and CBT for the analysis of blends that concern not only metaphorical constructions but also other non-metaphorical and larger constructions**.** I focus on macro-structures: whole text, specific episodes, characters, and the mental activity of characters and I represent them as conceptual integration networks characterised by several input spaces. I interpret Dove's re-elaborations of the Greek myth in terms of new emergent meanings arising from a dynamic process of projection and integration of multiple elements. Chapters 1, 2, 3 begin by presenting the conceptual integration network that I discuss throughout the chapters. In Chapter 1, there are three conceptual integration networks representing the connections between the narrative and conceptual structures of the Greek tragedy *Oedipus the King* and Dove's *DFE*. In Chapter 2, the graph gives an account of a specific conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST and its re-elaboration in Dove's work. In Chapter 3, the conceptual integration network is used to represent the complex characterisation of Augustus, the protagonist of *DFE*.

The contents of the mental spaces are numbered and represent the participants, their roles and relationships, the main structures that I have identified as central to both the Sophoclean tragedy and Dove's elaboration.

I do not make use of the generic space, as in many cases it was not useful to the analysis, and it does not contribute to the explanation of the blend. Rather, I identify which elements of an input space are selected and have counterparts in other input spaces, and how they are projected onto the blend. The emergent meaning is represented in squares within the blended space.

In the second part of the thesis, I focus only on the conceptual mappings of conceptual metaphors that structure the work *Mother Love* in relation with the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. In chapters 4 and 5, the graphs represent the conceptual mappings underlying the linguistic metaphorical expressions that I detect and analyse in the collection *Mother Love*.

Even though blending includes and gives a coherent and complete explanation of the creation of metaphors, and "all metaphorical expressions involve blending" (Freeman, 2002: 474), rarely are CMT and CBT "equally explanatory"(Dancygier, 2006: 34). Dancygier explains:

> [0.17] Metaphor is more specific about the nature of the changes in the target domain, while blending describes these kinds of changes as resulting from a more general process. Because of the different goals of the two approaches, one or the other might be chosen with respect to the kind of data under analysis. (Dancygier, 2006: 33-34)

Therefore, to give an account of Dove's imagery and of her poetic re-elaboration of conventional metaphors, and of the personal re-use of conceptual metaphors already present in the Greek model, I decided to focus on single creative linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors. I represent direct projections of elements from the source domain onto the target domain, and I do not consider and represent the more general process of meaning construction (blending).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does cognitive linguistics provide a useful framework for explaining classical reception and myth-making in Rita Dove's works?
2. How can a cognitive linguistic approach account for parallelism and analogy in Dove's reworking of Greek myth beyond linguistic and stylistic intertextuality?
3. How can Conceptual Blending Theory explain Rita Dove's re-use of the Greek myth to address issues of racism and oppression?
4. How can Conceptual Metaphor Theory provide a useful approach to poetic analysis and interpretation, and explain Rita Dove's visual imagery?

A brief note on terminology

In this thesis, I make extensive use of racial terms such as "white", "black", "mixed race", and I examine racist beliefs and practices during and after the slavery era in the United States of America in order to analyse literary works that deal in part with racial dynamics and systems of oppression. For this reason, it is necessary to reiterate that race is a fiction, a human classification system artificially constructed and constantly reproduced and reinforced by dominant groups to maintain systems of power and produce racial inequality.

Part I. *The Darker Face of the Earth*

Chapter 1. A cognitive linguistic analysis of the macro-structures of *The Darker Face of the Earth.*

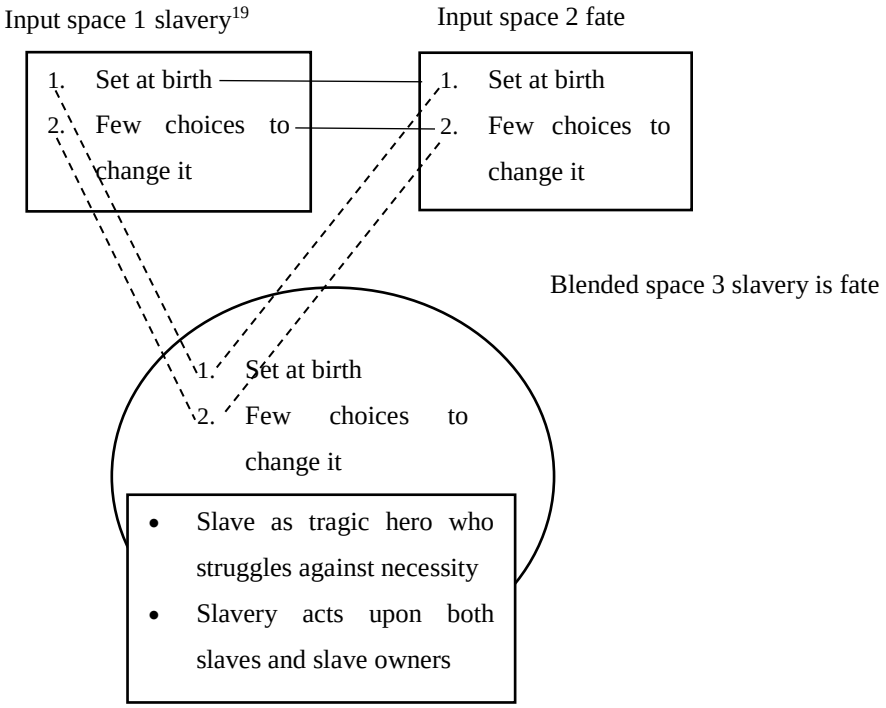

Figure 1.1

[19] When referring to Dove's play and characters, and to specific perspectives presented by racist thinkers (particularly in chapter 2), I use terms such as 'slave' and 'slave owner' to accurately reflect the author's linguistic choices, as well as racist discourse and viewpoints. However, in my historical overview and analysis, I use more respectful and accurate language, referring to individuals as 'enslaved people' to stress their agency and humanity within oppressive systems.

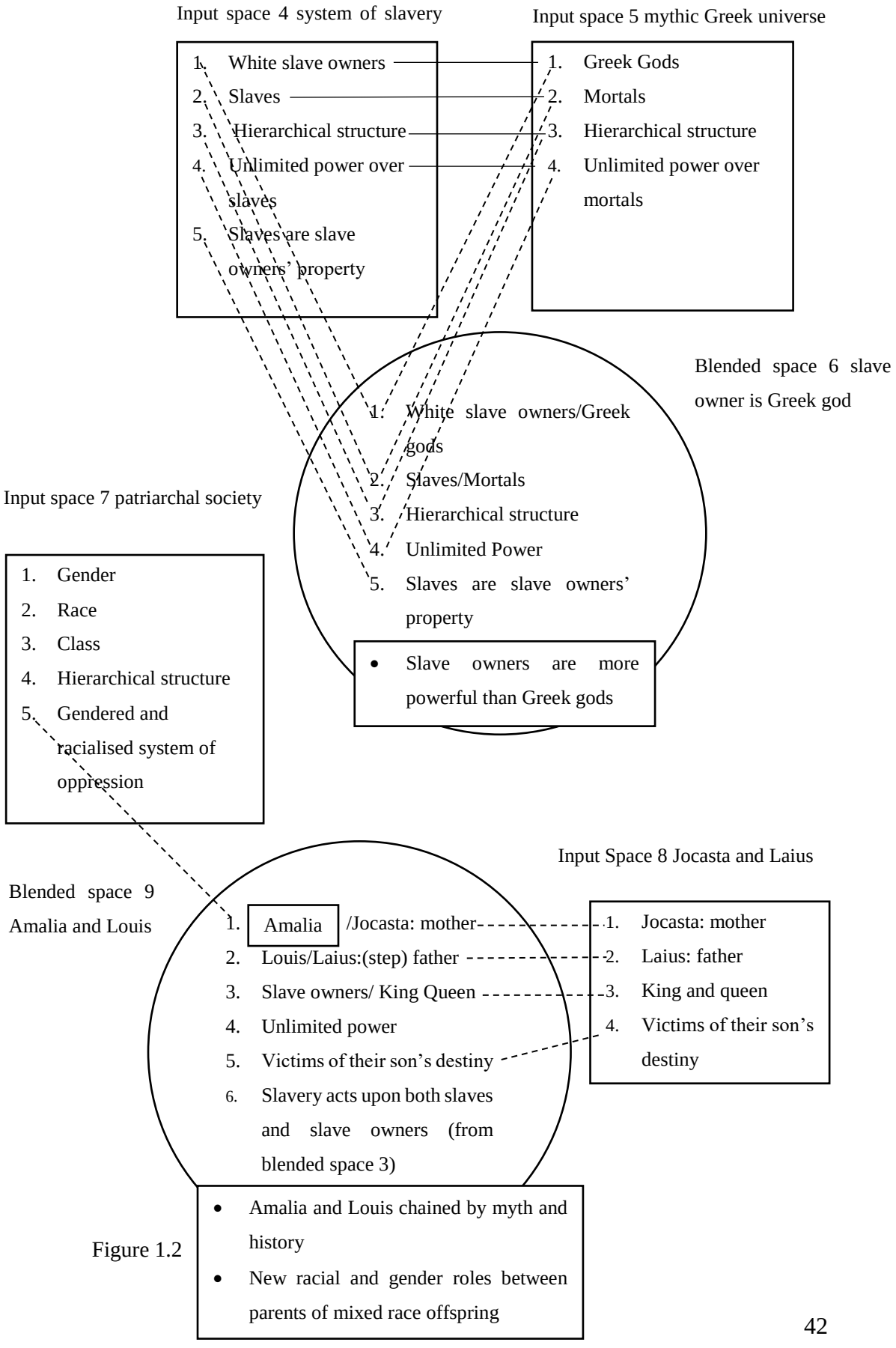
Input space 4 system of slavery
1. White slave owners
2. Slaves
3. Hierarchical structure
4. Unlimited power over slaves
5. Slaves are slave owners' property
Input space 5 mythic Greek universe
1. Greek Gods
2. Mortals
3. Hierarchical structure
4. Unlimited power over mortals
Blended space 6 slave owner is Greek god
1. White slave owners/Greek gods
2. Slaves/Mortals
3. Hierarchical structure
4. Unlimited Power
5. Slaves are slave owners' property
• Slave owners are more powerful than Greek gods
Input space 7 patriarchal society
1. Gender
2. Race
3. Class
4. Hierarchical structure
5. Gendered and racialised system of oppression
Input Space 8 Jocasta and Laius
1. Jocasta: mother
2. Laius: father
3. King and queen
4. Victims of their son's destiny
Blended space 9 Amalia and Louis
1. Amalia /Jocasta: mother
2. Louis/Laius:(step) father
3. Slave owners/ King Queen
4. Unlimited power
5. Victims of their son's destiny
6. Slavery acts upon both slaves and slave owners (from blended space 3)
• Amalia and Louis chained by myth and history
• New racial and gender roles between parents of mixed race offspring

Figure 1.2

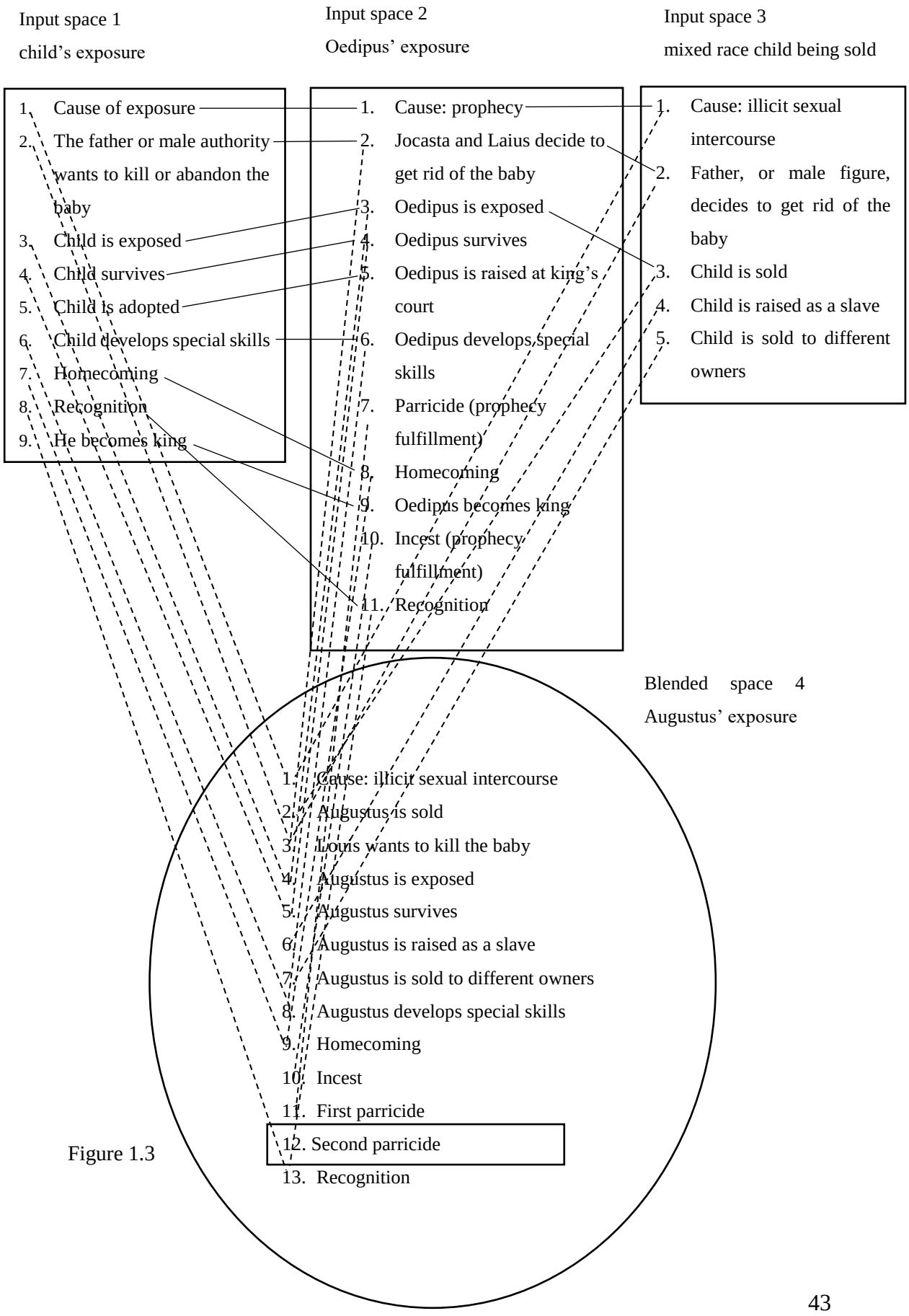
Input space 1
child's exposure
1. Cause of exposure
2. The father or male authority wants to kill or abandon the baby
3. Child is exposed
4. Child survives
5. Child is adopted
6. Child develops special skills
7. Homecoming
8. Recognition
9. He becomes king
Input space 2
Oedipus' exposure
1. Cause: prophecy
2. Jocasta and Laius decide to get rid of the baby
3. Oedipus is exposed
4. Oedipus survives
5. Oedipus is raised at king's court
6. Oedipus develops special skills
7. Parricide (prophecy fulfillment)
8. Homecoming
9. Oedipus becomes king
10. Incest (prophecy fulfillment)
11. Recognition
Input space 3
mixed race child being sold
1. Cause: illicit sexual intercourse
2. Father, or male figure, decides to get rid of the baby
3. Child is sold
4. Child is raised as a slave
5. Child is sold to different owners
Blended space 4
Augustus' exposure
1. Cause: illicit sexual intercourse
2. Augustus is sold
3. Louis wants to kill the baby
4. Augustus is exposed
5. Augustus survives
6. Augustus is raised as a slave
7. Augustus is sold to different owners
8. Augustus develops special skills
9. Homecoming
10. Incest
11. First parricide
12. Second parricide
13. Recognition

Figure 1.3

This chapter aims to explore the macro-structures of *The Darker Face of the Earth*[20] and to show how a cognitive approach could be relevant for the analysis of works that combine different stories, situations, and literary traditions. I use Conceptual Blending Theory[21] (CBT), elaborated upon by Fauconnier and Turner, as an analytic tool to engage with macro-textual- and structural-features of the play. This analysis is not conducted to highlight similarities or to produce a checklist of the analogies and differences between literary works. Rather, the aim is to give a satisfactory account of the intertextuality of the play and the complexity of Dove's work as a whole.

Figure 1.1 and figure 1.2 are representations of the conceptual integration network of *DFE*. They connect mental spaces at various levels of abstraction: the intuition behind the writing process and the play itself. The conceptual integration network connects the blend between institutions, abstract relational structures, and roles in the system of chattel slavery[22] with structures and roles in the Greek mythic universe (e.g. slavery—fate; slave owners—Greek gods). Moreover, it captures the connections between specific characters and stories of *DFE* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In figure 1.3, CBT is applied to the analysis of one specific event of *DFE*, Augustus' exposure, its action sequences, and its causal structure. I argue that Augustus' birth and life trajectory are an original adaption of the tale pattern of "the child exposed at birth".

In section 1.1., I introduce the play, the plot, and the main characters. Moreover, the play is considered within Dove's conceptualisation of history and art. In section 1.2., I analyse a long excerpt from Rita Dove's interview with Robert McDowell. In section 1.3., I examine the conceptual mappings emerging from the interview. I show how and why structures from Greek

[20] From now, I will refer to the work as *DFE*.

[21] For a more detailed analysis of CBT and its connection with narrative, see General Introduction, section 0.4.1.

[22] "Chattel slavery" defines a form of slavery in which the enslaved people were owned and treated as commodities; they could be bought, sold, lent, pledged and inherited. When I use the term "slavery" in this thesis, I am referring to this specific form of slavery practiced by white Europeans on Africans and people of African descent between the 16th and late 19th centuries.

tragedy are blended with those of slavery. In Section 1.4., I apply CBT to the play and, in particular, to the analysis of Amalia and Louis, two blended characters at the center of the complex integration network of *DFE*. In section 1.5., the CBT model is applied to examine the blending that I argue is present in the play: that of the tale pattern of the hero exposed with the historical practice of the slave trade. In Section 1.6., I draw my conclusions.

1.1. *The Darker Face of the Earth*

Rita Dove wrote the first version of *The Darker Face of the Earth* in 1994, and a second, completely revised version, which is the object of this study, in 1996. The play is based on *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles (496-406 BCE), however, the author clarifies her intention by stating that she "didn't want the play to be a kind of checklist against the Greek Myth" (Ingersoll, 2003:149); her work is far from an imitation of the Greek tragedy. Many aspects of the narrative differ from the Sophoclean original: time, setting, characters' names, and power relationships. Moreover, there are important changes in the plot (for example two parricides instead of one). Nevertheless, *The Darker Face of the Earth* contains specific references to the Greek myth of the tragedy *Oedipus the King*, and Rita Dove herself in many interviews highlights the analogies between the structures, the events, and the characters of the two works.

The play consists of a prologue and two acts, each one containing eight scenes. The action takes place on a plantation between 1820 and 1840. Dove begins at beginning, with Augustus' (the Oedipus character) birth, whereas Sophocles begins when Oedipus is already the King of Thebes, precisely when a terrible plague is afflicting the city. Augustus is an unwanted child because he is the product of the union between the white plantation owner Amalia Jennings and Hector, one of the slaves on the plantation. Amalia wants to keep the baby, but Louis, Amalia's husband, wants to kill him; the

doctor called to assist Amalia during childbirth, manages to convince her to give him away in order to save his life.

The role of the doctor is very important in the first part of the play, even if he will never appear again in the story. He guides Amalia in the choice to sell her son, he curbs Louis' wrath, and, above all, he acts as a sort of oracle by foreseeing the disasters that would befall the Jennings' house if Amalia had decided to raise a mixed-race baby. The inauspicious consequences would be the loss of honor of the family, the shame on Amalia's family name, and, in addition, like a reversed Oedipal oracle, the danger that Louis, in the future, may decide to kill the baby all the while feigning that it was an accident.

Louis is furious, and, although Amalia agrees to give the baby to the doctor, before the doctor leaves with Augustus, Louis puts the spurs of his boots in the basket in which they have put the baby, hoping that the baby will injure himself on the spurs and die. He survives. The slaves have been told, however, that the baby is dead, and Hector, the biological father, is overwhelmed by the loss of his son. Close to madness, he retreats into the swamp where he starts to live in a sort of isolation, killing snakes.

The night Augustus was born, a slave named Scylla[23] (Tiresias' character) gains prophetic powers. She will later reveal the vision she had on the night of Augustus' birth: a powerful curse was released upon the plantation that shattered the harmony and touched four people, a white woman (Amalia), a white man (Louis), a black man (Hector), and a black woman (Scylla). All this occurs in the prologue.

After the prologue, the play jumps twenty years ahead to Amalia buying a new slave. The new slave is her son, Augustus, who will remain unrecognised until the end of the play. Augustus joins the uprising on Jennings' plantation for the cause of freedom; in the fields, Amalia overhears Augustus talking about the Haitian Revolution, a revolt in which enslaved

[23] For the analysis of the relation between Augustus and Scylla see chapter 3 section 3.2.4.

people fought against slavery and colonial regime. Upon hearing this, Amalia invites him to the big house and this is the moment when they develop an attraction for each other, which in turn develops into a love story. Hector, aware of the planned uprising, tries to sound the alarm to save Amalia, whom he still loves. While trying to stop him, Augustus accidentally kills his father Hector.

The relationship between Amalia and Augustus is not a secret on the plantation, and the conspirators begin to doubt Augustus' intentions. This is the reason why, in order to prove his loyalty to the cause, the other slaves order him to kill both masters (his mother and his foster father). Augustus enters the house to accomplish the mission. While confronting Louis, the master starts talking about the basket that took the then baby Augustus away. Augustus recognises the description of the basket and, by assuming that Louis is the man who raped his mother, stabs and kills him.

Then Augustus rushes to Amalia, asking her for the real identity of his mother. She realises that Augustus is her son. They hear the rebels coming. Amalia, who is aware of the plan and of the fact that Augustus must kill her, stabs herself to save him from the slaves' revenge. The slaves, once in the room, thinking that Augustus killed both their masters, celebrate him as their savior. The play ends with the masters' house burned down.

Rita Dove blends the plot of the Oedipus's myth with the historical narration of the life of an enslaved person of African descent. As will emerge more clearly in the next sections, the author creates a complex play in which typical structures of the classical Greek tragedy are not only transferred in a different situation, but blended with a set of institutions and social structures deeply rooted in the history of North America. *The Darker Face of the Earth* investigates the historical conditions of nineteenth century-America and the "historical foundations of American culture" (Pereira, 1999: 187) through Greek tragedy and mythic lenses.

Myth and history are blended, and they are enriched by the vision of the author. Dove's personal present connects with national history. Being female

and black has made Dove's perspective different from the mainstream reality, as she explains in her 1999 interview with Pereira:

> [1.1] P: Interesting. So do you think that in some way the personal present and national history end up being connected for you?
> D: They've always been.
> P: Why or how?
> D: I think they both have something to do, a lot to do, with being female and being black. From as early as I can remember, I always felt that there was a world with lots of "historical" events going on, and that my viewpoint was not a direct one, but I was looking at it from the side. (Pereira, 1999: 188)

This particular perspective made it possible for the author to have a wider and deeper view, which does not look for an easy and simple answer when interpreting events and situations. In a continuous movement from the center to the liminal, marginal, and marginalised borders, Dove creates a multiplicity of points of view, and different experiences are preserved and imprinted on the continuum of history and myth.

There are different versions of the same event, as people experience it from different and often divergent perspectives. The impracticability of interpreting events and historical facts in a unique way implies that Dove's works lack ideological and propagandistic aims.[24] For these reasons, approaching *The Darker Face of the Earth* only as a political play would be misleading. In the 1994 interview with Emily Lloyd, Dove states:

> [1.2] "If there are moments in my writing where something comes in that isn't politically correct or doesn't seem to fit into my politics such as depicting Amalia, Augustus' white mother, as capable of tenderness I would feel like I was falsifying myself if I didn't allow those moments to come in". (Lloyd, 1994: 22)

Artistic truth and integrity leave no space for didactic or political purposes. Dove's play is characterised by many different fragments of particular existences, which reflect different historical perspectives of the same string

[24] For an analysis of Dove's political and historical consciousness see, among others: Taleb Khyar (1991); Boone (2004); Righelato (2008).

of events, and center on how different individuals deal with conflict and the emotions that emerge from it (Stein, 1995).

Concerning the era of chattel slavery, the author states:

> [1.3] "I felt that there were things that had not been said, that essential aspects of the question of slavery and the trauma of slavery have been swept under the carpet. We hear the horrifying details, but we don't think about the actual people involved, their joy and pain and complexity. It's not all good and bad. A slave owner may have noble and base instincts, confusion and absolute certainty, just like every other human being in the world, and the same is true for the slaves". (Goff & Simpson, 2007: 157)

The Darker Face of the Earth avoids simplifications and embraces complexity with the aim to represent individual existences in their fullness. There is not, in the play, a distinction between good and evil, hero and villain, the plague is the system of slavery. In relation to the moral aim of the play, Dove states:

> [1.4] "In the end, I didn't want anyone in the audience coming away thinking, these are the bad guys, these are the good guys; slavery is bad, slave owners are bad, look at the noble savage, and all that. I wanted all the characters to be fighting for their own individual realization against the system. The big bad guy is the system, obviously". (Pereira, 1999: 197)

The Greek myth, the trauma of slavery, and the issue of race in America are blended into a complex system in which each character struggles against an unescapable destiny. The ancient myth is re-rooted on American soil, and the ancient notions of fate and necessity are blended with the historical structure of the system of slavery.

1.2. A blend of multiple stories. A cognitive approach to poetic intuition

This section takes into consideration a long excerpt from Dove's 2000 interview with Robert McDowell, collected and edited by Earl G. Ingersoll in

the book *Conversations with Rita Dove* (2003). Dove explains the circumstances for the creation of *The Darker Face of the Earth*.

Even though Dove does not use cognitive terminology, the process of creating myth (mythopoiesis) she describes is, in my opinion, the blend of different mental spaces. Therefore, I am going to apply the blending theory to explain Rita Dove's intuition and creative process.

> [1.5] "My husband and I spent five months in Jerusalem in 1979, I had recently finished the manuscript for my first book of poems the "Yellow House on the Corner," which contained a selection of poems based on slave narrative, and I suppose that was on my mind one late afternoon that summer, as I stood looking out over the walled city of Jerusalem with its turrets and citadels. I had just reread Sophocle's "Oedipus Rex", and perhaps it was the natural amphitheater of the Kidron Valley, where King David cried out at the loss of his rebellious son Absalom, perhaps it was the slanted sunbeams striking the pale stones of the Old City like a spotlight dressed with the palest of ping gels- but I found myself musing on kings and all-too-human heartbreaks, looking for similarities between the classical sense of destiny and pure contemporary attitudes toward history and its heroes. What is it, I wondered, that makes Oedipus interesting as a hero when his course has been set at birth? Why do we watch, enthralled, if we already know his fate? I searched for a modern analogy, a set of circumstances where the social structure was rigid and all powerful as the Greek universe, one against which even the noblest of characters would be powerless. And as the sun began to set behind the Mount of Olives, a Jimmy Cliff song floated from my husband's study: Oh De wicked carry us away Captivity require of us a song; How can we sing King Alpha's song In a strange land. The lines are adapted from Psalm 137, the cries of the Israelites in bondage but sung, in Cliff's version, by the slaves in the Americas." (Ingersoll, 2003: 176)

The cognitive linguist Mark Turner, in the work *The Literary Mind* (1996), made the revolutionary claim that the literary mind, the one that creates narratives and stories, does not work differently from the everyday mind and everyday thought. In our everyday life, he explains, we constantly blend the contingent situation we are in, defined by Turner as "the immediate environment" (Turner, 2003: 4), with other mental stories. We inhabit a specific mental story with certain roles, plots, and goals, and, at the same time,

we are able to activate a different mental story, without being confused about the actual story we are in.

The immediate environment Rita Dove is in (Jerusalem, 1979), with its rich history and echoes of ancient narrations, prompts the activation of a different mental space, the story of the second king of ancient Israel, King David. The story of King David has a time, place, roles, plot, characters that are different from the situation in which the author inhabits.

The mental space of King David and the connected domains of kings, heroes, and family drama (e.g., incest between brother and sister), activates the author's memory, since Dove had just re-read Sophocles' most famous tragedy. Therefore, the mental space of *Oedipus the King* is activated. What Rita Dove narrates is, on a general level, a very common human activity; Turner describes it as the human ability "to conjure up mental stories that run counter to the story we actually inhabit" (Turner, 2003: 1).

As Rita Dove reflects on the ancient sense of destiny and the modern concept of hero, she tries to find a moment in modern human history with a set of institutions and structures similar to the ancient Greek universe, where human free will was intertwined with, and limited by, necessity, supernatural forces and divine powers. Another input (a sonic one), from the "immediate environment" (a radio playing in her husband's studio) prompts the activation of a different input space. The sonic input is the song "Rivers of Babylon" sung by Jimmy Cliff. I conceive of the song as a blended space that in turn becomes an input space for a different conceptual blend: the conceptual integration network of *The Darker Face of the Earth*. The song, as also explained by Dove, is an adaptation of Psalm 137.

The Biblical Psalm 137 evokes the sufferings of the Israelite captives exiled in Babylon. The captives are described as longing for their homeland and struggling for the alienation from their temple. They are asked by their captors to sing but they cannot sing on foreign soil. The lyrics of Cliff's song are taken almost literally from the Psalm, but they take on a different meaning.

The song, in particular, blends the subjugation and suffering faced by Israelites with the oppression, exile, and enslavement of African people.

As pointed out by Stowe (2012) the psalm has been re-elaborated in many different ways, for a variety of reasons, and it is open to different interpretations. Its longevity and adaptability is because the psalm "deals with cultural dispossession and exile, pervasive experiences for large numbers of people throughout American history" (Stowe, 2012: 96). Frederick Douglass, for example, a former enslaved person, who became an eminent activist, author, political speaker, and orator, in his famous 1852 speech "What to the slave is the fourth of July", used this Psalm to conceptualise the experience of Africans and African Americans, with the aim to oppose slavery and ask for justice.

In the song "Rivers of Babylon", Babylon is metaphorically mapped onto colonial oppression, the exile to Egypt is mapped onto the African Diasporas, and the Israelite captives are mapped onto the chained Africans in a foreign land. I am not going to analyse this blend in further detail. It is sufficient here to state that the sonic surrounding activates the input space of the slavery system and to underline the complexity of the input spaces that are active and functional to the creation of the first draft of Dove's story. Moreover, as for the plot of *Oedipus the King*, the reality of the enslavement of people of African descent is ready to be re-activated because, as the author consciously realises, she previously elaborated on the historical facts of chattel slavery in her collection of poems *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980).

The ability to inhabit a particular situation and remember a different story is not the only human mental capacity; different stories can be activated simultaneously and they can be blended "into a new mental structure" (Turner, 2003: 1). The new mental structure is, in this case, the play emerging from two main input spaces, namely *Oedipus the King* and the historical context of the American slavery system.

In the following passage from the same interview, Dove explains the analogies between Sophocles' tragedy and the system of slavery in North America:

> [1.6] "And there I had my analogy. Rarely has history seen a system which fostered such a sense of futility as slavery. For the Africans taken forcibly from their homes and their roots-language family tribal memory - systematically decimated, the white power structure must have seemed as all-encompassing as the implacable will of Zeus. In a flash, I had the basic constructs: a child born of a white plantation mistress and her African lover is sold off but returns twenty years later, unaware of his origins. The open secret of miscegenation would be the key that turns the lock of Fate, instead of Tiresias, a conjure woman would prophesy the curse. Pride and rebellious spirit have little chance in the systemic violence of slavery, which brutalizes both slave and master." (Ingersoll, 2003: 176)

In my diagrams, the analogies become the main mappings between the input spaces. From this last passage, it is clear that the author is not transposing the Greek play in a modern setting. Dove blends structures (e.g. slavery system — Greek pantheon), events (incest — miscegenation), and people (e.g. Augustus — Oedipus; African conjure woman — Tiresias) from different stories and situations. From this analysis, I delineated the first blending of figure 1.1 "slavery is fate".

1.3. Re-rooting Greek myth in the slave plantation

In the previous section, I explained Dove's intuition and creative process in terms of a blend of different input spaces. In this section, I focus on the single blends between input spaces that I have identified based on Dove's explicit parallelism that emerged from the interview. I analyse the conceptual mappings between input spaces, and identify the new emergent meaning that represents Dove's poetic creation.

1.3.1. SLAVERY IS FATE

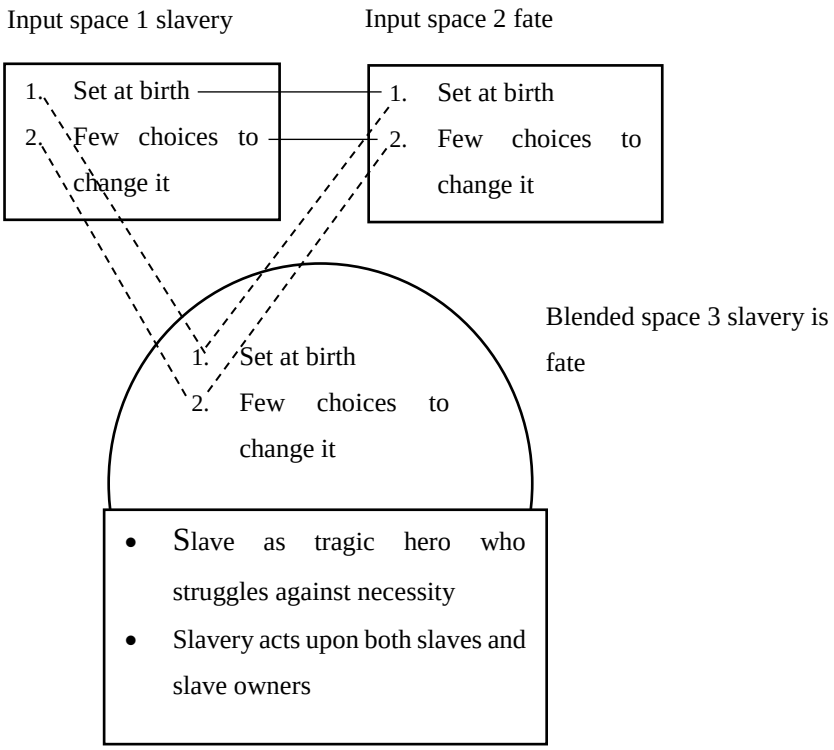

Figure 1.4.

The association made by Dove (see quotation [1.6]), between the institution of slavery and the conceptualisation of fate within Greek mythology is represented by the metaphoric blend of figure 1.4.[25] The classic conception of destiny and the nature of the hero whose fate is already settled is at the center of Dove's interpretation of the Greek Tragedy. The role of fate, represented by the course set at the moment of Oedipus' birth, is emphasised and seems to be the most constitutive element.

In ancient Greek thought, it was believed that everyone had their lot of life and death and this lot of destiny is imposed at birth. This portion, this lot

[25] Figure 1.4. corresponds to figure 1.1. Solid lines indicate the cross-space correspondences between input spaces and constitute the mappings. Dotted lines indicate the projection of materials from input spaces onto the blended space. The frame inside the blend indicate the emergent meaning.

of life, is called moira,[26] from the verb μείρομαι ("to have as a part"). The abstract concept of fate, referred to by the term moira, is personified by three goddesses, the Moirai, the spinners of destiny, who assign their destinies to all.

The notions of fate, destiny, and determinism in ancient Greek thought are complex and they were not fixed and established once for all, but changed through time and with different authors. In relation to Attic tragedy, Greene (1948) points out that:

> [1.7] [I]t was within the discretion of each poet to manipulate the myth in such fashion as to bring out what most interested him; the role of the gods or of human character, the relentless power of fate or the tricks of chance, the just rewards of guilt. (Greene, 1948: 90)

This is not the place to give a complete overview of these elements, within the vastness of ancient Greek thought or even in the works of Sophocles alone; instead, it is worth focusing on Dove's understanding of those concepts and on the connections she establishes with them and the social structure of the slavery system.

The sense of predetermination in ancient Greece and classical mythology, in Dove's interpretation, has its counterpart in the oppressive system of slavery. For this reason, I created the mapping between input space 1 (slavery) and input space 2 (fate). As emerges from the interview, the constituent elements of input space 2 are "set at birth" and "few choices to change it".

Destiny, in Greek tragedy does not act in a rigid and mechanical way, but there is a sense of supernatural control over men, with fate as the limit of human free will.

> [1.8] ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ: οὐ γάρ σε μοῖρα πρός γ᾽ ἐμοῦ πεσεῖν, ἐπεὶκανὸς Ἀπόλλων, ᾧ τάδ᾽ ἐκπρᾶξαι μέλει.

[26] For a detailed analysis of the concepts of moira and fate in Greek thought, see Greene (1948).

> Tiresias: No, it is not at my hand that you are destined to fall, since Apollo, who has it in mind to bring this about, will be sufficient. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. 376–7)[27]

Apollo is the god who states that the only way to save the city of Thebes is to find Laius' murderer. He is also the god who predicted Oedipus the parricide and incest. In this passage, Tiresias the seer, talking with Oedipus, announces the latter's ominous, unchangeable destiny (μοῖρα),[28] for which Apollo seems actively involved. Necessity is intertwined with personal decision. Free will operates within, and is limited by, fate.

Input space 1 has analogous elements. For the people of the plantation, slavery worked as a predetermined and inalterable fate. Slavery, like fate, is set at birth; the possession of even "one drop of black blood"[29] could condemn one to a life of enslavement, especially if one's mother was an enslaved woman, just as being born mortal rendered one powerless against the will of the Gods. In the prologue of *DFE*, Phebe, one of the main characters in the play, a young enslaved woman who has a special bond and special affinity with Augustus, right before Augustus' birth, says these words: "Stepped on a pin, the pin bent, and that's how the story went" (*DFE*, prologue). Phebe repeats the same expression at the end of the play when the true identities of Amalia and Augustus are unveiled and their tragic destinies accomplished. These words, repeated in the prologue and at the end of the play, show a fatalist resignation to a mechanical string of events, an inescapable destiny assigned to enslaved people since the very beginning of their life. Slavery, like fate, is inescapable, but the limits assigned to enslaved people are more absolute and oppressive than those of fate.

[27] The Greek text and English translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* are from the *Loeb Classical Library*, edited and translated by Lloyd-Jones (2014), volume 3.

[28] For a further analysis on this passage and how it relates to a similar one in *DFE*, see chapter 2 section 2.3.6.

[29] The rule of the one drop of black blood was a racial classification principle, which asserted that any person with one black ancestor was to be considered black.

In a 1977 interview, Dove, while explaining what fascinated her about Greek mythology, again relates the concept of fate in Greek mythology to the experience of African Americans during and after slavery:

> [1.9] "I was fascinated by the way the concept of fate in Greek myth was analogous to the African American experience. If there's any group of people that knows what it's like to try to find a certain amount of freedom within a cage, it's the African Americans." (Steffen & Dove, 1997: 114)

Limited freedom is the relevant element for the cross-space mapping between fate and slavery.

The classicist scholar Nancy S. Rabinowitz does not agree with Rita Dove's interpretation of the importance of fate in Sophocles' tragedy:

> [1.10] I fundamentally disagree with Dove about the importance of fate in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus; the play rather emphasizes the role of choice within a fated existence. That is, the myth depends on the fatedness of Oedipus' life, but the play shows him as the architect of what happens as a result of the oracle. If there is something compelling about this myth and the play, it is not so much the incest but the question of free will. That might be true with regard to slavery as well (Wetmore 2003: 130–1). Does slavery leave a person any sphere for action? (Rabinowitz, 2015: 504)

According to the scholar, Sophocles highlights how, even in a fated existence, there is the possibility for personal decision, agency, and free will. There is a net, already woven, that represents the life of men and women in the archaic Greek universe, a net in which, despite the presence of a predetermined fate, there is a possibility for the agency, action, and individual choice. Oedipus, limited by necessity, is depicted as free to make his own decisions.

Even though Dove, in the interviews, focuses on the concept of necessity, lack of freedom, and uses the metaphor of the cage to conceptualise fate in Greek mythology and the slavery system, in *DFE* she does explore the tension between necessity and free will. The following quote will further explain Dove's position, and the connection she makes between an enslaved person and the Oedipus character:

> [1.11] "What makes Oedipus a creature to be pitied—what awakens our admiration and finally our awe—comes partly from recognizing, in his unraveling, our own blighted dreams. How would we react if caught in the web of a fate so horrendous, so hurtful in its omnipresent cruelty, that we feel shrouded in eternal damnation? What happens to those with genius and talent and compassion when they are enmeshed in a system of forced labour, forced separations, forced breeding? How can they right themselves, in such a crazed universe, how shall they attempt to prevail against it?" (Bosher, Macintosh, and McConnel 2015: 503)

The quote is taken from the playbill for the performance of *DFE*, at the American Theatre of Actors in New York (4th February, 2006). Every spectator of that performance was prompted to make a connection between Oedipus and the main character Augustus and to map the tragic hero onto the character of an enslaved person who struggled against a rigid and deterministic structure in the attempt to the (impossible) revolutionary chance to overcome it. The horrendous fate to which Oedipus is destined (curse) is blended with the predestination of the system of slavery for the enslaved people. Nevertheless, what is questioned and investigated is precisely how, and whether it is possible to prevail against it.

The characters of Dove's play fight, or have fought, the battle against the system of slavery. They are moved, like in Greek tragedies, by strong individualistic forces and they act and make choices destined to fail; they are caught in the inevitable conflict between human will and the necessity of reality. Therefore, the first important emergent meaning of the blended space "slavery is fate" is: "slave as tragic hero who struggles against necessity".

The construction of a blend between slavery and fate implies the conceptualisation of slavery as an inescapable superimposed structure that acts, even though in very different ways, both on the enslaved and the enslavers.[30] Dove herself explains this construction in the 1999 interview with Pereira: "I wanted all the characters to be fighting for their individual realizations against the system" (Pereira, 1999: 151). The element "slavery acts upon both slaves and slave owners" is not projected from either input

[30] For a detailed analysis of this element, see section 1.4.

space and it is in contrast with readers' previous knowledge of the slavery system. This element is the second emergent meaning arising from the blend.

Fauconnier and Turner's theory of "backward projection"[31] might be useful to explain why the author has given much relevance to fate in *Oedipus the King*. As already pointed out in section 0.4., an important element of CBT is that not only information is projected from input spaces to the blend, but, once the emerging meaning is established, information can be projected backward, to one or both input spaces. With this new knowledge, we can "think afresh of the inputs" (Schneider, 2012: 6).

The conceptualisation of slavery as a curse set at birth and as an inescapable destiny that acts in a strictly mechanical way, giving everyone the same fate without the slightest possibility for self-determination, could be projected from the blend back into the input space of fate. Therefore, the role of fate in *Oedipus the King* might have been retroactively modeled on the role of slavery in the American system, becoming in Dove's interpretation, much more deterministic and oppressive, like the reality of slavery in the American past, than was conceived in Greek tragedies.

1.3.2. The metaphor of power: SLAVE OWNER IS GREEK GOD

The blending between fate and slavery implies the metaphorical mapping between the hierarchical structures of the mythic Greek Universe and the ones of the system of slavery (figure 1.5).

[31] See General Introduction, section 0.4.

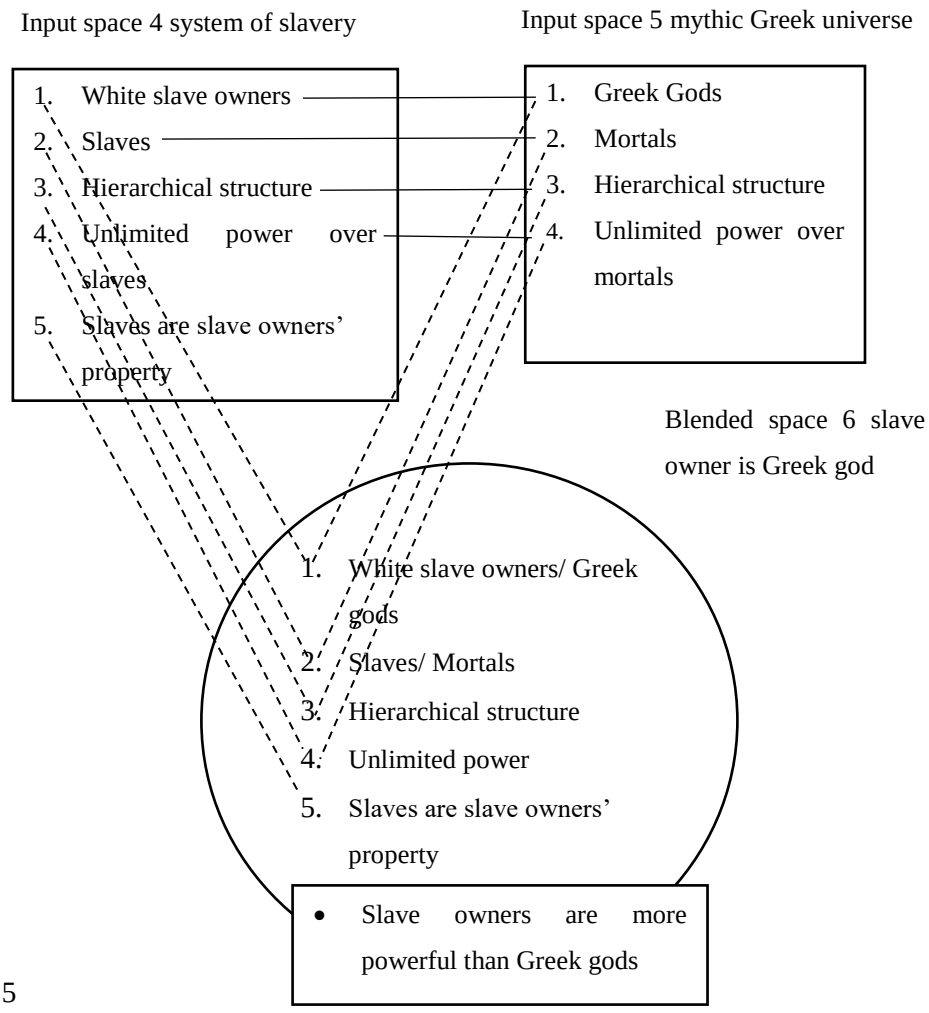

Figure 1.5

In both social systems there is a rigid structure with gods and slave owners at the top. Dove uses the metaphor of the implacable will of Zeus to conceptualise white power (see quotation [1.6]). Moreover, in the 1997 interview with Steffen, Dove's association (blend) between slave owners and Greek gods is enriched with details:

> [1.12] "Then there are the Greek gods, who tend to make war for sport and are capricious to boot, using human beings as pawns in their bickerings with each other which means that things on Earth are apt to change without warning. If a god decides something's go to happen his way, a human being really can't do much about it. Doesn't it sound a lot like the whimsy of a white plantation mistress and the punishments of the white master?" (Steffen & Dove 1997: 114)

What emerges from the interview is that the most distinguishing element which defines both slave owners and Greek gods is unlimited power, namely the capacity to interfere in, and control over, respectively, enslaved people and mortals. Slave owners, like Greek gods, have extraordinary power. Dove also highlights their similar lack of morality: she associates the caprice of the Greek gods with the whims of slave owners.

The blend, beyond inheriting partial structure from each input space, develops an emergent meaning. As represented in figure 1.5, unlike Greek gods, slave owners owned slaves, therefore, with their unlimited power and absolute role in shaping and controlling the lives of slaves, they were more powerful than the mythological Greek gods.

1.4. The power of metaphor. Louis and Amalia: victims of a double destiny

In this section, I focus my analysis on the characters of Amalia and Louis: the slave owners of Jennings' plantation. I argue that they are complex blended characters of different input spaces. Figure 1.6 represents the conceptual mappings emerging from my reading of *DFE* and a cognitive linguistic approach to literary characters. The analysis is based on textual cues from which I gathered information on the characters and on the process of inferences that takes place in the reader's mind when different specific input spaces are activated.

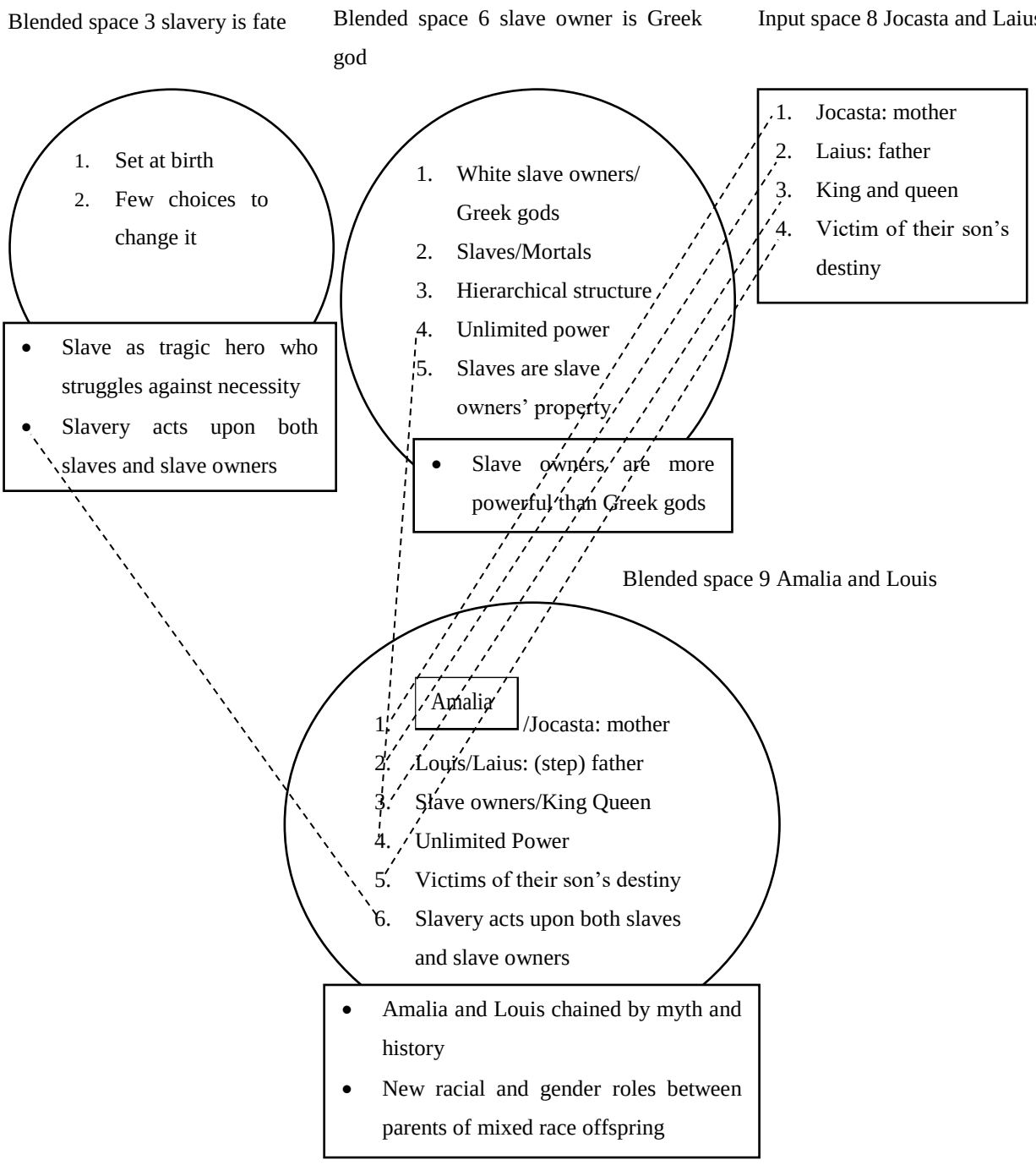

Figure 1.6

In figure 1.6, I represent "Amalia and Louis" as a blend of the blended space 3 "slavery is fate", blended space 6 "slave owner is Greek god", and input

space 8 “Jocasta and Laius”. The originality of Dove’s representation emerges at its best in blended space 9 “Amalia and Louis”.

The element “unlimited power” is projected from the blended space 6. Amalia and Louis as slave owners are at the top of the hierarchical structure and, as explained in section 1.3.2., they are powerful and superior agents. In *DFE*, Amalia and Louis have unlimited power over their slaves and also over Augustus, they make decisions that affect the life and death of the slaves; they decide what the slaves can, or cannot know. Nevertheless, Amalia and Louis are not only a blend of the historical figures of the slave owners and the powerful mythological Greek gods whose most prominent quality is power.

Even if the play is not an adaptation of *Oedipus the King*, the reader is invited to establish a mapping between Dove’s play and Sophocles’ tragedy. When we think of Oedipus, we think also of his parents. In cognitive terms, the mental space “Jocasta and Laius” is activated in our mind as in the mind of the author. Rita Dove, in fact, establishes a correlation between Amalia and Jocasta, by stating: “in a different world, Amalia (the Jocasta figure) might have been a woman of independent means and Augustus (who recalls Oedipus) a poet” (Pereira, 2003: 200, emphasis added).

Jocasta and Laius are as much victims of fate as Oedipus. At the exact moment when Oedipus is prophesied to kill his father, to marry his mother, thus, Jocasta is prophesied to marry her son and Laius to be killed by his son and they had no choice to change their destiny. I suggest that this Jocasta and Laius’ pre-determined fate (element “victims’ of their son’s destiny”) is projected onto blended space 9. Amalia and Louis are, like Jocasta and Laius, destined to, respectively, commit incest with, and be killed by, their son Augustus.

The element “slavery acts upon both slaves and slave owners” is projected form blended space 3 onto blended space 9. As pointed out in section 1.3.1., the system of slavery operates as a rigid predetermined fate, ruling above the inhabitants of the plantations, both slaves and slave owners. When Augustus is born as an illegitimate child of mixed race, the racist

system of slavery, which produces rigid and inflexible roles, also cages Amalia and Louis, laying the foundations for a familiar drama based on race, combined with the Oedipal plot. Race and kinship are the principal elements of this American tragedy and the parents are as involved and as cursed as the son.

In my opinion, the most original and important emergent meaning of the blended space 9 Amalia and Louis, created by the artistry of Rita Dove, is that Amalia and Louis are not only chained by destiny, in the form of myth, but also of history. Even if they are born into a ruling position, white owners were born to rule just as black people were born to serve.

Amalia, even if she controls the life of the slaves, is bound by the system of slavery. In an exchange with Augustus, she recognises the role that has been imposed upon her, and from which she cannot escape:

> [1.13] AMALIA: Don't you think I see the suffering?
> Don't you think I know I'm the cause?
>
> *With sarcasm and self-loathing*
>
> But a master cannot allow himself
> the privilege of sorrow. A master
> must rule or die.[32] (*DFE*, Act 2, scene 5)

Amalia sees the pain she causes in the plantation; she actively contributes to and sustains the system of slavery. At the same time, she cannot change her role within such a fatalistic and deterministic structure.

As we can see from the blended space, Amalia and Louis cannot be exclusively identified as evil owners. Amalia, in particular, is a multifaceted character; she is a mistress, a woman, and a mother who, throughout the play, undergoes important changes. These features contribute to her power and, at the same time, they subjugate her, creating a complex and, most importantly, morally ambiguous character.

The roles of mother and father of input space 8 are projected and blended with the values Amalia and Louis of the blended space 9. I argue that

[32] I faithfully reproduce Rita Dove's works and its format.

the analogy with the tragic rulers of Thebes led Dove to change and reverse the common racial and gender relation between white father and black mother found in the slave narratives (the autobiographical narrative of former slaves) and the standard narrative evolving around the "tragic mulatto" character during the slavery era.[33]

In the literature of this kind (slave narrative, "tragic mulatto" stories) the white parent is, traditionally, the man, who does not recognise his offspring, rejects them, and condemns them to a life of slavery. The mixed-race child develops a close connection with the black mother; they are both victims, of slavery and of white man's rejection.

The activation of the mental space "Jocasta and Laius" complicates the structure of the slave play because the author duplicates the fathers and introduces a white mother. In *DFE*, the white parent is the mother who is forced to abandon her child on the day of his birth. Moreover, the bond between the mixed-race child and the slave mother becomes an incestuous impossible love story. The blend of different situations in *DFE* results in a de-familiarisation of the readers' previous knowledge and they are asked to de-categorise and re-interpret, in a dynamic reading process, characters that are a blend of historical and mythical figures.

1.4.1. A cognitive linguistic analysis of the character of Amalia

[33] For a more detailed analysis of the "tragic mulatto" character and its relation to Augustus and *DFE* see chapter 3, section 3.5.

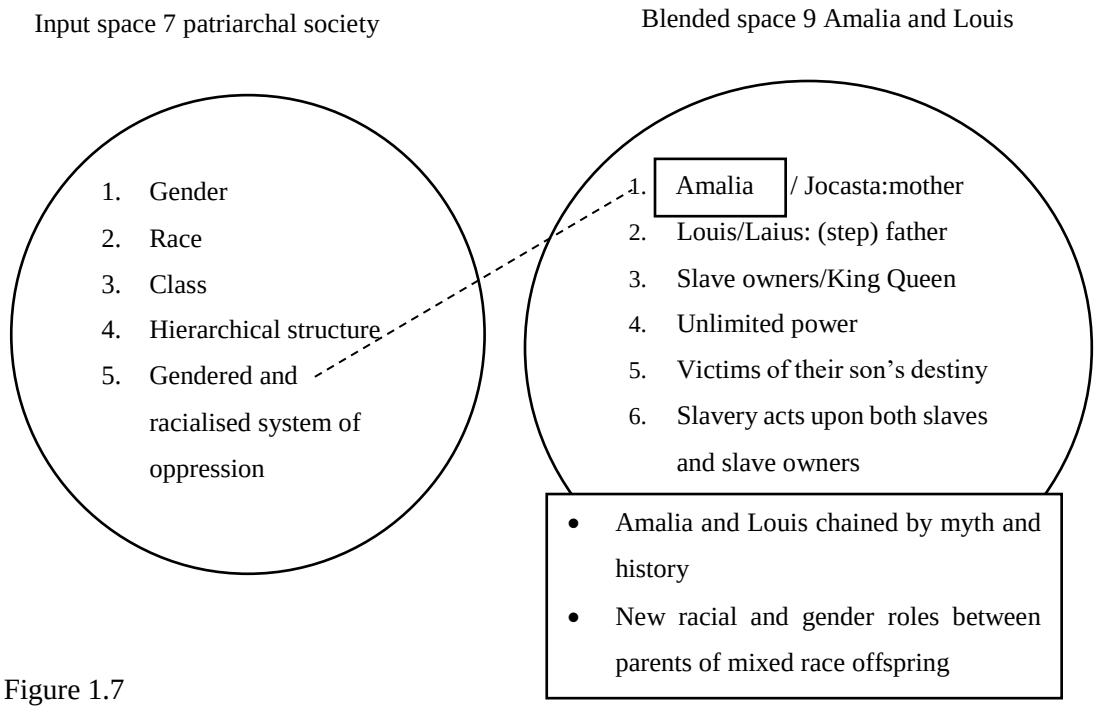

Figure 1.7

Amalia is a white mistress, the plantation owner who had an extra-marital affair with Hector, a slave, and was forced to abandon their son Augustus right after his birth. In *DFE*, Amalia is one of the most complex characters; as I have shown in the previous section, she represents a blended space with projected materials from the mental spaces "slavery is fate", "slaver owner is Greek god", and "Jocasta and Laius". There is another fundamental element that must be analysed and which operates together with slavery in the systematic oppression of black and white women: patriarchy. For this reason, I put Amalia inside a frame linked to the input space 7.

Input Space 7[34] represents the intersectionality[35] of the structure of oppression: meaning that different forms of discrimination, such as those based on gender, race and class, do not operate independently but intersect

[34] I modeled the blended space "patriarchal society" in order to highlight the necessity to adopt an intersectional perspective for the analysis of the relation between owners of enslaved individuals and enslaved people and, in particular, for the analysis of the character of Amalia. Nevertheless, I only take into consideration the play and the fictional narration. It is not the aim of this section to give an account of the complexity of race and gender relation during and after slavery era.

[35] For an understanding of intersectionality see, among others: hooks (1981); Crenshaw (1989); Yuval-Davis (2006).

and interact with each other. Intersectionality gives an account of the "multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crewshaw, 1991: 283). The system of slavery represents an intersectional system of oppression.

An intersectional perspective provides a tool for understanding and analysing the oppression experienced by black women during slavery as specifically different from that of black men, based on the intersection of gender and race. Social interaction between whites and blacks consisted of racial oppression operated by whites, while the interaction between white men and black women also held a sexual significance: "sexual abuse and degradation was the significant form of social interaction between white men and enslaved black women" (Feinstein 2018: 19).

In her work *When rape was legal* (2018), Rachel S. Feinstein analyses the widespread and common practice of rape of black women by white men as an intrinsic dimension of white masculinity and power. There was a sexist element to the racial difference between white and black women, which was highly relevant to the different experiences of each party. Black women were seen as hypersexual, promiscuous and sexually available, while white women were portrayed as the normative standard, models of self-control, moderation and self-purity. This portrayal of black women as lascivious and overly sexual, linked to the Jezebel stereotype,[36] was one of the main justifications for a wide range of abuses and for the widespread and almost socially institutionalised practice of sexual abuse and sexual violence of enslaved black women.

Rape and sexual violence were legal and extremely common on the plantation, even as hypocritical anti-miscegenation laws remained in force. White power was intertwined with white masculinity and white sexism, expressed and exercised through sexual abuse. In this system, black women

[36] The Jezebel stereotype is a negative sexual stereotype that portrays black women as sexually deviant in relation to other women, particularly white women, and describes their sexual appetites as "at best inappropriate, and at worse, insatiable" (Collins, 2002: 83) and a reflection of their uncivilised nature.

are the most oppressed category; doubly oppressed as black people and as women, black women face forms of oppression that are not merely additive, but intersectional, both similar to and different from those of white women and black men (Crenshaw, 1989: 149), and which require distinct recognition.

Despite their double subjugation as women and as black people, enslaved women practised forms of resistance different from those of enslaved men. Although research in the field of resistance to slavery focuses on the role of enslaved men in insurrection and uprisings, some historians[37] have considered and focused their research on black women and their role.

Angela Davis was one of the first to analyse the experience of black women and to focus on the aspects of their resistance, including during slavery. Davis stated that: "[w]omen resisted and advocated challenges to slavery at every turn" and that their "[r]esistance was often more subtle than revolts, escapes and sabotage. (Davis, 1981: 22). In fact, as many historians and scholars[38] have pointed out, the number of enslaved women who planned and executed long-term escapes was lower than the number of enslaved men. There were several reasons for this: unlike enslaved men, women were rarely employed outside the plantation as carpenters or other craftsmen, as they were not usually trained in manual skills. They, therefore, had less knowledge of their surroundings than enslaved men and were more conspicuous when travelling alone (Fox Genovese, 1988: 319). Nevertheless, there are several records of female enslaved runaways, in some cases disguised as men, such as the enslaved abolitionist Ellen Craft, who escaped to the North with her husband (Marshall, 2010).

There are many accounts of short-term escapes, cases of truancy and absenteeism. Enslaved women used this practice to visit the household and meet their relatives (Douglass, 1845), but also to avoid violence and sexual

[37] For a more in depth analysis on the resistance of black women, see: Davis (1971); Fox Genovese (1988); White (1999); Perrin (2001); Ellison (1983); Myers (2008).

[38] See, among others, Camp (2002).

abuse, to challenge the authority of the owners and to regain control over their labour, time and mobility (Camp, 2002: 7).

Black women's resistance also included everyday practices such as feigning illness, poisoning masters' food and sabotage. Other forms of resistance were physical opposition to sexual violence, including murder. In addition, some scholars[39] have analysed forms of resistance to forced reproduction through abstinence, refusal of marriage, feigning pregnancy, the use of birth control, abortion and, in fewer cases, infanticide.

An intersectional approach takes into account not only the different experiences of black men and black women, but also of white men and white women "as differentially situated within a racial and gender hierarchy" who maintain "their own privilege and power from these positions" (Feinstein, 2017: 4). White women had the privilege to ignore their husband's behavior toward black women. At the same time, they were forced to be submissive to these men and:

> [1.14] had little legal recourse for physical punishment or rape from their husbands upon whom they were financially dependent, they had a strong incentive to oblige their husbands, approve of their behavior, and remain silent when they felt it was necessary to do so. (Feinstein 2018: 52)

White women were not completely free and they had to respect defined roles and honorable behaviors as set by men, limited within the boundaries of the private sphere.

> [1.15] Legally, white men had the power to treat the wives as they pleased, creating an incentive for white women to remain silent. Physical force and abuse against white women was legal during slavery, and this limited the power of white women. (Feinstein, 2018: 52).

Although white women were victims of inequality and subservient to white men, they were themselves instruments of oppression, dominating

[39] See, among others, Perrin (2001).

enslaved people. Feinstein[40] explores the role played by white women in the reinforcement of sexual violence towards black women and on how the system of slavery subjugated black women in contrast to white women. White women were privileged as white, and instead of cooperating and fighting together with black women, they strengthened white oppression by devaluating and oppressing black people, reinforcing their privileged position and the benefits that arise from it.

> [1.16] The sexual violence enacted by a white man against an enslaved black women reinforced the racial division between white women and black women by creating jealousy and conflict. This conflict made it difficult for white women to see the shared interest they held with black women in eliminating the power of white men to rape. (Feinstein, 2018: 55).

This was very common on plantations, and Augustus himself believed that he was the son of a black woman and a white man whose white wife had decided to abandon him to punish the black woman and vindicate the offence.

White women, as an intermediary group, played a crucial role in maintaining oppression, and "perpetuating the interlocking systems of racism and sexism" (Fenstein, 2017: 4). Although from a subordinate position in relation to white men, white women were active in the abuse of power because "slave ownership conferred that power on all white persons" (Glymph, 2012: 18). The power of white men was visible and undeniable, in their ownership, civil and political rights, and in their dominant position over white women, enslaved and free black people. The domestic and subservient position of white women led to the creation of the stereotype of the caring, caste and self-sacrificing Southern lady (Glymph, 2012: 23), who represented the gentle face of the slavery system. Despite this enduring stereotype, which

[40] Fenstein (2017) uses Collins' (2002) concept of the "matrix of domination", a theoretical approach that explores the intersections of power and oppression, to explain the intermediary role played by white women in sexual violence against enslaved black women. The scholar analyses the complex network of intersectional incentives, tactics and consequences that encouraged white women "to reinforce the intersecting institutions of oppression by subordinating those beneath them in the hierarchy as well as reinforcing norms which sustain their own oppression" (Fenstein, 2017: 14).

was a crucial element in the construction of white supremacy and sexist and racist ideology, the reality in the plantation household was different, and white women's violence against enslaved people was intrinsic to the system of slavery.

Recent works[41] have challenged the idea of white women as simple victims of patriarchal power, reconstructing the historical figure of the white woman as complicit in supporting and reinforcing the institution of slavery, and in many cases as the owner of enslaved people. Autobiographical narratives of formerly enslaved people[42] are replete with descriptions of abuse at the hands of the white female slave owners, describing a reality of female ownership and violence that was more widespread than once falsely claimed.

As Glymph (2012) points out, male planters and owners of enslaved people spent long periods away from the plantation, and even if they were in the household, they may not have had constant direct contact with enslaved people, who were controlled by overseers and factors. Unlike the male owner, the female owner was always in the household, in daily contact with the enslaved people and had direct control over them, and "physical conflict seems to have occurred much more frequently between mistresses and slaves than between masters and slaves" (Glymph, 2012: 36). Their power over the enslaved people gave them the right to punish, beat and abuse them.

Like a historical owner of enslaved people, the fictional character of Amalia is an active and violent participant in enslavement and the slave trade. She is the one who decides to buy new slaves, including Augustus. She is feared by her slaves and is the cause of their suffering.

In blended space 9, I have highlighted Amalia inside a frame and I have linked it to blended space 7. She plays a primary role in *DFE*. She is "an attractive white woman […] who exhibits more intelligence and backbone than is generally credited to a Southern belle" (*DFE*: prologue). Moreover, she is the owner and manager of the plantation and makes all the decisions.

[41] See, among others, Glymph (2012); Rogers (2019).
[42] See Douglass (1855); Jacobs (1861)

In the eyes of the slaves, she no longer resembles a woman, power has made her masculine.[43] When talking of how Amalia runs the plantation, the slave Scipio says: "Woman? she is more man than woman" and Phebe adds: "And more devil than man" (*DFE*: prologue).

However, she recognises the inhuman condition in which slaves are forced to live. She admits to Augustus, talking about the Haitian revolution, that in similar conditions she would have planned a revolt against the slave owners.

[1.17] AMALIA: It was a brilliant revolution.
I've often wondered why our niggers
don't revolt. I've said to myself:
"Amalia, if you had been a slave,
you most certainly would have plotted
an insurrection by now" (*DFE* Act 1, scene 8)

She admits the brutality of the system, but this awareness does not make her less cruel and brutal. On the contrary, Amalia, after having experienced the oppressive structure of slavery and patriarchy, starts to act in a more repressive and violent way upon the slave of the plantation.

Amalia is not subjected to forced labor, perpetual violence, and torture; her position is totally and undoubtedly better than the one of every slave. Amalia is, in the central section of the play, described as indifferent in the face of mental and physical sufferings of slaves:

[1.18] AMALIA: What's this?
PHEBE: How-how we do, Miss Amalia!
We was just trying to figure out
what to do with Diana here.
AMALIA: She seems healthy enough to me–
good stock, young and fresh.
PHEBE: (Motioning for DIANA to look sicker.)
She fell down out something awful.
It don't look like she feel too good–
AMALIA: You aren't here to play doctor, Phebe.
Where is that Jones? Jones!
JONES: Yes, miss Jennings?

[43] Typical of patriarchal societies is gender division of roles and labor, and the association of power to men.

[…]
AMALIA: Get these niggers in line!
(*DFE*, Act 1, scene 1)

Several elements in the play show the extreme annihilation and subjugation of slaves, women, and men, and how the system of slavery affected slaves and their families. Beyond the main characters and together with the plot of the love story that develops between Augustus and Amalia, Dove depicts the reality of the slavery system, such as the story of Phebe's mother and that of the slave Isaac.

Phebe's mother died surrounded by the total indifference of Amalia's father, after having been a domestic slave for many years, caring for Amalia when her mother died. The slave Isaac was punished for his preaching, and his wife and little son were sold. These two examples of the historical truth of slavery remain, however, in the background. The play focuses, rather, on Amalia and her submission to patriarchy. Despite Amalia's contribution to the maintenance of a system of brutality like slavery, she is also depicted as a victim of the same system.

To claim that a white owner is a victim of the racist system of slavery is absurd and wrong. Dove herself in her 1994 interview with Lloyd (see quotation [1.2]), explains that depicting Amalia as capable of tenderness and love towards Augustus does not fit into her system of political belief and it is not politically correct. Nevertheless, through Amalia's words, Dove represents the restrictions and ideals of purity and chastity to which Amalia is subjected.

While talking to Augustus, she complains about the limitations she had to face when she was young. Her father gave her an inconsistent education at "Miss Peter's Academy for Elocution and Deportment":

[1.19] AMALIA: He let me run wild until
it was time to put on crinolines.
My playmates were sent to the fields,
and I was sent to the parlour with needlework–
a scented, dutiful daughter.
AUGUSTUS: Most men find intelligence troubling

in a woman – even fathers
(*DFE*, Act 1, scene 8)

I find it noteworthy that Augustus is described by Jones, the overseer, in almost the same words: "Ma'am, an educated nigger brings nothing but trouble" (*DFE*, prologue). Dove creates two complex and fully human characters, without delineating a defined line that separates the good from the bad, the hero from the villain.

As explained by Dove in her 2008 interview with Pereira (see section 1.4.), Amalia could have been an independent woman and Augustus a poet, but in the system they live in, there are no possibilities for them to deviate from what they are forced to be. Amalia and Augustus emerge from the play as linked by a similar oppressive destiny.

Amalia is a complex character as she is both an instrument of oppression and a victim of it. She has to respect the social standard of the time, innocence, purity, decorum, and integrity. The purity of the upper-class woman was the symbol of the purity of the white race itself. For this reason, Amalia has little control over her sexuality or her maternity. The patriarchal slavery system constrained both Augustus and Amalia the night Augustus was born. She is forced to abandon her baby and Augustus is destined to be a slave. It is only in this and a few other moments that Amalia is able to recognise the burden of this system:

[1.20] ALEXANDER:[44] White folks feel a loss
as much as we do-
it's just that they ain't
used to losing. I tell you,
Miss Amalia went crazy in the head
the day she lost that baby boy.
(*DFE*, Act 1, scene 1)

[44] A forty-year-old slave, the one who has been in the Jennings' plantation longer than anyone else.

The author, a woman and a mother herself, investigates the consequences of this violence on Amalia's psyche, rendering her character more human. Amalia goes through different transformations throughout the play.

After Amalia is forced to abandon her son she changes her attitude, she loses her humanity and becomes meaner. She changes again after meeting Augustus; the system of patriarchy and slavery left her without compassion and love, but Augustus enables her to rediscover the capacity for love.

1.4.2. A cognitive linguistic analysis of Amalia's mental functioning

When Amalia falls in love with Augustus, she begins setting up a mental scenario that contradicts the reality she is in, a counterfactual world where there is a possibility for them to be together. Figure 1.8 is an attempt to give an account of Amalia's fictional mind. In input space 10, I represent the real world where Amalia and Augustus live, which is characterised by the specific roles set by the system of slavery; that of mistress and that of the slave. Input space 11 is modelled on the concept of a (hetero) love relationship and contains specific roles and characteristics.

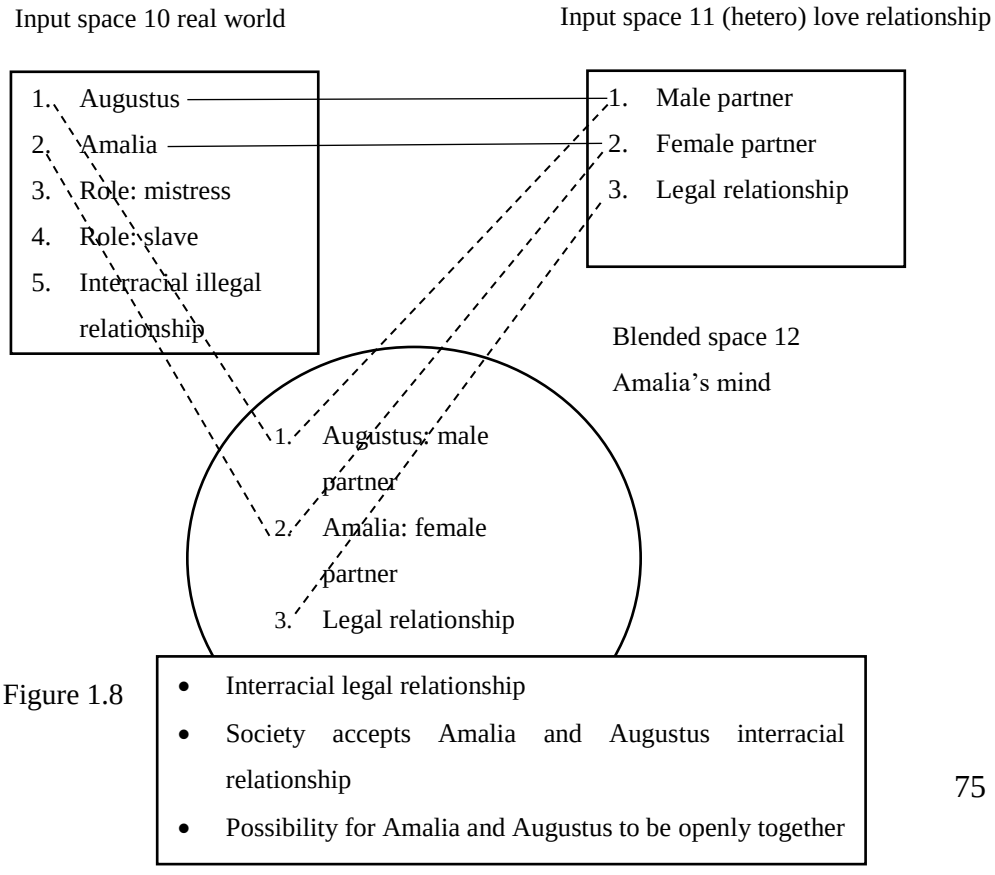

Figure 1.8

Amalia blends the reality input space, where she is a slave owner and Augustus is a slave and their love story is illegal, with an alternative scenario of a love relationship between two people without hierarchical social roles and racial connotations. The roles of input space 10 are not projected into the blended space. The roles of "male partner" and "female partner" are projected from input space 11. The blend is a counterfactual mental space in which there are no social, racial, hierarchical differences between Amalia and Augustus.

Construing a mental scenario causes Amalia a momentary loss of awareness of the distinction between the real world and the imaginary one. While talking to Augustus, who points out that the cold weather would ruin the crops and that they should be picked fast, Amalia replies:

[1.21] AMALIA: Look at us, squabbing about agriculture!
Forget about the weather!
Who cares what happens out there?
AUGUSTUS: Someone's got to care, Missy.
AMALIA: Don't call me that.
AUGUSTUS: That's what you are. And I'm your slave.
Nothing has changed that.
AMALIA: (Putting her hand to his mouth; AUGUSTUS withdraws, but only slightly.)
Shh! If this is all the world they've left us,
then it's ours to make over.
From time to time we can step out
to show ourselves to the people
so they will have someone to blame.
AUGUSTUS: It's too late.
(*DFE*, Act 2, scene 5)

Amalia is living in the blend, starting to neglect her duties as the plantation's owner and beginning to deny her social role. Amalia re-thinks the reality input space and believe that there is a way for them to be together and that, maybe with time, the inhabitants of the plantation, and more generally society, will accept their love relationship.

One night when Augustus is sneaking into Amalia's room, he is almost caught by the overseer Jones and says to Amalia:

[1.22] AUGUSTUS: I nearly collided with Jones,

barreling full steam across the porch
AMALIA: Did he see you?
AUGUSTUS: Shadows are kind to niggers.
AMALIA: You are not a nigger.
AUGUSTUS: (Catching her hand by the wrist)
Yes I am, Amalia.
Better not forget that.
(*DFE*, Act 2, scene 5)

Amalia builds a blended space where there are no racial boundaries in order to adjust to the difficult situation they are in. The attempt, abstract and conceptual, to deconstruct the rigid categories they live in, which deny any possibility for them to be together is not supported by Augustus, who re-establishes the racial order reassigning the expected roles, using the words that define himself and Amalia.

1.5. A cognitive linguistic analysis of Augustus' exposure

In my analysis of *DFE*, I have found the presence of the story type of "the hero exposed at birth". The term exposure, (from Greek: ἔκθεσις), means an attempted infanticide, a threat to the life of a child that fails. Marc Huys, in the analysis of this tale type in the works of Euripides, defines it as a "universal tale-pattern" (Huys, 1995:13), characterised by a recurrent fixed scheme, a string of motifs, and structure, adapted differently in many oral and written traditions.

Huys assumes that the tale pattern of the hero exposed at birth is a legendary and a "supra-historical" fictional structure with its own characteristics and deviates from historical practices of exposure of children (Huys, 1995:14). In ancient Greece, for example, the cause of exposure was socio-economical, and, in most cases, the child exposed was a girl. In myth, legend, and tales, the child is usually male, exposed because of prophecy or because he is the illegitimate son of a God and a mortal. He extraordinarily survives an event that in real life implied certain death.

In this section, I argue that Dove blends the mythical tale pattern of the hero exposed with the historical practice of the transatlantic slave trade. More specifically, the trajectory of Augustus' life is a blend of the tale pattern of the child's exposure, the adaptation of this pattern in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King,* and the historical element of an enslaved slave child being sold. I see the symbolic structure of the fictional extraordinary survival of an abandoned child blended with the precarious survival of a mixed race child in the reality of slavery in the southern United States.

In figure 1.3, I modelled three input spaces: input space 1 "child's exposure"; input space 2 "Oedipus' exposure" and input space 3 "mixed race child being sold". Input space 1 describes the tale pattern of the hero's life, as it emerges from scholarship, particularly from Mark Huys' work. Input space 2 represents Sophocles' adaptation of the tale pattern in *Oedipus the King*. Input space 3 "mixed race child being sold" shows the typical path in the life of a mixed race child when born to a white woman. Blended space 4 represents Augustus' exposure. I start the analysis of the blend from input space 1 "child's exposure".

1.5.1. Input space 1 "child's exposure"

1. Cause of exposure
2. The father or male authority wants to kill or abandon the baby
3. Child is exposed
4. Child survives
5. Child is adopted
6. Child develops special skills
7. Homecoming
8. Recognition
9. He becomes king

Figure 1.9

From Marc Huys' (1995) comprehensive study of a large number of myths and folk tales, I have extracted and elaborated the essential features of the heroic pattern exposed at birth, and I have outlined the main points delineated in input space 1 (Figure 1.9). The first element of the input space 1 is the cause of exposure. Huys reduces the possibilities to two main causes: illegitimate sexual intercourse or dream/prophecy.

Huys points out that sexual intercourse is often between a god and a mortal princess. This determines a great future for the child and his exceptional nature, but also his illegitimacy. The abandonment of the child, in this case, is determined by the male authority's (father or grandfather) desire to get rid of the child because of his lack of legitimacy and because he represents a future rival for the throne.

In the case of a dream/prophecy, the exposure of the child is the result of a bad omen or an ominous oracle, which often prophesies that the child will dethrone or harm the male ruler; the child may also represent a threat to the entire community. In this case, the child must be exposed or sacrificed in order to avoid the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The second element of the input space is: "the father or male authority wants to kill or abandon the baby". In some cases, it is the father who wants to expose the baby, in other cases, it is the grandfather; in both cases, the one who wants to get rid of the baby is the male representative of power. Huys adds that in many cases the mother tries to save the baby (Huys, 1995: 38).

Point 3 is the exposure itself, "child is exposed". The infant is usually abandoned to the forces of nature (water, forest, mountain). In real life, a child abandoned has almost no chance of survival. In these tales, the child is supposed to die but he survives (point 4).

The child is saved by a deity or a compassionate human who helps and rescues the child. To survive an attempted murder, implies that the child is special and will accomplish great things; he is predestined for greatness. After the rescue, the baby is raised by another family or by a God (point 5 "child is adopted") and develops his innate special skills and qualities (point 6):

[1.23] The child adoption by a deity or a human and the manifestation of his natural pride and extraordinary qualities complete the preparation for the second phase of the story, his final rehabilitation and conquest of power. (Huys, 1995: 39).

The return to his homeland (point 7 "homecoming") and his "recognition" (point 8) by the biological family represent a moment of glory and success which are implied, and anticipated by the extraordinary survival of the child at the beginning of his life. Normally, the exposed hero tales end with family reunification, with the hero becoming the new ruler, "he becomes king" (point 9). In classical Greek tragedies, the moment of recognition is particularly relevant, and it is an important element for a dramatic turn in the plot. In many tragedies, the recognition could represent the violent dethronement of the king at the hand of his son.

1.5.2. Input space 2 "Oedipus' exposure"

1. Cause: prophecy
2. Jocasta and Laius decide to get rid of the baby
3. Oedipus is exposed
4. Oedipus survives
5. Oedipus is raised at king's court
6. Oedipus develops special skills
7. Parricide (prophecy fulfillment)
8. Homecoming
9. Oedipus becomes king
10. Incest (prophecy fulfillment)
11. Recognition

Figure 1.10

Input space 2 (figure 1.10) is modelled on the particular exposure of Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, as it emerges from the plot, and in particular from the fourth episode (vv. 1110-1185), where Oedipus receives relevant information about his origins from a man of low status who served his parents. The first element is: "cause: prophecy". The cause of Oedipus' exposition is a prophecy, as Jocasta, still unaware of Oedipus' real identity, explains to him:

[1.24] ΙΟΚΑΣΤΗ: χρησμὸς γὰρ ἦλθε Λαΐῳ ποτ᾽, οὐκ ἐρῶ
Φοίβου γ᾽ ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ, τῶν δ᾽ ὑπηρετῶν ἄπο,
ὡς αὐτὸν ἥξοι μοῖρα πρὸς παιδὸς θανεῖν,
ὅστις γένοιτ᾽ ἐμοῦ τε κἀκείνου πάρα

> Jocasta: An oracle once came to Laius, I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his servants, saying that it would be his fate to die at the hands of the son who should be the child of him and me. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*: 711-714)

During the pregnancy, Jocasta and Laius receive from the oracle of Delphi the prophecy that if they had a son, he would kill his father.

The second element is "Jocasta and Laius decide to get rid of the baby". Laius and Jocasta give the order to expose the baby in order to avoid the fulfilment of the oracle. The third element is "Oedipus is exposed"; Jocasta and Laius order a trusted man to abandon the baby on Mount Cithaeron. Beyond this, Laius pierces Oedipus' feet, making his death all but inevitable. Given this, Oedipus' survival is even more extraordinary; he survives the exposure on the Mount and the threat to life represented by the pierced feet (point 4: "Oedipus survives").

After the exposure, Oedipus is saved by a compassionate man. The herdsman decides not to abandon the baby, but, moved by pity, gives the child to a servant of Polybus. The Corinthian shepherd takes the child to Corinthus; King Polybus and Queen Merope adopt the child and raise him as their son (point 5 "Oedipus is raised at king's court").

One day Oedipus is told that Polybus and Merope are not his real parents. For this reason, he decides to question the oracle of Delphi about the true identity of his parents. The oracle does not give Oedipus a clear answer

but prophesies that he will kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid the fulfilment of this prophecy he decides not to go back to Corinth but to move to the East, heading to Thebes. Along the road from Delphi to Thebes, at the junction of three roads, he meets his biological father Laius. During a confrontation, Oedipus kills the old man not knowing he was his biological father (point 7 "parricide").

Like every exposed child, Oedipus demonstrates his "election and predestination" (Huys, 1995: 49). On his way to Thebes, he encounters a sphynx threatening the city by posing riddles to passers-by, killing those who cannot answer. With his special skills, Oedipus solves the riddle and becomes the hero who saves Thebes from the cruelty of the Sphynx. Once in Thebes ("homecoming") as reward for saving the city, Oedipus obtains the throne and marries the queen of Thebes, his mother (points 9 and 10: "Oedipus becomes king" and "incest"). The final recognition and the unveiling of the true identities of Oedipus and Jocasta in Sophocles' work have dramatic consequences: Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus' blindness, and his exile.

1.5.3. Input space 3 "mixed race child being sold"

1. Cause: illicit sexual intercourse
2. Father, or male figure, decides to get rid of the baby
3. Child is sold
4. Child is raised as a slave
5. Child is sold to different owners

Figure 1.11

Input space 3 (figure 1.11) contains the principal elements of the life trajectory of a mixed race child being sold. During the slavery era, the status of mixed race children was regulated by the "partus sequitur ventrem" law: enslaved women gave birth to enslaved children, and free women gave birth to free children. However, the child of a white woman and a black man seldom inherited the free status of the mother, as they were more likely to be enslaved.[45]

The sexual intercourse between black men and white women of the upper class was the most illicit, therefore, any resulting pregnancy was kept secret, and the children born from this union were sold or even killed. Therefore, the cause of the child being sold or killed is represented by the element "illicit sexual intercourse". It is the father or the male representative of power who decides to abandon the baby to punish the woman and reinforce his power (point 2). The child of input space 3 is not considered a human being but a master's property and a source of profit; for this reason, he is more likely to be sold than killed, (point 3: "child is sold").

Unlike input space 1 and input space 2, there is no final enthronement and empowerment of the child exposed once he has reached adulthood. After being sold, the child is raised as a slave (point 4), and then possibly sold again (point 5) living as a slave for the rest of his or her life. Augustus as a slave and a modern Oedipus is the blend of the previous input spaces. To conclude the analysis I examine the blended space 4.

1.5.4. Blended space "Augustus' exposure"

[45] For more detail on this topic, see chapter 2 section 2.3.3.

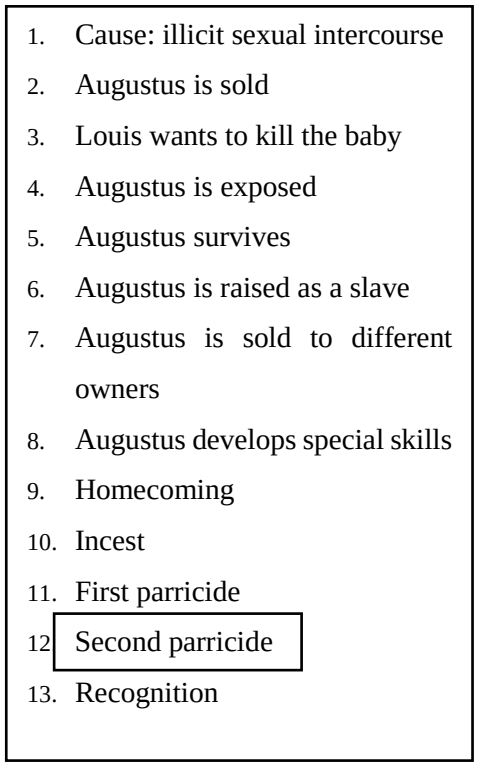

Figure 1.12

The blended space 4 (figure 1.12) represents Augustus' exposure. The cause for Augustus being sold is "illicit sexual intercourse". The relation is not the one between a god and a mortal princess but between a black slave and a white woman.

In a racist system, the white woman is the symbol of the purity of the white race, and Amalia and Hector's affair is the most illicit sexual intercourse that could possibly occur in the southern states at this time. A relationship between a white woman and a black man generated more concern within society than any other relationship. In 1664, Maryland legislators declared that: "it is a disgrace to our nation" when "English women intermarry with Negro slaves".[46] In the case of Augustus, I would say that it is more than a disgrace, it is a tragedy.

[46] Archives of Maryland, Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1637-1664, pp. 533-534.

After Augustus' birth, Amalia wants to keep the baby, but the doctor convinces her to sell him away. The motive of the compassionate herdsman who decides to spare Oedipus' life out of pity is turned into something different:

[1.25] LOUIS: Get rid of the baby. Destroy the bastard.
DOCTOR: My charge is to preserve life, Mr.
Lafarge, not to destroy it.
LOUIS: What's the matter? Aren't you a man?
DOCTOR: My manhood isn't the question here.
Do you want your business
smeared across the whole country?
Think for a minute: what have we got here?
A fresh slave. New property.
And you're in need of a little spare change,
aren't you? I understand the cards
havent' been much in your favour lately. (*DFE*, prologue)

The reason for preserving Augustus' life is purely economic, therefore the element "child is sold" of input space 3 is projected onto the blended space. Moreover, by talking with Amalia and trying to convince her to sell the baby, the doctor shows us the morality of that time:

[1.26] DOCTOR: How long do you think it will take
before your slaves begin to speak back?
To botch the work and fall ill
with mysterious aliments? Then
who will help you-Louis?
An overseer who knows his mistress
is tainted with slave funk? In a bad year,
how much will you have to beg
to get a tab at the store?
Who will you invite to tea, Amalia-
your dashing blackamoor? (*DFE*, prologue)

And again:

[1.27] DOCTOR: I am just trying to save
your daddy's good name.
As for your precious little bundle-
how long do you think he'll last
with Luis feeling as he does?
How long before your child
accidentally drowns

or stumbles under a horse's hooves?
You can't keep him, Amalia;
if you truly love him,
you cannot keep him. (*DFE*, prologue)

As soon as Amalia's husband Louis finds out that the child is not his son but the son of a slave he becomes angry and decides to kill the baby (element: "Louis wants to kill the baby"). The important and very creative element in *DFE* is that the element "child is exposed" from input space 1 and the element "child is sold" from input space 3 are both present in the play ("Augustus is sold" and "Augustus is exposed").

Although Augustus represents an economic profit, Louis tries to kill him by putting the spurs of his boots into the basket in which the doctor puts the baby, hoping that he will be fatally injured. Louis' aim to kill baby Augustus at any cost, as critics have noticed,[47] is imperfectly motivated. Augustus is not Louis' real son, he could not claim to inherit his fortune, and there is no oracle prophesying parricide. Instead, in a sort of Oedipal oracle in reverse, the doctor, in the attempt to convince Amalia to let him take the baby away, prefigures the possibility that Louis will attempt to take Augustus' life as an act of revenge. However, Augustus does not represent a real threat.

Goff and Simpson suggest that when Louis attempts to kill Augustus, he "may be acting under the impulse of ancient history" (Goff & Simpson, 2007:146). My cognitive linguistic analysis seeks to provide a solid and convincing explanation as to why the viable interpretation of Louis' attempted infanticide should be traced through literature rather than history.

One reason for this attempt at infanticide is to punish Amalia's behavior, which is unacceptable in a racist patriarchal society. As I explained in section 1.4.1., white women, despite being in a privileged position, faced many limitations imposed by patriarchy. Nevertheless, I suggest that what is at work here is the projection of the element of "child is exposed" from input space 1 and the element "Oedipus is exposed" from input space 2 onto the

[47] See Barbara Goff & Michael Simpson (2007).

blended space 4. The act of putting the spurs in the basket parallels the act of exposure of the child as a threat to his life in myths and legend. Moreover, I argue that Louis' action recalls the act of piercing Oedipus' feet by his father Laius. Augustus and Oedipus' survivals are exceptional.

Oedipus and Augustus' exposures, leave the two respective heroes with perennial marks. Many heroes have a particular and personal mark, through which it is possible to recognise them. Both Oedipus and Augustus have scars that represent their origins and glorious survival. It is through the element of the scars and the description of the basket in which Augustus was sent away, that the final recognition is made possible.

The basket is one of the motifs of the tale pattern of the hero exposed. Usually, notes Huys, the exposed child is put in a receptacle such as a chest or a basket, for example in the exposures of Ion, Danae, and Oedipus (Huys: 1995: 39). The receptacle represents an ambiguous element as it is a tool for the rescue, but it is also the tool through which the exposure is accomplished, and therefore does not represent real protection from dangers.

The same ambiguity is present in Augustus' basket because, as a container, it is a safe place for the child and implies the intent to save the baby and to have him rescued. Nevertheless, it contains Louis' spurs, and therefore is a threat to Augustus' life. The basket is one of the main objects in *DFE*, and for this reason, it is described in detail in two of the most important moments of the exposure's tale pattern: the exposure itself and the recognition. Both the motif of the scars[48] and the motif of the basket are highly symbolic.

Augustus survives the male representative of power who tried to kill him. Unlike the myth of Oedipus, there is no compassionate human being to save him, and he is not raised by a royal family. Conversely, a family, for the sake of economic profit, buys him, raises him as a slave (projection of the element "child raised as a slave" from input space 3), and sells him again

[48] For an analysis of Augustus' scars, see chapter 3, section 3.6.

(projection of the element "child is sold to different owners" from input space 3).

During the period he served Captain Newcastle, Augustus, as an exposed child, develops special skills (point 8) that distinguish him from the other slaves. Augustus acquires a special status and great fame among slaves and slave owners alike. Augustus' homecoming (point 9) like that of Oedipus, is a prelude to the tragic recognition. The element of incest is projected from input space 2 into the blended space. Once back on the plantation, in fact, Augustus starts a love relationship with the white mistress Amalia, and they commit incest. In a second moment, with a reverse order in respect to *Oedipus the King*, Augustus, after having killed Hector, his biological father ("first parricide"), kills Laius ("second parricide"). The recognition (point 13) unveils the acts of parricides and incest.

Through the element of the exposure originally blended with the historical element of the slave sold, the reader knows from the beginning that Augustus is a special and heroic child. Not all babies could survive the deep wounds inflicted by sharp spurs. The motif of exposure is an example of the cognitive notion of a narrative script,[49] a prototypical sequence of events in an expected causal and chronological order. Through the key action of the exposure motif, the reader already knows that the child Augustus will survive the infanticide attempt, that he will be a distinguished man due to his heroic features, and that one day he will come back to the plantation, the place he was born.

1.5.5. The killing of the fathers

Dove reworked both the motive of the hero's exposure and the issue of Oedipal parentage. The presence of two parricides is an element that is worth analysing in further detail.

[49] For an analysis of the cognitive notion of the scrip, see the General Introduction section 0.7.

Augustus has two father figures. Hector is Augustus' biological father, but he is denied his paternal rights. Louis, Amalia's husband, could be considered a kind of step father as, like the father in the story of the exposed child, he is the one who decides to expose the baby, and also because Augustus believes that Louis is his real father.[50] As Goff and Simpson (2007: 146) point out, there are other father figures in the play: the slave trader who takes the baby Augustus on the night of his birth and raises him, and the sea captain who gives him his name and promises him freedom.

The presence of two main father figures and the emergent meaning of the two parricides are further evidence of the high complexity of this play and of the protagonist Augustus. I argue that there are three reasons for the duplication of fathers: history, literature and metaphor.

The first reason is the complexity of the history of black families under slavery. The institution of slavery denied marriage and family to enslaved people, tore children from their parents, and killed off or sold them. In the play, there are different examples of this plague (the story of Isaac, see this chapter, section 1.4.1.). The slave system, like in the case of Amalia and Hector, also banned a sexual affinity between the owner of enslaved people and enslaved people.

The consequences are the impossibility to name father and mother with certainty and truth, but also the creation of relationships and links that replace family ties. During Hector's funeral, slaves are celebrating the dead with an African ritual in which his youngest child must pass over and under him. He has no child but Phoebe tells the other slaves not to worry because: "Every child on this plantation was like his child" (*DFE*, Act 2, scene 6).

Hector himself was kidnapped from Africa brought to America, cut off from his family and true origins: "(SCYLLA) He came with no mother to soothe him. He came with no father to teach him. He came with no names for his gods" (*DFE*, Act 2, scene 6). Therefore, the Oedipal paternal issue, the problem of origins, and the quest for identity proliferate within plantation.

[50] See chapter 3 sections 3.2.1., and 3.5.3.

The second reason is literature; Augustus has two "literary" fathers, an Oedipal one and a father of the "tragic mulatto" genre. Augustus unwittingly kills his biological father, Hector. Hector's murder is quite analogous to that of Laius: Oedipus and Augustus, because of an altercation, kill their fathers accidentally. After the first parricide, the rebels give Augustus the order to kill the owners of the plantation. While he clashes with Louis, the phase of recognition begins. Louis describes the basket in which Augustus was driven away but Augustus misunderstands Louis' identity believing him to be his white father who raped his mother, who did not accept him as a son, and rejected him.

As will be further explained in chapter 3 section 3.5., parricide is a typical element of the "tragic mulatto" genre. In this type of narrative, a white plantation owner does not recognise the son conceived by the enslaved women he owns and does not consider himself to be his father. The denial of birthright causes mixed feelings in the son: the aspiration of being allowed into the house of the owner, of having the right to call him father, but also the hatred and the desire to avenge himself and his mother by killing the white man. This hatred usually culminates with the killing of the father/slave owner, as an act of revenge, and in many cases with the death, by suicide or at the hands of the white community, of the "tragic mulatto".

When Augustus faces Louis, Augustus kills him exactly because he thinks he is his real father and because he wants to take revenge on his mother whom he thinks Louis raped. I suggest that Augustus is following a narrative pattern, even if he is wrong about his true origins.

The third reason for the presence of two father is metaphor. Augustus has two metaphorical fathers. In the play, family becomes the metaphor for the nation racially divided and segregated while still intimately linked by blood and family ties. Through the metaphor of the Oedipal family drama, a broader political and racial conflict is represented.

Hector is the metaphor for Africa; Scylla defines him as the "son of Africa" (*DFE,* Act 1, scene 1) and he is the only slave besides her, who can

speak Yoruba (a west African dialect). Hector represents Augustus' African ancestry but, also, the submission of black people, their lack of power and human rights, and their subjugation and enslavement. Hector, after all, tries to warn of the revolt in order to stop it. On the other hand, Louis, as a white owner, is the metaphor for white power and its system of abuse, violence, and annihilation for all Africans and African Americans. Louis is the embodiment of everything that Augustus fought against.[51]

Augustus' process of emancipation and recognition of the self and identity, passes through the killing of the fathers and their metaphorical meaning: subjugation and oppression. Augustus finds himself in liminality, caught within the boundaries of two spaces in which he is able to move through: the plantation and the owner's house. This hybridity opens to transformation and evolution; Augustus crosses over the colonial dichotomy between white/black, African and American, and the dichotomy of self/other which characterises racial oppression. He does this not only through violence but also through blood and love represented by incest and miscegenation as will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.6. Conclusion

A cognitive linguistic analysis is able to account for and represent the conceptual richness and original elements of the play. Instead of a strict comparison between Dove's play and Sophocles' tragedy, a cognitive approach unpacks the complexity of Dove's work and the cognitive process at the basis of creativity, which turns out to go beyond a re-reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

In this chapter, CBT has been used to analyse the macro-structures of *DFE*. In figures 1.1. and 1.2., I have represented the play as a conceptual integration network; I have extracted the main input spaces that characterise

[51] Rita Dove, personal communication.

the play and uncovered the additional new meanings that emerge from each blend. Dove's creative process has been explained in terms of the blend between the historical institution of chattel slavery and the ancient Greek notion of predetermined fate, as well as the relationship of power and hierarchical structure present in the southern states of United States of America and the mythic Greek universe.

CBT also proved to be a useful tool for analysing the characters of Louis and Amalia. Dove creates an original story in the terms of blends of different input spaces, stories and situations which, rather than confining the characters in a repetition of recurrent schemas taken from different stories, traditions and situations, develop an original and emergent meaning.

In section 1.5., CBT is used to examine a single episode of the plot: the story tale of the child exposed within the complex macrostructure of Augustus' life trajectory. It emerged that the narrative type of the exposed hero is blended with the historical practice of the slave trade. In this way, I have shown that the moment when Augustus is sold and exposed is the key moment in his life, as it is the symbol of his exceptional nature and predestination, and, also, defines Augustus as a hero.[52]

[52] See chapter 3 for a complete cognitive analysis of the character of Augustus.

Chapter 2. The conceptual metaphor of MISCEGENATION IS INCEST in *The Darker Face of the Earth*

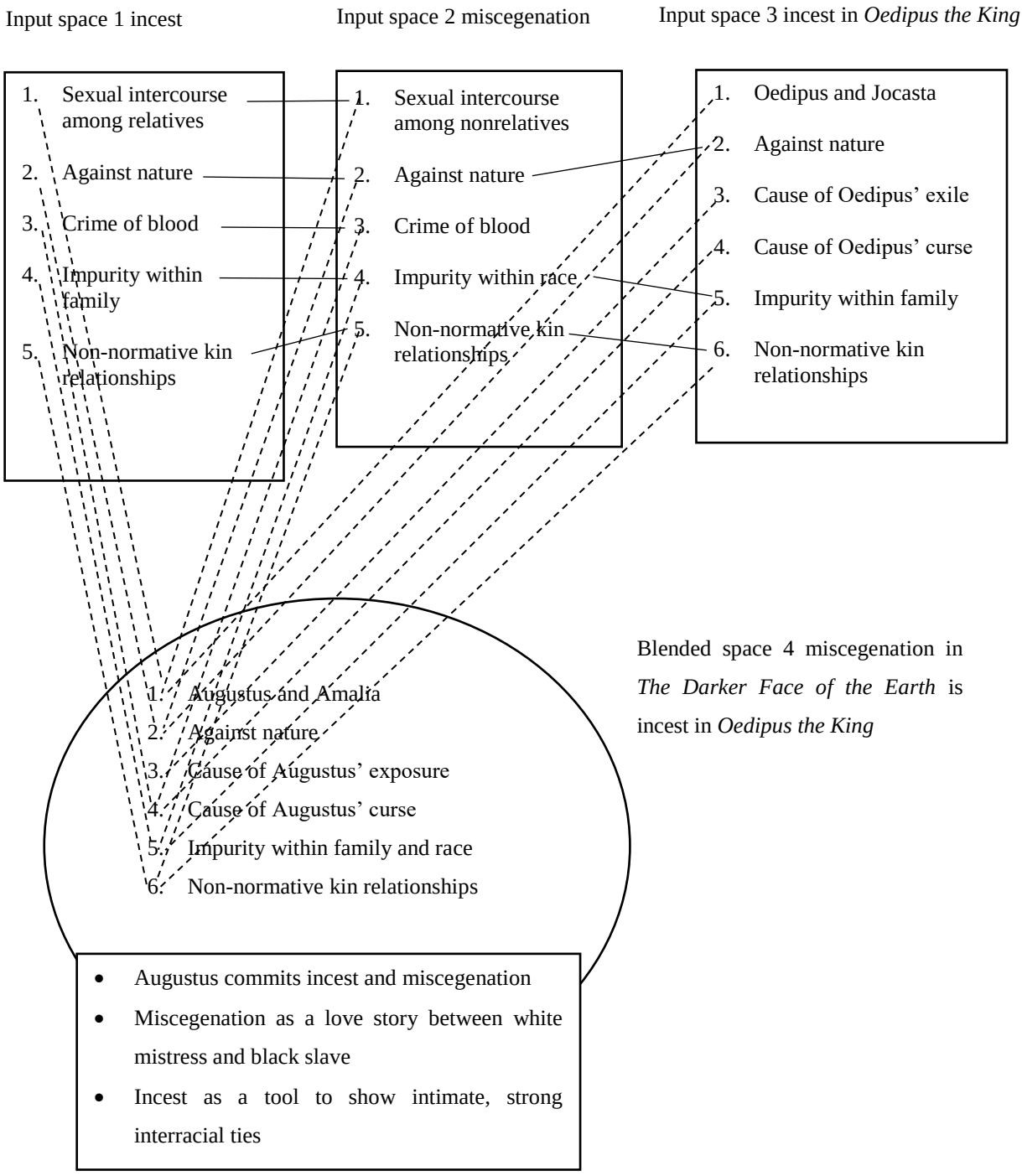

Figure 2.1

In chapter 1, I analysed the macrostructures of *DFE* and represented the conceptual structures of the play as a complex integration network of several

input spaces. In this chapter, I focus on one of the main conceptual metaphors I have individuated in the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*: MISCEGENATION IN *THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH* IS INCEST IN *OEDIPUS THE KING*.

The element of incest in *The Dark Face of the Earth* has been addressed by several authors in different ways. Pereira argues that incest in the *DFE* "stands for cultural amalgamation" (Pereira, 2002: 15), it is the symbol of cultural mixing and the birth of Augustus as a "cultural mulatto".[53] Furthermore, Pereira links Augustus' biological mixing and cultural amalgamation with Dove's "amalgamated and cosmopolitan artistic identity" (Pereira, 2002: 206) and her personal life (interracial marriage and mixed-race daughter).

Carlisle acknowledges the importance of the element of incest in Dove's play, but notes that: "[w]hile incest and parricide figure prominently in the tragedy, it is miscegenation that cuts the deepest" (Carlisle, 2000: 141). In a similar way, Rabinowitz states that, in relation with the institution of slavery and miscegenation laws, incest "seems almost immaterial" (Rabinowitz, 2015: 509).

Goff and Simpson argue that incest becomes a sign for forced amalgamation. The meaning of the Oedipal incest is transformed and reshaped by "coordinating transgressive desire with miscegenation" (Goff and Simpson 2007: 139).

I depart from Carlise (2000) and Rabinowitz (2015) in arguing that the Oedipal theme of incest is not secondary in Dove's play. In this chapter, I analyse Dove's re-elaboration and re-conceptualisation of the Oedipal concept of incest in entire episodes of *DFE*. Through a close linguistic analysis, I attempt to show that the role and function of miscegenation in *DFE*, and the linguistic elements used to address it, are blended with those of incest in Sophocles' tragedy.

[53] For the meaning of "cultural mulatto", see note 76, section 3.2.4.

Unlike Pereira (2002) and in line with Goff and Simpson (2007), I argue that incest is used to conceptualise interracial sexual union. However, my approach to this subject matter, the analysis presented and the conclusion differ from that of Goff and Simpson (2007). I argue that incest is not simply reshaped or transformed by its contact with the theme of miscegenation, but that incest is metaphorically blended with interracial unions.

Moreover, my analysis delves into additional dimensions beyond Dove's play. It takes into account the metaphorical use of incest in a broader non-poetic context in order to understand why two distinct concepts such as incest and miscegenation have long been closely linked in American thought, literature, and legislation, even though the association has never been identified as a conceptual metaphor.

Werner Sollors distinguishes three ideological explanations for the recurrent connection between incest and miscegenation: a "pragmatic" state-interventionist, a "realistic" abolitionist-liberal, and a "paranoid" proslavery-racialist-fascist trajectory (Sollors, 1997: 314). The first explanation has to do with the field of law and the legal terms linking incest and miscegenation. The taboo of incest was used to reinforce bans and laws prohibiting miscegenation and interracial relations. The second explanation highlights how the system of patriarchy, the sexual subjugation of black enslaved people, and the denial of birthrights to mixed-raced offspring makes incest a real possibility during slavery. The third ideological category uses incest to conceptualise miscegenation in order to reinforce sexual racism and generate horror and negative emotion towards interracial unions.

In this chapter, I use the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and the Blending Theory (CBT) to examine the connection between incest and miscegenation as a conceptual metaphor in American discourse on family and its re-elaboration in *DFE,* as showed in figure 2.1. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that within American discourse and legislation on the family, many linguistic expressions are interrelated and manifest the underlying conceptual metaphor: MISCEGENATION IS INCEST. In the second part of

the chapter, I propose that the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST is articulated in Dove's work with particular reference to the narrative trajectory delineated in her play *The Darker Face of the Earth* and the Sophoclean play *Oedipus the King*. My formulation for this specific conceptual metaphorical blend is: MISCEGENATION in *THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH* is INCEST in *OEDIPUS THE KING*.

Although every conceptual metaphor involves blending, for the analysis of the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST in American family discourse I use CMT. I have chosen to limit my analysis to the linguistic metaphorical expressions used to define the concept of miscegenation and to the conceptual mappings that I have individuated and extracted from American laws, texts, and secondary literature. CMT is used to point out and represent the changes in the target domain (miscegenation) and how the metaphorical use of incest has shaped and affected the conceptualisation of interracial unions in a specific discourse and context.

By singling out the components of this mapping, it is possible to see how the conceptual domain of incest has been used to understand and characterise the conceptual domain of racial interrelation and to reinforce the opposition to interracial intercourse and marriage, and, therefore, the idea of sexual racism. The metaphoric use of the concept of incest constructs miscegenation as an obscene and prohibited relation between specific categories of people.

For the metaphor MISCEGENATION IN *THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH* IS INCEST in *OEDIPUS THE KING*, I use CBT because I focus my analysis on the whole play and the whole creative process, not just individual linguistic expressions. I analyse the projection of elements from the input spaces onto the blended space and the emergence of new meaning.

I decided to create a single conceptual network (figure 2.1) to highlight the conceptual mappings of the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST and to represent the author's presupposed familiarity with this conceptual metaphor and her creative and subversive use of it in *DFE*. In this

way, I try to show that the metaphorical association between incest and miscegenation operates on a cognitive level and is active in the re-writing of the Oedipus' myth by Rita Dove.

In section 2.1., I delineate a rapid excursus on the presence of the concept of incest in the American debate of family and kinship. In section 2.2., I analyse the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST within American discourse about race and slavery. I systematically explain which elements of the source domain "incest" are mapped onto the target domain "miscegenation". In section 2.3., I focus on the presence of the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST in *The Darker Face of the Earth*, and I explore how the ancient myth is coherently reinterpreted and enriched in racial discourse. In section 2.4., I analyse the new emergent meaning of the entire blend. In section 2.5., I present my conclusion. Within the entire analysis, the literary works of *DFE* and *Oedipus the King* and their protagonists, Augustus and Oedipus, are constantly analysed in their similarities and differences.

2.1. Incest-based arguments in American familial legislation

Before analysing the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST that I see operating in *DFE* in detail, it is essential to contextualise and offer an overview of the use of incest within the broader American debate on family law. In the following examples, unlike those in section 2.2., incest is not used as a metaphor to conceptualise and understand another concept, but rather results in slippery slope arguments showing the terrible consequences if a certain law were passed.

It is not the aim of this chapter and of this dissertation to explore this debate in depth. However, for the purpose of my analysis, it is important to consider the use of the concept of incest in situations that have nothing to do with sexual and loving relationships between blood relatives in American family laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Incest is the prototypical example of the violation of boundaries that should not be crossed, and it is characterised, way beyond North America, as an illegal, repulsive, and disgusting practice, however, not in a uniform manner concerning the class of the individual for which incest laws apply. Incest comes to conceptualise and shape different kinds of unions in different times and contexts by implying the same repulsion.

Let me begin by tracing the presence of incest in the American debate on the family from more recent cases and then go back to the nineteenth century. Incest is a preventive justification used by marriage traditionalists to avoid acts they consider unnatural and dangerous to the institution of marriage and family itself.

In her study on incest within the contemporary family discourse, Cahill quotes the senator of United States Rick Santorum, who states in an interview (April 7, 2003):

> [2.1] If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual [gay] sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything. (Cahill 2005: 1544)

In this logic, the legalisation of same-sex marriage would open the door to the legalisation of sexual taboos such as polygamy and incest. A similar consideration is that of Hadley Arkes, Professor Emeritus of Jurisprudence and American Institutions at Amherst College, who believes that if same-sex marriage is allowed, then there would be no reason for the law to negate incest (Cahill 2005). In this kind of statement, gay marriage must be avoided at all costs in order to protect the institution of the family and maintain the status quo.

Incest is also the feared consequence of alternative reproduction for many conservative politicians, and organisations. Incest fear is at the heart of many statements, limitations, and pronunciations against alternative reproduction and non-biological, gay, and lesbian parenthood.[54] It is claimed

[54] See Cahill (2015).

that the anonymity of a donor could lead to relatives meeting without knowing each other's identities and inadvertently committing incest. The fear of incest is used to restrict and regulate unions and kinship; above all, it is used to define what a family is or should be.

The eminent philosopher Judith Butler has analysed the incest taboo in some of her own works.[55] Butler observes that the incest argument tends to resurface whenever non-traditional family structures press for legal recognition. This is the reason why, as I will show in detail in the next sub sections, the debate around interracial sexual relations and marriages arose after the declaration of emancipation and during the decades after the Civil War with greater strength and harshness than during the period of slavery.

2.1.1. A matter of race is a matter of blood. Crossing, amalgamation, and miscegenation.

Laws, customs, and taboos were active in the prevention of interracial unions. The first legal intervention[56] was passed in 1664 in the state of Maryland and legislation against interracial relations characterised American life until 1967. Concerns and questions about interracial relationships, sex, and marriage have always been part of the American debate about society, in terms of "crossing", "amalgamation", and "miscegenation", all used to describe interracial unions in a derogatory way.

In her study on miscegenation, Lemire asserts that "at least by 1815 the term 'cross' had been appropriated to refer to race mixing" (Lemire, 2002: 39). She provides the example of Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* in which the protagonist Hawk-eye, who, despite having been living with Native Americans for a long time, is "a man of white blood", a "man without cross". The term "cross" here means that his whiteness is pure and his white blood has not been "corrupted" by other races.

[55] See Butler (2000, 2004).

[56] For an overview of the history of interracial unions in the United States, see Woodson (1918); Hodes (1997); Pascoe (2009).

The term “amalgamation”, instead, is borrowed from the world of metallurgy, it originally refers to the procedure through which one or more metals are mixed when molten. The metallurgical term is translated into the debate about race. Race is believed to be a genetic and biological quality connected with reproduction. To calculate the amount of white blood and black blood in someone’s body was a matter of mathematics; a “mathematical problem of the same class with those mixtures of different liquors or different metals” (Lemire 2002: 51).

It is possible to make the analogies between races and metals because of the implied assumption that race is carried in blood and, as for metals, purity is degraded by mixing. George Washington, who used the term many times, wrote in a letter to Edward Coles: “amalgamation with the other color produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent” (Lemire 2002: 51). These analogies imply further conceptual metaphors, namely RACES ARE METALS and BLOOD IS METAL (a cognitive mapping that is still active today for example with the metaphorical expression “melting pot”).

These terms show that interracial relations are considered unnatural unions between specific and different categories that are and should remain naturally and biologically separated. Crossing blood, as well as amalgamation, are derogatory terms used to describe unions that, by mapping biology onto ideology, are considered a deviation from the norm and a threat to the preservation of the purity of white blood and thus the white race.

The term miscegenation was used for the first time in 1864 by the authors of a pamphlet called *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races* (Croly & Wakeman, 1864). The term derives from the Latin words “miscere” (to merge) and “genus” (species) and it is used to denote the “abstract idea of the mixture of two or more races” (Croly & Wakeman, 1864: ii). The term was coined right after Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863. The pamphlet, originally published anonymously, was written by two democrats, David Goodman Croly and

George Wakeman, who pretended to be republicans firmly believing in the positive effect of interracial marriage and unions for the progress of humanity. In the pamphlet, they defended the right of black people to marry white people after obtaining freedom. Their aim was actually the opposite: to warn the white population of the consequences of black emancipation.

During the slavery era, the subjugated and alienated position of black people defined the roles in the society of both white and black people. However, during and especially after the Civil War, when, for the first time, black people could join the army, many white Americans started to worry about the possibility of social and political equality, which could lead to interracial marriages and families. The anxiety on the part of white people grows exponentially in a situation of uncertainty and changes regarding the legal status of black people.

Martha Hodes, in her work on the history of sex between white women and black men, points out that:

> [2.2] White anxiety about sex between white women and black men is not a timeless phenomenon in the United States; rather, it is a historical development that evolved out of particular social, political, and economic circumstances. Scholars agree that the most virulent racist ideology about black male sexuality emerged in the decades that followed the Civil War, and some historians have recognized that the lynching of black men for the alleged rape of white women was comparatively rare in the South under slavery. (Hodes, 1997: 1)

The problem of the relationship between races gained a new urgency and Lincoln's position regarding slavery alarmed segregationists and racists. Croly and Wakeman wrote: "When the president proclaimed emancipation he proclaimed also the mingling of the race. The one follows the others as surely as noonday follows the sunrise" (cited in Lemire, 2002: 116). The emancipation proclamation began to also be called "the miscegenation proclamation", clearly showing that the greatest fear linked to emancipation was interracial sexual mixing. Even if the pamphlet was a hoax, it generated great concern and raised discussions all over the country, particularly in the South.

In 1864, the physician and strong defender of slavery and subjugation of Africans and African Americans, John H. Van Errie, wrote, in response to Croly and Wakeman, the pamphlet *Subjenation: the Theory of the normal relation of the races; An answer to "Miscegenation"*. According to Van Errie, God created white and black people unequal, and the safety of democracy and its progression rests on this sacred statement. Van Errie believed that miscegenation is an awful perversion of the instincts of reproduction and, he added, it requires a lot of time to "recover from the foul and horrible contamination of admixture of the blood of the negro" (cited in Masur, 1999: 119).

Miscegenation became the issue of Lincoln's presidential campaign and Lincoln had to answer this concern by stating that he has never been in favor of political and social equality of "the white and black race" (Lemire, 2002: 116), nor of their intermarriage. Miscegenation remained a political, social, and legal issue for years to come. As would have happened years later, the specter of incest is evoked in moments of social change to construct and express fear and disgust and to conceptualise these unions as unnatural and deviant from the norm.

2.2. MISCEGENATION IS INCEST. The conceptual metaphor of racist America

Incest has not only been used to represent the feared consequence and the potential harm of given law in matters of family legislation, but also as a metaphorical term interchangeable with the term "miscegenation". In this section, I explore the conceptual metaphor that lies behind this linguistic association.

I have come to the formulation of this conceptual metaphor based on considerations of the debate among racist American ideologues, starting at least in the eighteenth century and extending to the twentieth, who compared miscegenation to incest. In the following sub-sections, I analyse single

mappings from source (input space 1) “incest” onto target (input space 2) “miscegenation” of the conceptual metaphor.

2.2.1. First mapping

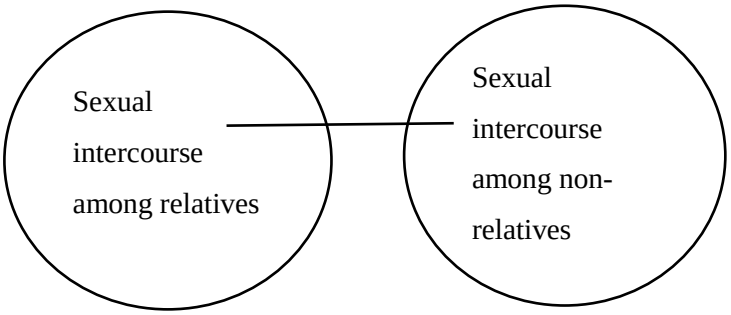

Figure 2.2

Incest describes sexual activity between two members of the same family; incest is familial mating. Therefore, the first element within the source domain “incest” is “sexual intercourse among relatives”. This element is mapped onto “sexual intercourse among non-relatives”. Although in the United States anti-miscegenation laws included interracial relationships between white people and various groups such as Native American, Chinese, and Filipinos, the fundamental and most pervasive concern has always been the relationship between black and white people.

At first sight, the association between incest and miscegenation seems illogical. Incest is a union between individuals who are considered very much alike, given that they belong to the same family. On the contrary, miscegenation is a union between individuals considered to be very different, as the notion of different races implied psychic, biological, cultural, and intellectually different, if not opposing, traits. This is what makes both taboos exchangeable, as Saks notes:

> [2.3] The taboo of too different (amalgamation/miscegenation) is interchangeable with the taboo of too similar (incest), since both crimes rely on a pair of bodies which are mutually constitutive of each other’s deviance, a pair of bodies in which each body is the

> signifier of the deviance of the other. Neither body can represent the norm, because each is figured as deviance from another. (Saks, 1988:71)

Both domains rely on the same structure: a relation between two bodies, which should never form a couple because of their reciprocal inappropriateness.

2.2.2. Second mapping

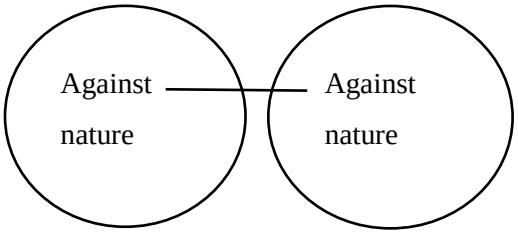

Figure 2.3

The Swiss scientist and biologist Luis Agassiz, who obtained a professorship in Zoology and Geology at Harvard University (1847), was a strong opponent of miscegenation. He was one of the most famous representatives of polygenism (polygenists propose that human origins came from different lineages, and, therefore, different origins produced different human races). During a lecture at the Charleston Literary Club in South Carolina in 1847, he explained that black people, by having a different origin than white people, constituted a separate human species. The city of Charleston played an important role in the slave trade and the institutionalisation of racism. For this reason, the decision taken by Dove to set her play on a plantation near Charleston might not have been accidental.

In a letter to the American abolitionist Samuel Gridley Howe in 1863, Agassiz stated that sexual relations between black and white people were "immoral" and, even more important for my analysis, that:

> [2.4] viewed from a high moral point of view the production of half breeds is as much a sin against nature, as incest in a civilized community, the idea of amalgamation is most repugnant to my feelings, I hold it to be a perversion of every natural sentiment. (Sollors, 1997: 298, emphasis added)

Through the metaphor of incest, Agassiz expresses a sense of disgust and repulsion, and, at the same time, through the prototypical symbol of the violation of natural boundaries, he conceptualises miscegenation as a deviation from a natural norm. Both incest and miscegenation were represented as sins against nature. To be attracted to a black person was said to be unnatural. This was a widespread opinion, supposedly, white people *naturally* preferred white partners because of a natural, God-given inclination.

In her study of the representation and portrayal by writers, novelists, and journalists of interracial coupling in the period between the Revolution and the Civil War, Lemire (2002) cites a wide range of texts that discuss the concept of "taste". The following short passage is taken from an article in the "New-York Commercial Advertiser", July 10, 1834.

> [2.5] For wise and good purposes, the Creator of all the earth gave distinctive features and properties to those whom he appointed to inhabit its diverse territories. He also, at the same time, endowed his creatures with the faculty of TASTE accompanying it with entire freedom of choice, thereby forming a perpetual and insurmountable barrier to the execrable amalgamation. (Lemire 2002:80, emphasis in original)

God and nature interdict amalgamation and interracial mingling.

These considerations have not lost vigor with time, as they permeated the contemporary debate on interracial marriages. President of the United States Harry S. Truman (term: 1945-1953), when asked about the future of interracial marriages and whether they were going to be widespread in the United States, answered: "I hope not; I don't believe it" (Zabel, 1965:1). The President then asked the interviewer if he would have approved the marriage between his daughter and a black man, and the interviewer answered that he

wanted for his daughter to marry whom she loved. The president added: "Well, she won't love someone who isn't her color". Truman's statement reproduces the recurrent concept of a natural preference for someone like "us" and a natural repugnance for "others".

In relation to incest, Cahill discusses the case of the Wisconsin Court of Appeals, which in 1997 stated: "the incestuous parent by his actions has demonstrated that the natural moral constraint of blood relationship has failed to prevent deviant conduct" (Cahill 2005: 1590, emphasis added). In addition, the Colorado Supreme Court, in the case of Israel v. Allen in 1978, concerning marriage between a brother and sister related by adoption, states:

> [2.6] [O]bjections that exist against consanguineous marriages are not present where the relationship is merely by affinity. The physical detriment to the offspring of persons related by blood is totally absent. The natural repugnance of people toward marriages of blood relatives, that has resulted in well-nigh universal moral condemnation of such marriages, is generally lacking in applications to the union of those only related by affinity. (Cahill 2005: 1567, emphasis added)

There is a "natural repugnance", which impedes interracial unions and relations between relatives. The repulsion toward incest is as natural as the one toward miscegenation. The metaphorical use of incest, therefore, points to interracial relations as a violation of the natural order.

2.2.3. Third mapping

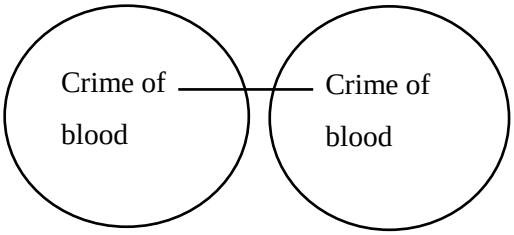

Figure 2.4

According to racist ideology, any contact between races is forbidden and considered revolting: something that disturbs a sense of decency and the

natural order. Interracial marriage, the apex of interracial intercourse, is outrageous and "incestuous". The law of North Carolina did not recognise interracial marriages contracted in other States in which they were legal:

> [2.7] And it is furthered argued that a marriage between persons of different races (might be) as unnatural as revolting as an incestuous one; and it is declared void by the law of North Carolina"[57](Cahill 2005: 1592, emphasis added).

The writer Chesnutt reports on a code in Mississippi in 1880 in which interracial marriages are defined as "incestuous and void" (Chesnutt, 1889:6). In the previous two examples, I see further linguistic expressions of the conceptual metaphor that I am proposing. In this way, through the adjective "incestuous", miscegenation, re-conceptualised as a deviation from the norm, has no legal status. Correspondences between incest and miscegenation have a strong persuasive impact and shape public opinion to the point that they also influence legislation. Therefore, the metaphorical use of incest to connote miscegenation led many courts and legal decisions to associate incest and miscegenation in criminal codes.

The Supreme Court of Missouri in 1883 declared that: "the State has the same right to regulate marriage in this respect [between white and black people] that it has to forbid the intermarriage of cousins and other blood relations" (Cahill 2005:1556). By reference to a marriage contracted outside the state of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Supreme Court proclaimed in 1924:

> [2.8] [i]n the case at bar the marriage was impossible under the statute, going out of the state to escape the statute, and going through the form of marriage in a state where the inhibition did not exist, and soon thereafter returning to this state, and all in an effort to accomplish indirectly what cannot be done directly, would be a fraud upon the laws of this state by a citizen of this state, and such a marriage cannot be recognized by the courts, neither can it be ratified or in any manner become legal by time or change or age or conduct of the parties. The inhibition, like the incestuous marriage, is in the blood, and the reason for it is stronger still. (Cahill 2005:1590, emphasis added)

[57] The Supreme Court of North Carolina, 1877.

Miscegenation, via the association with incest, is classified as a crime of blood.

Blood is regarded as the element through which hereditary qualities are carried and transmitted to offspring. As blood is fundamental to determining a person's race,[58] it is also fundamental to kinship. Biological and racial traits are reflected in blood, and the word blood metonymically expands its meaning, as in these linguistic examples: "pure blood", "half-blood" and "consanguinity".[59] Conceptualising miscegenation and incest as similar crimes implies that they are punished by a similar penalty.

2.2.4. Fourth mapping

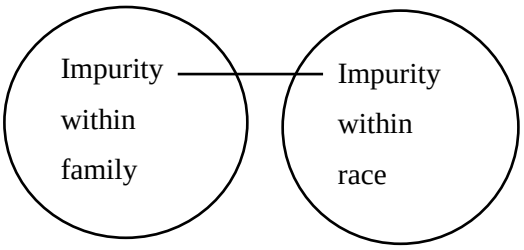

Figure 2.5

Incest and miscegenation were both considered causes of contamination and impurity. As highlighted by Burleigh, "both incest and miscegenation are sexual crossings of categorical boundaries; both index anxieties about blood purity" (Burleigh 2013: 204). Sheffer (2013) explains that incest and miscegenation were associated with their supposedly negative effect on offspring:

> [2.9] Throughout the nineteenth century, incest and miscegenation were further linked by their assumed weakening effect on the genetic

[58] It is enough here to mention the "one drop of blood rule": a social and legal principle of racial classification. In many States, for example Mississippi, it was asserted that the colour line is drown at one-fourth of black blood. If a person had less than one-fourth of black blood, they were considered white.

[59] For an analysis of the figurative use of "blood" and its elitist and racial implications in central texts of Western culture see Keyser (2017).

> stock— the former through hereditary birth defects and the latter through "dilution" of racial qualities. (Sheffer, 2013:15).

Anxiety about white purity was a huge concern among nineteenth century racist and white supremacist thinkers. In his *Treatise on Sociology: Theoretical and Practical* (1854), the proslavery thinker Henry Hughes states:

> [2.10] Hybridism is heinous. Impurity of races is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. The law of nature is the law of God. The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation forbids ethnical amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest. (cited in Sollors, 1997:298, emphasis added)

In this statement, the two terms are exchangeable and the practices are seen as equal. Amalgamation (miscegenation) is "ethnical incest" (Hughes, 1854: xxxiv) because, like incest, it is against nature and religion which, Hughes argues, are the same. Moreover, Hughes maps bloodline contamination within the same family onto the white race tainted by black blood. Racial and sexual segregation is necessary to the preservation of the purity and the progress of a race.

In his *Essay on the Inequality of Humane races* (1854), de Gabineau also asserts that race-mixing inevitably leads to the deterioration of humanity. Mixed race offspring represented the subversions of racial hierarchy and thus a danger for the supremacy of the white race; miscegenation directly leads to the degeneration of the white race, due to contamination by black blood. For this reason, interracial sexual unions and interracial breeding were of most vital concern.

Van Errie and Agassiz feared miscegenation because of its consequence on the white race. Agassiz states in 1863:

> [2.11] Conceive for a moment the difference it would make in future ages, for the prospect of republican institutions and our civilization generally, if instead of the manly population descended from cognate nations the United States should hereafter be inhabited by the effeminate progeny of mixed race, half Indian, half Negro, sprinkled with white blood […] I shudder from the consequences

> […]. How shall we eradicate the stigma of a lower race when its blood has once been allowed to flow freely into that of our children. (cited in Ferber, 1998:30)

The element of blood is crucial in the procreation discourse; race and, therefore, one's inferiority or superiority, are linked to blood and procreation.

2.2.5. Fifth mapping

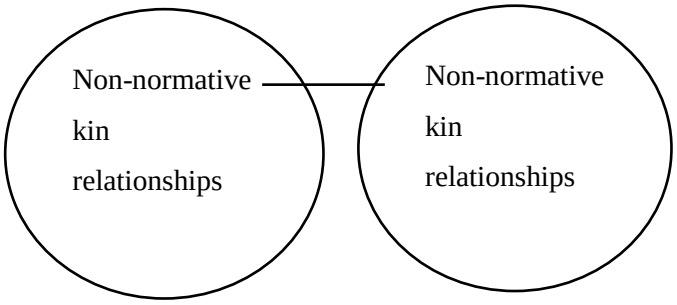

Figure 2.6

Incest is not only conventionally seen as a violation of boundaries, it is also a violation of terms. Cahill reminds us that many "psychologists have remarked that familial names perform a prescriptive as well as the descriptive function" (Cahill, 2005:1583). Familial names represent defined social roles, and define and reinforce appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Martin Weich (1968) talks about a "verbal taboo" which serves to support the incest taboo. Using terms like "mother", "father", "brother", and "sister" instead of the proper names of the individual, categorises that person within the family frame, and at the same time reinforces boundaries and sets sexual limits (Cahill, 2005:1584). Incest bans illicit unions and ties, contributing to the definition of family, family roles, and kinship. The capacity of incest to contribute to the norm is transferred, metaphorically, to miscegenation.

Miscegenation becomes sexual horror, and its association or even assimilation with incest creates and negates family roles at the same time. In fact, the shame and the repulsion characterising miscegenation ultimately cause silence and secrecy. Silence and secrecy lead to the denial of kinship; for the mixed race child it is impossible to call their biological parents "father"

or “mother” (most of the time, it was the white father who denied his paternity).

In a reverse order, prohibition against miscegenation made the use of terms within the family frame impossible. If the incest taboo establishes sexual boundaries between father and daughters, mothers and sons, brothers and sisters, miscegenation caused the impossibility to use those terms and, therefore, to establish family connections and links after sexual intercourse has already occurred. The chaos caused by not using the correct terms to denote individuals, created the possibility to commit incest on the plantations, leading to the real, not metaphoric, occurrence of an incestuous-miscegeneous act, like in the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*.

2.3. MISCEGENATION IN *THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH* IS INCEST IN *OEDIPUS THE KING*

In the following sub-sections I analyse the function of incest in Rita Dove’s *DFE*. I focus on the metaphorical blend MISCEGENATION IN *DFE* is INCEST IN *OEDIPUS THE KING*, by analysing the elements projected from the input spaces onto the blend.

2.3.1. Augustus and Amalia

In *DFE*, two acts of miscegenation are present: the one between the slave Hector and the slave owner Amalia, and the one between Augustus and Amalia. The relation between relatives (input space 1), which in the *Oedipus the King* has the form of a relation between mother and son (input space 3), and the interracial relation between nonrelatives (input space 2) are projected onto the relationship between Augustus and Amalia. They are an interracial couple, but their roles are not only those of slave owner and enslaved man, but also of mother and son.

2.3.2. Against nature

Miscegenation has been defined as unnatural by pro-slavery thinkers and racists, via its metaphorical association with incest. The element "against nature" of input spaces 1, 2 and 3 is projected onto the blended space. In the prologue of *DFE*, the doctor himself, referring to Augustus, says: "This is unnatural" (*DFE*: prologue).

I argue that, miscegenation in *DFE* has its metaphorical counterpart in incest in *Oedipus the King.* Nevertheless, there is a subtle but important shift concerning what should be avoided or hidden *qua* unnatural. Whereas in the input space "incest in *Oedipus the king*" it is the unnatural union between relatives, specifically, mother and son that should be avoided, in the input space "miscegenation", it is the interracial union and the interracial offspring that are unnatural.

I propose a connection between the use of the adjective "unnatural" in relation to Augustus, which is what drives his exposure, and Oedipus' actions, defined against the law of nature. When Oedipus became aware of his actions and his true identity, he complains and damns the path of his tremendous life:

[2.12] Οἰδίπους: ὦ φῶς, τελευταῖόν σε προσβλέψαιμι νῦν,
ὅστις πέφασμαι φύς τ' ἀφ' ὧν οὐ χρῆν, ξὺν οἷς τ'
οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν, οὕς τέ μ' οὐκ ἔδει κτανών.

Oedipus: O light, may I now look on you for the last time,
I who am revealed as cursed in my birth, cursed in my marriage, cursed in my killing! (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 1183–5)

Oedipus' offenses and the unbearable truth of his existence are expressed with symmetric sentences in a tragic climax.

Note the presence of the verb χρῆν (used twice) and the verb (ἔδει), although this is not the place for a full examination of these expressions, suffice it to say that the semantic range of "χρῆ" (it is necessary to, one should) and "δει" (it is necessary to) is one of necessity and obligation. These terms can assume a variety of meanings and can be translated, depending on the context, as "must", "should", "is necessary", "is the divine will". Oedipus'

actions are against human and divine rules. Both incest and miscegenation are defined as something that should not have happened because they go against the laws of nature.

2.3.3. Cause of Augustus' exposure

I suggest that the role of incest (together with parricide) in *Oedipus the King* as the cause of Oedipus' departure from Corinth and his exile from Thebes is re-elaborated in *DFE* in the form of miscegenation as the cause for Augustus' exposure. Unlike in the *Oedipus the King*, in *DFE* it is not incest and the attempt to avoid the fulfilment of the prophecy, and then its ultimate realisation that shatters the order and seals Augustus' fate, but miscegenation. Rita Dove, in fact, in relation to the events of *DFE*, states: "the open secret of miscegenation would be the key that turns the lock of Fate" (Ingersoll 2003:176).

The theme of the exposure is a very common pattern in the tale of the birth of the hero. [60] It consists of the failed attempt to kill the baby by his parents, usually his father or another male representative of power. One of the causes of child's "exposure" is an illicit sexual union. In *DFE* Augustus is sold and exposed[61] because the highest symbol of racial order has been transgressed: a black man has had sexual intercourse with a white woman.

Laws, public opinion, and customs viewed sexual liaisons between white women/ black men and white men/ black women differently. These latter unions, which often implied the rape of enslaved women by male owners of enslaved people, were largely permitted. This was a well-known phenomenon that never created much concern, thus showing the patriarchal nature of the slavery system.[62] This practice was even referenced directly in American law with the so-called "partus sequitur ventrem" law, which

[60] For an analysis on this topic see: Rank (1909); Huys (1995).

[61] See chapter 1 section 1.5., for a discussion of Augustus' exposure as the result of a blend between the tale-pattern "child exposed at birth" and the slavery pattern "mixed race child being sold".

[62] See chapter 1, section 1.4.1.

regulated the legal status of children born from white and black parents. The Latin formula delineates the link between the mothers' and children's status: the child would inherit enslaved or free status from his or her mother. Sexual abuse of enslaved women was, in fact, not only tolerated but also economically profitable. The child of a white man and a black woman was considered a slave, and his or her destiny was to serve on their father's plantation, with the possibility to be sold to another master.

The relationship between white women and black men had a different impact on social opinion and the entire institution of slavery, which equated being black with being a slave, than those between white men and black women. According to historical documents, there were many cases where after giving birth to a mixed-race child, a white woman, especially if she belonged to the upper class, was asked to divorce her husband or was forced to leave her home and move away, while the mixed race child was sold and sent away. Amalia belongs to a family of white, rich plantation owners, from a white supremacist perspective, the most respectable and honorable class of individuals. Therefore, her relationship with the slave Hector had to be kept secret and the baby had to be sent away.

2.3.4. Cause of Augustus' curse

The element "crime of blood" in input spaces 1 and 2, and the element "cause of Oedipus' curse" in input space 3 are projected onto the blended space. Miscegenation in many cases is criminalised in the same way as incest,[63] and in *DFE*, the crime of miscegenation assumes the form of a curse.

Scylla[64] on the night Augustus was born gained prophetic powers:

[2.13] SCYLLA: The veil was snatched from my eyes–
and over the hill I saw
bad times a-coming. Bad times
coming over the hill on mighty horses,
horses snorting as they galloped
through slave cabin and pillared mansion,

[63] See section 2.2.4.
[64] Scylla is a blend between the Greek seer Tiresias and an African conjure woman.

horses whinnying as they trampled
everything in their path.
Like a thin black net
the curse settled over the land. (*DFE*, Act 1, scene 1)

She envisions the curse released on the plantation, represented through the powerful visual metaphor of mighty horses invading the land bringing chaos and violence. The frightening vision is projected onto Augustus' birth, which subverts racial boundaries and threatens social order.

Augustus, during an argument with Scylla, in an attempt to demean her proclaimed prophetic abilities and skills as a voodoo practitioner, tells her: "Are you going to put a curse on me, too, Scylla?". Scylla replies: "No need to curse you: you have been cursed already" (*DFE*, Act 1, scene 5). Augustus, the result of an illicit union, is cursed by the system of slavery in which he was born.

I suggest that miscegenation in *DFE* acts as a curse imposed on Augustus, in the same way incest acts as Oedipus' curse. Miscegenation and incest are on the opposite sides of illicit sexual intercourse. Augustus and Oedipus represent the crossing of boundaries that should not be crossed. As tabooed characters, both Augustus and Oedipus are outsiders; they are cursed, and are moving toward the same destiny. Their destiny has been set at birth and is a tragic one, from which they cannot emerge. They are powerless against it.

I have individuated in both plays the conceptual metaphor of the fall through which Augustus and Oedipus' tragic destinies are conceptualised. Scylla prophesies Augustus' destiny by saying: "Oh, you may dance now, but <u>you will fall</u>. The devil inside you will cut you down to your knees" (*DFE*, Act 1, scene 5, emphasis added). In *Oedipus the King*, Tiresias is the blind seer who prophesies Oedipus' destiny via the metaphor of the fall, expressed linguistically by the verb πεσεῖν (from πίπτω, "to fall down"):

[2.14] ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ: οὐ γάρ σε μοῖρα πρός γ'ἐμοῦ <u>πεσεῖν</u>, ἐπεὶ
ἱκανὸς Ἀπόλλων, ᾧ τάδ' ἐκπρᾶξαι μέλει.

> Tiresias: No, it is not at my hand that you are destined to fall, since Apollo, who has it in mind to bring this about, will be sufficient. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. 376–7, emphasis added)[65]

Tiresias' words give the impression that Apollo is working to seal Oedipus' destiny and, therefore, facilitate his destruction.

In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus' curse is of familial nature. The curse is defined by the seer in terms that convey different familial roles, tremendously combined in one person:

[2.15] ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ: φανήσεται δὲ παισὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ ξυνὼν
ἀδελφὸς αὐτὸς καὶ πατήρ, κἀξ ἧς ἔφυ
γυναικὸς υἱὸς καὶ πόσις, καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς
μόσπορός τε καὶ φονεύς.

> Tiresias: And he shall be revealed as being to his children whom he lives with both a brother and a father, and to his mother both a son and a husband, and to his father a sharer in his wife and a killer. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. 457–60)

The different predicates ascribed to Oedipus are per se neutral terms that, by virtue of their combination, emerge as absurd and absolutely irregular: brother and father, son and husband, fellow-sower and killer. Moreover, the terms αὐτοῦ and αὐτὸς (contracted forms of ὁ αὐτός, "same") strongly underscore sameness: Oedipus himself is the subject of different, contrasting appositions.

Augustus' curse is caused by the dissolution of racial boundaries and illegal familial bonds. When Scylla explains the vision she had the night Augustus was born, she states that the curse touched four people:

[2.16] SCYLLA: The curse touched four people
DIANA: (getting scared) Who were they?
Who were the four people?
SCYLLA: Black man, black woman,
white woman, white man. (*DFE*, act 1, scene 1)

[65] For an analysis of this passage see chapter 1, section 1.3.1.

The chorus of the slaves repeats Scylla's words ("black man, black woman, white woman, white man") several times in the act, to reinforce the focus on the racialised connotation of the familial curse. In a country with racist policies, racist ideologies, an institutionalised system of slavery, and the annihilation of black people, Augustus threatens the racial order just as much as he threatens the familial order.

2.3.5. Impurity within family and race

The elements "impurity between family" and "impurity between race" of input spaces 1, 2 and 3 are projected and blended onto the blended space. Blood, as a metonymy for race and family, defines bloodline and racial affiliations. Mixing familial blood, or blood of two different races, causes impurity of family and of race. Miscegenation causes blood pollution in *DFE*, like incest in *Oedipus the King*.

Augustus represents a threat to his family, but also to the social order, because of the subversion of racial boundaries and the lack of difference from white people, which is metaphorically represented in him by his mixed blood:

[2.17] SCYLLA: Your Augustus is pretty clever—
been lots of places and knows
the meaning of words and things like that.
But something's foul in his blood,
and what's festering inside him
nothing the side of the living
can heal. A body hurting that bad
will do anything to get relief- anything.
(*DFE*, act 2, scene 3, emphasis added).

Here, Scylla is talking about Augustus' blood and mixed-race. Moreover, Augustus' blood holds "the horrible truth of his own relationship with his family" (Wilson, 2012: 580). Augustus represents the conflict between family, blood ties, and race.

In *Oedipus the King*, the committed incest caused impurity within family, as emerges from the following words pronounced by Oedipus:

[2.18] Οἰδίπους: ὦ γάμοι γάμοι,

> ἐφύσαθ’ ἡμᾶς, καὶ φυτεύσαντες πάλιν
> ἀνεῖτε ταὐτὸν σπέρμα, κἀπεδείξατε
> πατέρας ἀδελφούς, παῖδας αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον,
> νύμφας γυναῖκας μητέρας τε, χὠπόσα
> αἴσχιστ’ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔργα γίγνεται.
>
> Marriage, marriage, you gave me birth, and after you had done so you brought up the selfsame seed, and displayed fathers who were brothers, children who were fruit of incest, brides who were both wives and mothers to their spouses, and all things that are most atrocious among men. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. 1403–8, emphasis added)

It is worth noting the reference to blood (αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον). Incest causes contamination within a family because of the shredding of too-familiar blood, the most shameful thing among mortals. Miscegenation and incest are, respectively, causes of blood contamination in Augustus and Oedipus' offspring and family.

2.3.6. Non-normative kin relationships

The element "non-normative kin relationships" in input space 1, 2 and 3 is projected onto the blended space. In American literature, the erasure of family ties, the impossibility to trace genealogical inheritance, and the consequent narrative theme of obscure origins have been at the center of many dramas, novels, and plays. One of them is *Mulatto,* a play in two acts written by Langston Hughes in 1931.The action takes place on a plantation in Georgia where the slave owner, Colonel Norwood, has a longtime relationship with the black enslaved woman, Cora, whom he does not call wife. Cora and Colonel Norwood have various children, but he does not call any of them son or daughter.

In the following short exchange between Robert (Cora's son) and his white father, the erasure of family ties is evident; the impossibility for Robert to call the white man "father" and the opposition between "son" and "bastard", which are racially laden terms, illustrate the clash between race and kin.

[2.19] Norwood: I mean talk like a nigger should do to a white man
Robert: Oh! But I'm not a nigger, Colonel Tom. I'm your son
Norwood: (Testily) You are Cora's boy.
Robert: Women don't have children by themselves.
Norwood: Nigger women don't know the father. You are a bastard. (Hughes, *Mulatto*, Act 2, scene 1)

The same opposition between the term "son" and "bastard" is present in Rita Dove's play. After Augustus' birth, Louis says to the doctor: "Get rid of it, destroy the bastard" (*DFE*: prologue). The term "bastard" is used four times by Louis in relation to Augustus, while Amalia refers to him as her son. Maternal love is erased by white male power and the racial system of slavery. Augustus and the majority of mixed-race children cannot call their white parents "father" or "mother".

In *Oedipus the King*, it is incest which defines the non-normative kin relationship. As I showed in section 2.3.4., the problematic nature of Oedipus is expressed in the absurd combination of terms used to define the normative family and normative roles. Oedipus is defined as brother and father of the same children, son and husband of the woman to whom he was born. There are no terms defining this new familial relationship. In *Oedipus the King*, familial categories have slipped into each other, they conflict with each other, creating shameful connections. In *DFE* familial categories conflict with racial categories. In both cases, children were denied birthrights and inheritance, creating family drama.

All the statements and mappings that I have analysed in the previous sections place incest and miscegenation symmetrically on the extreme sides of the same unnatural scale of sin and deviation and prove that miscegenation in *DFE* has the same function and characteristics of incest in *Oedipus the King*. All of these conceptualisations converge on Augustus, who is a mixed-race slave who commits incest. In the fictional plantation of *The Darker Face of the Earth*, in fact, as in many real plantations, the convergence of the taboos of miscegenated incest and incestuous miscegenation, is not only metaphoric

but also very literal. In the next section, I show that in Rita Dove's play incest and miscegenation overcome the horrifying representation of unnatural and dangerous mingling, and acquire further, liberating meanings.

2.4. New meaning emerging from the blend

Metaphorical blends, beyond each mapping providing analogic relations, have an 'extra', emergent meaning that is not suggested by the individual input domains. In this section, I analyse the emergent meaning of the metaphorical blend of incest and miscegenation in *DFE*.

Miscegenation represents a common literary trope. However, most of the time, the protagonists of a (sometimes incestuous) mixed race relationship are a white man and a black woman. The horrible truth of sexual abuse and white supremacy is present in the Jennings' plantation as in all American plantations. It is a parallel theme that emerges at times in the play but does not come to the foreground.

In the prologue, Louis is furious at Amalia for her faithless conduct, but she is equally aware of his behavior as sexual abuser on the plantation:

> [2.20] AMALIA: so it's alright for you
> to stroll out by the cabins
> any fine night you please? Ha.—
> The big white hunter with his scrawny whip! (*DFE*: prologue)

and:

> [2.21] AMALIA: But not even Daddy
> suspected where you would seek
> your satisfaction. It was your right
> to pull on those riding boots
> and stalk little slave girls.
> God knows what you do to them in the name of ownership.
> (*DFE*: prologue)

Augustus himself thinks that he is the mixed race son born from abuse upon an enslaved woman by a white man because, as he said, this is "an old story"

both in history and fiction.[66] Nevertheless, this is not the story of Amalia and Augustus. This represents a major difference between *DFE* and other works on the same theme of incestuous miscegenation and slave narrative in general.

When myth is re-activated in a context characterised by oppression, as in the case of *DFE*, it can have a subversive power and assume different connotations. The relationship between Amalia and Augustus is complicated by the prototypical confusion of family ties in the Southern plantation blended with the Oedipal motif of incest.

In chapter 1 section 1.4., I argued that due to the mapping with *Oedipus the King* and the blend of Amalia and Louis with Jocasta and Laius, Dove reverses power relations and gender roles. Incest and miscegenation are not the result of abusive and perverse dynamics of power but of romance. Dove herself defines the play as a love story (cited in Goff and Simpson, 2007: 138).

The revolutionary power of love changes both Amalia and Augustus.[67] Amalia starts to act more humanely toward the slaves and she "becomes multidimensional and even nurturing and loving" (Pereira, 2003:48). Moreover, as stated by the slave Phebe, desire and love give her a new reason to live:

> [2.22] PHEBE: When she married Massa Louis
> she began to sour.
> Seemed like disappointment killed her.
> […]
> And now you [Augustus]'ve brought her back to life.
> (*DFE*, act 2, scene 7)

Augustus goes through changes himself, and his system, which only consisted of two elements, "hate and be hated",[68] collapses and he has to choose between love and freedom. Therefore, in *DFE*, interracial mingling become a

[66] See chapter 3, section 3.5.1.
[67] For a complete analysis of the character of Amalia, see chapter 1 section 1.4.
[68] For an analysis of the complexity of Augustus, see chapter 3.

tool to show the bonds hidden behind racial oppositions, to overcome these barriers, and express revolutionary possibilities of interracial desire and love.

The concept of incest has also been re-elaborated. Rita Dove stated in an interview that her inspiration for the incest that occurs in *DFE* was Sophocles' tragedy (Ingersoll, 2003:187). Nevertheless, Dove's treatment of incest is distant from that in *Oedipus the King.* The relationship between Amalia and Augustus is often at the centre of the narration and of the characters' thoughts, and, most importantly, it is delineated as a love story, impossible in the eyes of both anti-miscegenation laws and within the complex Oedipal plot.

Moreover, incest, in *DFE,* is not characterised as horrific or tremendous as in *Oedipus the King*. In the last scene, where Augustus and Amalia recognise themselves not only as lovers but as relatives, the discovery of incest does not have the terrible consequence that it does in *Oedipus the King*. Amalia kills herself, like Jocasta does, however, this happens not because of the horror she feels for the act she has committed but because of her maternal love, to save her son, again in danger, as the night he was born. Augustus has to kill his master Amalia but love has taken the place that hate once had, and, in a desperate final act, he tries to stop Amalia from stabbing herself and save the mother he had just found. Incest, as a form and metaphor for interracial love, contributes to the dismantling, even if for a short moment, of a system of hate and division.

Incest, in fact, as a metaphor for miscegenation, not only represents a familial drama, but represents the complex dynamics hidden under rigid racial segregation. Incestuous miscegenation or miscegenous incest, is a form of love, a subversive element in a system of annihilation, as that of slavery. In my opinion, Dove deals in a completely original way with elements which, as has been shown, have played a fundamental role in more than one culture and literary tradition. She reworks the plot and concepts firmly rooted in different traditions, but what emerges is something different that recovers the old to overcome it in a new, more powerful framework. Incest and miscegenation

acquire further meanings. They are the symbol of a country that is not only racially divided by hate and violence but inextricably linked by passion, love, suffering, parentage and desire.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed historical accounts that provide evidence of the widespread use of incest to conceptualise and talk about miscegenation. I have shown how these correspondences and analogies underpin the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST.

A cognitive linguistic approach shows that Dove's representation of miscegenation is part of the longstanding tradition of the metaphorical association between incest and miscegenation. In *DFE,* the role and function of the concept of miscegenation, the language used to address it, and the re-elaboration of the concept of incest present in *Oedipus the King* depend on the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST, rooted in a specific period of time in the United States of America.

CMT and CBT provide the framework to explain how Dove does not duplicate plot patterns or episodes in her work, but re-contextualises and re-conceptualises them simultaneously, by merging elements and structures which already exist in African American history and literature. In this way, incest is not only a mythical element transposed in another context but has its roots and causes in the context of slavery.

Moreover, a cognitive approach provides evidence of the creative re-use of incest in *DFE* which, many (Goff, 2016; Carlisle, 2000) believed to have been overshadowed by or not as powerful as miscegenation in the play. Goff, for example, states: "The transgression of incest and patricide is almost overshadowed by the transgression of interracial sex" (Goff, 2016:9).

On the one hand, I have shown that, by reversing gender relations through the blend with characters, roles, and participants' relations in *Oedipus the King*, miscegenation is not the result of the white male slave owner's

sexual and power abuse of his slaves, but an act of love. Miscegenation is an unspeakable desire repressed and muted in a nation obsessed with racial boundaries and oppressed by patriarchy and the system of slavery. On the other hand, I have pointed out how incest, blended with a story of interracial love (miscegenation) takes on a different connotation: it is not abhorred, and it is not described as horrific and repulsive. Incest is the desire emerging from the repressive system of slavery, which denied interracial love and family.

Chapter 3. Re-writing history, myth, and folklore: A cognitive linguistic analysis of Augustus

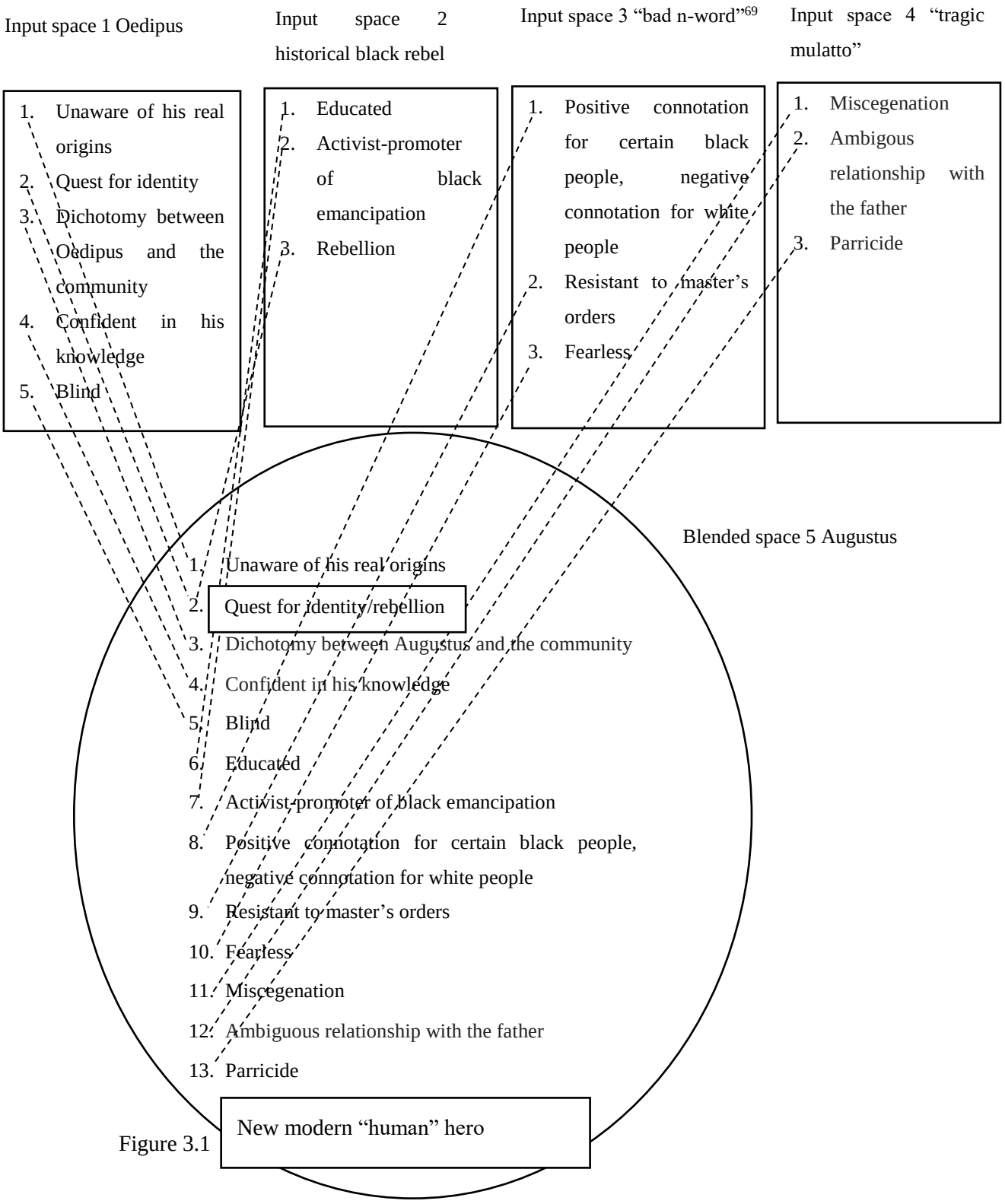

Figure 3.1

[69] In this chapter, I have chosen to avoid the use of the racist slur and will instead use the term 'n-word' to refer to the popular, racist, folkloric and literary character. When quoting passages from literary critics and from Dove's own text, I will retain the original language and expressions used by the authors.

In this chapter, I introduce and examine the main character of *DFE*, namely, Augustus. Through a close reading of the text and an analysis of Augustus' name, actions, words, and relationship with the other characters, I highlight his main features in order to show the complexity of his persona. The main features that I identify in *DFE* for this character are his name, his actions, his words, and his relation with the other characters.

Before moving on with the analysis, a brief recap of the main protagonists of the play is in order. Augustus is the son of the slave Hector and the white mistress Amalia. Louis is Amalia's husband. Scylla is the Tiresias' character, she gained prophetic powers the night Augustus was born. Phebe is a young slave, born on the plantation who is attracted to Augustus from the very first moment she sees him, but she is also Augustus' second in command during the uprising.[70]

Figure 3.1 describes the conceptual network of the character Augustus, who is, according to my reading, a blended space; a construction produced by the projection of material recruited from different input spaces. Various literary, mythical, and historical figures contribute to the emergent figure of Augustus, beyond the relatively straightforward "Oedipus" character. The input spaces 1, 2, 3 and 4 represent what I suggest are the main fictional and non-fictional characters on which Augustus is modeled. Within the entire chapter, literary works and their protagonists, Augustus, Oedipus, fictional and historical figures are analysed in their similarities and differences. Augustus is not the simple sum of parts projected from input spaces; he is a unique, new character who evolves throughout Dove's play.

In section 3.1., I analyse the characters' names, in particular, the names Augustus and Hector; the first clear sign of Dove's merging of the domains of ancient history, mythology, and the North American slavery system. I focus on the names Augustus and Hector to explain Dove's choice, between historicism and resistance. In section 3.2., I provide an analysis of the input space 1, "Oedipus", specifically the Sophoclean Oedipus of the tragedy

[70] For the detailed summary of the play, see chapter 1 section 1.1.

Oedipus the King. In section 3.3., the focus is on input space 2, the "historical black rebel" within the slavery era. In section 3.4., I examine input space 3, the folkloric figure of the "bad n-word". In section 3.5., I analyse input space 4, the literary fictional character of the "tragic mulatto". In section 3.6., I analyse the meaning emerging from the blended space "Augustus". In section 3.7., I present my conclusion. Through a cognitive linguistic analysis, I argue that Augustus is at the center of Dove's process of constant dialogue with previous traditions and shares features from prototypical characters but he deviates from predetermined features and develops his own complex figure.

3.1. Augustus and the cognitive underpinnings of *nomen omen*

White owners used to rename enslaved people in order to suppress their African identity and to subjugate them, to reinforce the idea that enslaved people were the property of their master. In her work on the politics of naming and renaming in European, Caribbean, and North American contexts of chattel slavery, Benson states that the "questions of naming, of both collective and individual designation, were integral to practices of domination" (Benson, 2006: 180). The act of renaming an enslaved person was part of the process by which the enslaved people became the property of the slave owner (Burton, 1999). Once brought to America and cut off from their true origins, they were forced to construct history and identity based on the new culture of their masters, beginning with the names.

In Jennings' plantation, we find many slaves with Greco-Roman names: Phoebe, Diana, Scipio, Scylla, Hector, Alexander, and Augustus. To give Greco-Roman names to enslaved individuals, whether related to history or myth, was a very popular practice during the slavery era:

> [3.1] Next to the Bible, the "classics" were undoubtedly the most prevalent sources of the names given by early slaveholders and continued by their slaves. The frequency and variety of ancient Greek and Roman names were more than simply a reflection on the emphasis of eighteenth-century education. Southerners prided

> themselves on their knowledge and appreciation of Graeco-Roman civilization and often stressed the many similarities between it and their own society, not the least of which was the institution of slavery. (Inscoe, 1983: 541)

Inscoes' data are particularly interesting because they are drawn from North and South Carolina records, where Dove places Jennings' plantation. Greco-Roman civilisation was used to assert the cultural superiority of white owners and to legitimise and justify a social order that enslaved Africans and African-Americans. Giving the names of heroes and great historical figures to people who had no legal and human status was a practice characterised by a form of cruel irony and by:

> [3.2] an additional dimension to the mockery: the slaves' ignorance of the significance of their names. Only those in possession of the cultural capital that such names represent can fully understand the joke, while the ignorant slave is made unwittingly to bear the mark of his or her own cultural inferiority. (Williamson, 2020: 65)

The name Augustus recalls the Roman *princeps* to the reader's mind; consequently, it produces associations with the mental spaces of power, military leadership, and *auctoritas*. Unlike the other slaves, Augustus Newcastle is an educated slave; he is the only one who knows the meaning and the relevance of his name. This is how he introduces himself to the other slaves:

> [3.3] SCIPIO: […] What do you go by?
> AUGUSTUS: Augustus
> SCIPIO: Au-gus-tus? Ain't never heard that one before. What kind of name is that?
> AUGUSTUS: The name of a king.
> (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 3)

Not only his name but also the capacity to go back to the origin of his name, give him a certain authority and specificity in comparison to other slaves. Being able to decode his name is, for Augustus, a way to comprehend and at the same time shape his own identity. Augustus, once he joins the revolt on the plantation, sees himself as a natural leader not only because of his

knowledge, bravery, and strength, but also because of his name and, I add, because of the cognitive conceptual domain that the name evokes in him. Rita Dove uses Greek names for slaves not just because of its historically common practice. Augustus' knowledge and appropriation of Western and classical culture is a tool of resistance and, most importantly, of self-definition, against a culture to which he and all the slaves are subjected, politically and culturally.

A further example of self (re)-definition through the conscious appropriation of a name imposed by the master is offered by history. One of the largest slave uprisings was the Stono Rebellion,[71] which began on the 9th of September 1739 near the Stono River, 20 miles (30 kilometres) southwest of Charleston, South Carolina. Not many sources of the rebellion are available and the identity of the enslaved people and their leaders is uncertain. Some reports, however, mention a man called "Cato" (named after the roman senator and philosopher Cato Uticensis, famous for his tenacity and integrity in his opposition to Caesar), as the leader of the rebellion. One of the sources of this rebellion is his great-great-grandson, George Cato. George Cato had been interviewed by Stiles M. Scruggs for the *Federal writers' project* (1936-1938), a federal government programme created to provide jobs for out-of-work writers during the Great Depression. Along with the particulars of the uprising, he said that his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all been named Cato in honor of their rebel ancestor, and, once emancipated, he proudly made it his surname (Shuler, 2009).

Names are identity markers, and they contribute concreteness and references to the collective memory of a cultural community. To delete African names is to delete African collective memory.[72] Nevertheless, a Greco-Roman name imposed by the owner of an enslave individual and linked to a defined mental space could take on additional meanings and

[71] For a detailed analysis of the rebellion, see Smith (2005).

[72] For insights into the practice of naming in colonial context, see Burton (1999); Vom Bruck (2006); Lopez (2015).

become the bearer of a new narrative and mythology, as in the case of George Cato. From a cognitive perspective, this occurs when the name evokes a specific frame in someone's mind, such as "hero".

When Augustus makes his first acquaintance with the other slaves, he is introduced to Hector. We readers are surprised to hear the slave's name is "Hector" and Augustus is surprised too. Augustus activates a mythological mental space in his mind that his fellow slaves cannot activate. Hector is described by Augustus in the following way: "Hector, mighty warrior, abandoned by the gods" (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 3). A reader well-versed in Greek mythology, as Augustus, would associate the epic hero Hector with warrior's skills and the valor and courage in defending his city of which his father is the king.

Moreover, Hector has a tragic and fatal destiny that is mapped onto the one of the slave. Hector, in the *Iliad*, is represented as a loving husband and father who has to say goodbye to his family for his destiny to be fulfilled; a fate much crueler (slavery) denies the slave Hector the opportunity to live with his family twice, first in Africa, and then with Amalia and his son.

While revealing, in a trance, what she saw the night Augustus was born, Scylla addresses Hector with these words: "Hector, son of Africa, stolen from his father's hut sold on auction block" (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 1). I suggest that this verse represents another blend of the mythical Greek heroes and the historical context of slavery. Scylla does not know the mythical figure of Hector, but her words activate in our minds the mental spaces of the *Iliad*, the Trojan war, and all the features of the Trojan hero. The tragedy of the hero and the violence inflicted on his body (dragged behind the chariot by the enraged Achilles) are mapped onto the body of the African slave, a body no longer his own but violated and sold to his future master.

Hector is not just a slave with the name of a hero given by his master. I believe that Rita Dove mines the mythical and heroic proportions of black people's lives and suffering. Their struggles against an inescapable destiny,

slavery,[73] denote heroic, fearless, noble vicissitudes, such as those of the Trojan warrior Hector. The powerful result I see in the meaning that emerges from the blend is the mythical hero of the New World, Hector.

As I showed in this section, the name is important for Augustus' self-definition, and the mental space of the king is undoubtedly present in Augustus' mind at the moment of his introduction to his fellow slaves. Names are important for self-understanding and for the creation or destruction of identity. However, I decided not to model a mental space for the name "Augustus". The conceptual network (figure 3.1.) I have created contains the mental spaces that I believe are fundamental to the formation of the new character of Augustus. Augustus is a complex character, and he can be analysed in more than one way with reference to other input spaces, but I believe that the mental space of the historical figure of Augustus was not relevant to the creative process of shaping, understanding and interpreting this literary character. Dove's Augustus does not mirror the Roman *princeps*; the interactions, behaviour and development of Dove's Augustus are completely different from those of the historical leader. The life of Augustus has none of the plot elements, narrative sequences, causal structure and action roles of the Roman *princeps*, and their stories do not share any specific common themes.

In the following section, I will show that, in terms of cognitive conceptual mapping, Rita Dove maps the mental space of "Oedipus" onto Augustus. She, therefore, warns us to think of her character as a tragic hero and a king more like Oedipus than Augustus; an outsider whose royalty implies special powers, even if he loses it all at the end of the play.

3.2. Input space 1 "Oedipus"

[73] For the conceptual blend between the input spaces "fate" and "slavery", see chapter 1, section 1.3.1.

1. Unaware of his real origins
2. Quest for identity
3. Dichotomy between Oedipus and the community
4. Confident in his knowledge
5. Blind

Figure 3.2

In the interview with Pereira (2003)[74] and on several other occasions, Dove acknowledges the association between Augustus and Oedipus. Therefore, in this section, I do not just assert that Augustus echoes Oedipus. Through a close analysis of *DFE*, Augustus' actions, behavior and words, I identify the individual conceptual components of the input space "Oedipus" that Dove, in my view, projects onto Augustus.

3.2.1. Unaware of real origins

The first element of input space 1 projected into the blended space is "unaware of his real origins". Oedipus and Augustus are unwanted children, they are cut off from their origins and denied the truth of their birth by their parents.[75] The births of both Augustus and Oedipus' are shocking events for their families and communities, although for different reasons. Oedipus' birth is marked by the words of the oracle and by a curse: to kill his father and to marry his mother. Augustus' birth shatters the harmony in the plantation and releases a powerful curse: the newborn represents an unnatural union, one

[74] See chapter 1, section 1.4.
[75] See chapter 1, section 1.5.

between a black slave and a white owner.[76] Both Augustus and Oedipus think that they know the truth about their origins and the circumstances of their birth, but they are wrong.

Oedipus believes that Polybus, the king of Corinth, the one who adopted and raised him as his son, is his real father.

[3.4] ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: ἐμοὶ πατὴρ μὲν Πόλυβος ἦν Κορίνθιος,
μήτηρ δὲ Μερόπη Δωρίς. ἠγόμην δ᾽ ἀνὴρ
ἀστῶν μέγιστος τῶν ἐκεῖ, πρίν μοι τύχη

Oedipus: My father was Polybus of Corinth, and
my mother Merope, a Dorian; and I was brought up as the greatest of the citizens. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 774-776)

Only at the end of the play do his real parents and origins become clear to him. These are the words pronounced by Oedipus as the truth of incest and parricide is unveiled:

[3.5] ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: ἰὼ Κιθαιρών, τί μ᾽ ἐδέχου; τί μ᾽ οὐ λαβὼν
ἔκτεινας εὐθύς, ὡς ἔδειξα μήποτε
ἐμαυτὸν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔνθεν ἦ γεγώς;
ὦ Πόλυβε καὶ Κόρινθε καὶ τὰ πάτρια
λόγῳ παλαιὰ δώμαθ᾽, οἷον ἆρά με
κάλλος κακῶν ὕπουλον ἐξεθρέψατε.

Oedipus: Ah, Cithaeron, why did you receive me? Why did you not take me and kill me at once, so that I could never have revealed to mortals what was my origin? O Polybus and Corinth and what was called the ancient home of my fathers, how beautiful was the veneer with which the care you gave me veiled my secret sickness! (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 1391-1396)

Cithaeron is the mountain where Oedipus was abandoned, and for this reason it is an important location and key element in his story. Oedipus uttered these words when his fate and actions were revealed to him, tragically declaring that it would have been better not to have been born.

[76] For an analysis of Oedipus and Augustus' curses see chapter 2, section 2.3.4.

Augustus describes to Amalia what he believes to be the circumstances of his birth, but, like Oedipus, he is mistaken about his origins:

[3.6] AUGUSTUS: One soft spring night,
when the pear blossoms
cast their pale faces
on the darker face of the earth,
Massa[77] stood up from the porch swing
and said to himself, "I think
I'll make me another bright-eyed pick-aninny".
Then he stretched and headed
for my mother's cabin. (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 8)

In the first part, from which the title of the play comes, the intercourse between the master and the slave is described metaphorically. The speaker is Augustus but he adopts the point of view of the white owner of the plantation. The pear blossoms falling on the earth metaphorically represent the white men turning their attention to and inflicting their violence upon black women. In Augustus' words, the image of the blossoms seems innocent and innocuous, but it is a metaphor for violence. Augustus' dialogue describes an abuse acted with the same ease and naturalness of a falling leaf or the one of a man who, standing on the porch, stretches his body leisurely.

The blossom is an element that Rita Dove often associates with violence and rape, as well with racial connotations. As I will go on to suggest,[78] in the sonnet "Afield" of the collection *Mother Love*, blossoms are linked to a heterosexual relationship connoted by violation and submission.

[3.7] I've walked there, too, he can't give
you up, so you give in until you can't live
without him. Like these blossoms, white sores,
burst upon earth's ignorant flesh, at first sight
Everything is innocence—
then it's itch, scratch, putrescence. (Dove, *ML*, *Afield*)

[77] The term "massa" stands for "master"; the term is used to represent the Southern speech during the era of slavery.

[78] See chapter 5, sections 5.2.1 and 5.5.

Another poem in which the element of blossoms is linked to sexuality and violence is the poem "A Suite for Augustus" in the collection *The Yellow House on the Corner*.

[3.8] A bloodless finger pointing to heaven, you say,
is surely no more impossible than this city:
A no man's land, a capital askew,
A postcard framed by imported blossoms-
and now this outrageous cue stick.
Lying, reflected on a black table.
(Dove, *YH*, "A Suite for Augustus")

The Washington Monument, described as an "outrageous cue stick lying, reflected on a black table", represents "not only the general violations of slavery but also, and specifically, the rape of black women by a white man as a foundation of the nation's history" (Pereira, 2003:63). In both cases, like in *DFE*, blossoms are linked to violent interracial unions.

Going back to Augustus' words, the comparative adjective "darker" used for the woman is in clear opposition to the whiteness of the flower. Augustus lives in a society racially divided where contact between the black and white people is regulated by violence and abuse. This clarity misleads Augustus. We know from witnesses and biographies of ex-slaves and historical documents that it was common for the white plantation owner to rape and abuse enslaved women.[79] For this reason, Augustus is convinced that his father has to be a white man and his mother a black slave. It is only at the end of the play that Augustus becomes aware of his origins, namely that he is the son of Jennings' plantation owner Amalia and the slave Hector.

After discovering that the woman he loves is his mother, Augustus, like Oedipus (see quotation [3.5.]), wishes he had never been born, saying: "Better

[79] See, for example, Douglass (1845); Jacobs (1861). The Federal Writers' Project (see section 3.1) collected oral histories and interviews with formerly enslaved people. These interviews, included in the collection *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*, provide first-hand accounts of life under slavery, including the brutality and sexual violence and abuse to which enslaved people were subjected. One of the key testimonies on sexual violence and abuse is the interview with former slave Henrietta Butler.

I had bled to death in that basket" (*DFE*, Act 2, scene 8). For tragic heroes, death sounds like a relief, and life is unbearable when the truth is disclosed.

3.2.2. Quest for identity

The second relevant element that I identify within the input space "Oedipus" is the "quest for identity". Oedipus' quest for identity is fundamentally underlying most of the tragedy, and it overshadows the search for Laius' murderer. The way to get rid of the plague that was afflicting Thebes is to find Laius' murderer. In order to wash away the pollution, the polluter (Laius' murderer) must be punished and banned from the city.

The element of the "quest for identity" represents one of Oedipus' primary features and it is projected onto the blended space "Augustus". Nevertheless, there is a difference. Oedipus is a free man, but Augustus is not. He is a slave, he does not legally exist, he is a white man's property, without the rights and power to control his own life. For this reason, the discovery of Augustus' identity is intertwined with the rebellion against the system of oppression and enslavement and the deaths of the plantation's owners. He needs to (temporarily) defeat the slavery system, represented by the owner's house, before getting to know his truth and carrying its burden for the rest of his life (like Oedipus). Due to these different statuses, the quest for identity for Augustus is blended with the element of the rebellion.

3.2.3. Dichotomy between Oedipus and the community

The third element that, in my analysis belongs to input space 1 is the "dichotomy between Oedipus and the community". Both Augustus and Oedipus are outsiders and their relationship with the community is controversial. Oedipus has become the saviour and liberator of Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx. The Sphinx had been sent by the gods as punishment for an ancient crime; she had afflicted the city of Thebes by devouring all its inhabitants who failed to solve her riddle. Therefore, Oedipus is admired and respected. At the beginning of the play, the entire city

supplicates its king Oedipus to protect and save Thebes from another danger, a plague that is ravaging the city.

At first, Oedipus' relationship with the citizens lacks tensions and distance; he shares suffering and sickness with his people:

[3.9] ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: προσήλθεθ᾽ ἱμείροντες, εὖ γὰρ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι
νοσεῖτε πάντες· καὶ νοσοῦντες, ὡς ἐγὼ
οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ὅστις ἐξ ἴσου νοσεῖ.
τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑμῶν ἄλγος εἰς ἕν᾽ ἔρχεται
μόνον καθ᾽ αὑτόν, κοὐδέν᾽ ἄλλον, ἡ δ᾽ ἐμὴ
ψυχὴ πόλιν τε κἀμὲ καὶ σ᾽ ὁμοῦ στένει.

Oedipus: I know, I am not ignorant of the desires with which you have come; yes, I know that you are all sick, and, sick as you are, none of you is as sick as I. Your pain comes upon each by himself and upon no other; but my soul mourns equally for the city and for myself and for you. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*: 59-64)

This civic role, strongly foregrounded at the beginning of the *Oedipus the King*, with the supplicants outside the king's house, becomes more and more limited until it disappears, replaced by Oedipus' personal quest.

As the tragedy unfolds, the quest for the murderer is overshadowed by the individual search for Oedipus' origins. This marks a contrast and opposition between the personal and the communal. The chorus is the first to comprehend that the king is guided by interests other than public safety:

[3.10] ΧΟΡΟΣ: ἡμῖν μὲν εἰκάζουσι καὶ τὰ τοῦδ᾽ ἔπη
ὀργῇ λελέχθαι καὶ τὰ σ᾽, Οἰδίπου, δοκεῖ.
δεῖ δ᾽ οὐ τοιούτων, ἀλλ᾽ ὅπως τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ
μαντεῖ᾽ ἄριστα λύσομεν, τόδε σκοπεῖν.

Chorus: As we reckon, both this man's words and your own, Oedipus, seem to have been spoken in anger. We need nothing like that, but we should consider how best we can accomplish the prophecy of the god. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*: 404-407)

To resolve the "prophetic utterances", it is necessary to find the murderer; this is the only way to save Thebes. But Oedipus is suspicious that Tiresias is working for Creon in order to help to dethrone him and take power. The fear

of losing his power and being under attack overcomes his duty as the leader of a community in extreme danger.

I suggest that the dichotomy between Oedipus and the community is projected onto the blended space Augustus. Since the beginning of the play, Augustus takes part in the life on the plantation and, as Oedipus, he wants to do his part for the end of the plague, which is not the pestilence but slavery itself. He joins the rebels; however, like Oedipus, what moves Augustus is an inner and deeper reason than the general goal of freedom shared with the rebels.

Phebe's words in *DFE* closely recall the concerns of the chorus toward Oedipus.

> [3.11] PHEBE: Every time you talk about
> victory and vengeance,
> it's as if you're saying
> my victory, my vengeance.
> As if you didn't care about
> anyone's pain but yours (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 7).

Augustus' loyalty to the cause is questioned; the rebellion is overshadowed by his quest for identity and his love for Amalia. There is a strict division between masters and slaves, black people and white people, who joins the rebels and who is against them. It becomes increasingly difficult for Augustus to distinguish which side he is on. What was once only hate loses its harshness and becomes love. As a result, the rebels dismiss him from his role and assign the command to Phebe.

3.2.4. Confident in his knowledge

The fourth element mapped onto the space "Augustus" is "confident in his knowledge". Knowledge is a problematic and ambiguous element for both protagonists. Their mental skills make them stand out from the rest of the population and put them in a special position. However, their extreme confidence and pride in their own knowledge, do not allow the heroes to understand the irremediable tragedy that they have to face and to listen to the

messages they receive from other characters. Their knowledge does not help them to penetrate the enigma of their origins.

Thanks to his acumen and mental skills, Oedipus had solved the riddle of the Sphinx saving the city of Thebes. His knowledge and his intelligence provide him with respect and glory. Oedipus is confident and believes in his abilities, he prophesies that thanks to his cleverness he can save the city from the plague: "ἀλλ' ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς αὖθις αὖτ' ἐγὼ φανῶ" ("Well, I shall begin again and light up the obscurity) (*Oedipus the King*: 132). It is worth noting, in this regard, the use of the tense of the verb "φανῶ"; the future tense is the tense that prophets and seers use *par excellence.*[80] This verse is also connoted by a dramatic irony that characterises the entire play. The verb means "to shed light, to make visible", but at the end of the play, Oedipus will blind himself for he did not see the crimes he unwittingly committed.

Like Oedipus, Augustus is defined, among other things, by his intelligence. Augustus is well-read: he reads Milton, Greek mythology, and the Bible; he has been to many places and knows history. Knowledge is particularly troublesome for Augustus, because, unlike for Oedipus, it does not provide him with a position of power. A well-read slave is seen as dangerous and problematic by white owners and looks as suspicious by the other slaves. At the same time, his mental skills give him a special status among the other slaves.

Augustus is contacted by the rebels to join them for his courage and bravery and, like Oedipus, he believes he can use his skills to help the rebels in the uprising: "I can do more. Read maps, write passes" (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 6). He feels he can use his experience and intelligence to save the community from the plague of slavery: "I have come to save you" (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 4) says Augustus to Hector just after killing him. Both Augustus and Oedipus are sure that they know what is best for their communities. They know how to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, their intelligence is problematic and does not result in profit.

[80] Prof. Anna Bonifazi, personal communication.

The complicated relationship with the respective communities analysed in the previous section is represented by the dialectical and dyadic opposition of Oedipus and Augustus with Tiresias and Scylla respectively. Both Tiresias and Scylla are aware of the danger represented by Augustus and Oedipus. They try to warn them about the evil inside them and play the role of real prophets to contrast the protagonists. Augustus and Oedipus do not listen to them and by doing so they get even closer to their fall.

This opposition embodies the conflict between two different types of knowledge.[81] In the following dialogue Oedipus contrasts his own knowledge, the knowledge of a riddle solver and a city savior, to Tiresias':[82]

[3.12] ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ: ἦν οὔτ᾽ ἀπ᾽ οἰωνῶν σὺ προὐφάνης ἔχων
οὔτ᾽ ἐκ θεῶν του γνωτόν· ἀλλ᾽ ἐγὼ μολών,
ὁ μηδὲν εἰδὼς Οἰδίπους, ἔπαυσά νιν,
γνώμῃ κυρήσας οὐδ᾽ ἀπ᾽ οἰωνῶν μαθών·

> Oedipus: It required prophetic skill, and you were exposed as having no knowledge from the birds or from the gods. No, it was I that came, Oedipus who knew nothing, and put a stop to her; I hit the mark by native wit, not by what I learned from birds. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*: 395-398)

It is worth considering the epithet "know-nothing" ("ὁ μηδὲν εἰδὼς"). Oedipus is being sarcastic here because it was he, an ordinary man without the prophetic powers of Tiresias, who alone saved the city of Thebes by solving the riddle of the sphynx. This sarcasm will ironically turn against him because, at the end of the play, he will be the one who knows nothing. Oedipus, in a previous exchange, called Tiresias "suborning such a sorcerer, a stitcher-together of plots, a deceitful beggar" (*Oedipus the King*: 387-389) discrediting his knowledge and his ability.

[81] In *Oedipus the King*, the clash with Tiresias (accused by Oedipus of conspiring with Creon to dethrone him) is also characterised by Oedipus' fear to lose his power; this element is missing in Augustus since he is a slave without power.

[82] On the elements of knowledge and understanding in *Oedipus the King*, see Champlin (1969).

The same dynamic is present in *DFE* between Augustus and Scylla. Augustus defines Scylla's speeches as "mumble jumble" (*DFE*. Act 1, scene 4), no different from the ones he had already heard before by other conjure women. She is not the first conjure woman he has met; he has been cursed before by other women who professed to have special powers. He is not impressed by her:

> [3.13] AUGUSTUS: Women like her, hah!
> They got a chill one morning,
> hear an owl or two, and snap!
> They've received their "powers"!
> Then they collect a few bones,
> dry some herbs, and they're in business. (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 4)

In *The Darker Face of the Earth* and *Oedipus the King*, there are two kinds of knowledge clashing and both Augustus and Oedipus denigrate the knowledge and the expertise of their opponents. Nevertheless, Oedipus and Tiresias belong to the same world of beliefs, but this is not true for Augustus and Scylla.

Augustus has no faith in voodoo practices and does not believe in Scylla's powers, juxtaposing his intelligence with Scylla's. This is because of his knowledge and double cultural heritage.[83] Augustus knows African tradition but also western literature and Greek mythology. This rich cultural background sets Augustus apart from the other slaves; he does not share most of their common beliefs. He seems not to have strong ties with his African ancestors, traditions or spirituality; his owner Captain Newcastle inculcated him the "skepticism of Western empiricism" (Pereira, 2002) toward African beliefs, and rituals.

When Phebe describes her shocking encounter with Scylla, and how Scylla frightened her with admonitions and threats, Augustus surprises Phebe

[83] Pereira (2002) defines Augustus as a "cultural mulatto"; a concept introduced by Trey Ellis (1989) who defines the cultural mulatto as a black person educated in a mix of cultures, someone who "can also navigate easily in the white world" (Ellis, 1989: 236)

by knowing the exact words that Scylla pronounced. Augustus is convinced that he knows and possesses Scylla's knowledge. Only at the end of the respective plays must Oedipus and Augustus recognise that the prophets were right and that their own knowledge is limited and cannot save them.

3.2.5. Blind

In *Oedipus the King* the themes of light and darkness, sight and blindness,[84] are recurrent especially in the scene with Tiresias. In the Greek tragedy, the opposition between blindness and sight is usually used metaphorically to conceptualise the opposition between ignorance and knowledge, as in the following dialogue between Oedipus and Tiresias:

[3.14] ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ: λεληθέναι σέ φημι σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις
αἴσχισθ᾽ ὁμιλοῦντ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ὁρᾶν ἵν᾽ εἶ κακοῦ.

I say that you are living unawares in a shameful relationship with those closest to you, and cannot see the plight in which you are. (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*: 366- 367, emphasis added)

This passage is particularly interesting because Tiresias is the one who is literally blind, but unlike the king, he metaphorically sees the misfortune Oedipus is in. In early Ancient Greek, as in many other modern Indo-European languages, acquiring knowledge is often linked to the sense of vision, "to see" metaphorically means "to understand,"[85] and we find many cross-linguistic examples of the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING.

In *DFE*, a dialogue between Amalia and Augustus recalls the one between Tiresias and Oedipus, because of the presence of the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING. Augustus, still unaware of his and Amalia's identities, but believing that his mother is one of the slaves of the plantation,

[84] On the themes of blindness and limits of human knowledge and insight in *Oedipus the King*, see Shields (1961) and Buxton (1980).

[85] See Sweetser (1990).

asks Amalia to reveal the truth. Amalia, who now knows that Augustus is the son she abandoned and that they committed incest, tries to stop Augustus from inquiring more. Augustus replies that after all the pain and violence he saw in his life, he is fearless:

[3.15] AUGUSTUS: I've heard grown men scream,
watched as the branding iron
sank into their flesh, I've seen
pregnant women slit open like melon,
runaways staked to the ground
and whipped until
they floated in their own blood and piss.
Don't think you can frighten me, Missy:
nothing your lips can tell
can be worse than what
these eyes have seen. (*DFE*: Act 2 scene 8)

Amalia replies: "Bravo! What a speech! <u>But you've seen nothing</u>" (emphasis added). The act of seeing has the metaphorical meaning of "knowing". Augustus knows what happens on the plantation and he has experienced some of the cruelest things a man could ever see. However, he fails to understand when he tries to see and define himself. He does not see himself as an Oedipus.

In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus' figurative blindness becomes literal when, at the end of the play, he blinds himself with Jocasta's golden brooches. The final act of blinding represents Oedipus' incapacity of discernment, his inability to see the truth. Like Oedipus, in the final scene of the ἀναγνώρισις ("recognition"), the moment when the truth of one or more characters is unveiled, Augustus loses his sight, though not through literal blindness: "I had the sun and the moon once. And the stars with their cool gaze. Now it's dark" (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8). Moreover, as a result of the shock, he loses the perception of his surroundings and begins to have visions of the traumatic memories of the atrocities he has witnessed throughout his life.

[3.16] AUGUSTUS: Who's there? How she stares, like a cat at midnight!
PHEBE: Nobody's there, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS: Don't you see her?

PHEBE shakes her head terrified

Look, she's hidden behind a tree.
PHEBE: Oh Augus-
AUGUSUTS: Shh! You'll frighten her. There's another one-
he's been flogged and pickled in brine.
That skinny boy ate dirt; that's why he staggers.
So many of them, limping, with brands
on their cheeks! Oh I can't bear it! (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8)

Augustus is in a kind of trance; the Oedipal trauma of discovering his true identity and the loss of his lover and mother is mixed with the collective trauma of slavery, represented by the images of the atrocities he has seen in his life as a slave.

3.3. Input space 2 "historical black rebel"

1. Educated
2. Activist-promoter of black emancipation
3. Rebellion

Figure 3.3

In *DFE*, the action takes place on Jennings' plantation in South Carolina. There are many different references to the city of Charleston in the text: Amalia is sent to Charleston to complete her education; her husband arrives in Charleston with hundreds of plantation owners after the revolution of Haiti; Augustus himself, the night he is born, is brought to Charleston, to a family that owned enslaved individuals.

Historically, Charleston, controlled by an oligarchy of white plantation owners and merchants, played a major role in the slave trade. It was the main

port of entry for enslaved people to the United States. The city is the symbol of North American slavery: its size, wealth, and richness had increased thanks to the slave trade and unfree labor. For this reason, many uprisings took place there. One of the first was the Stono rebellion[86] (also named "Cato's rebellion" after its leader).

The setting of *DFE* in a plantation near Charleston in my opinion is not accidental. The Oedipal plot is blended with African American history. Patrice Rankine in his pioneering study on the relation between the classics and African American literature *Ulysses in Black* (2006), states that "it is necessary to read Augustus within the tradition of rebellious black men in the traditional context, fictive and historical from Nat Turner to Bigger Thomas" (Rankine, 2006: 67).

In this section, I will analyse in particular three portraits of highly representative historical black rebels: David Walker, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. Rita Dove may have had all of them in mind while outlining Augustus' character. David Walker and Denmark Vesey are linked to Charleston. In her work, *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), Rita Dove dedicates a poem to David Walker. Therefore, I believe that in her creative process of shaping Augustus' character, she took Walker into particular account.

The tradition of rebellious black men – with emphasis on these three individuals in particular – is a conceptual package (input space 2), with selected elements projected onto the blended space Augustus. My aim is not to establish direct and linear parallelisms between each of them and Augustus, but to show how part of the complexity of the character Augustus emerges from a bundle of features conceptually related to what I call the "historical black rebel" mental space.

[86] See section 3.1.

3.3.1. Educated

The first element of input space 2, is "educated". In section 3.2., I explained that Augustus is confident in his knowledge. In this section, I am going to focus on his education, cleverness, and sensibility at the service of black liberation.

Therese Steffen highlights the affinity between the historical figures of Walker and Vesey and Augustus: "David Walker and Denmark Vesey, like Augustus, demonstrated a certainty and sophistication not thought possible for a black person at that time". (Steffen, 2001: 126). David Walker was born in North Carolina around 1797 (his exact date of birth is disputed, some historians have suggested 1785) to an enslaved father and a free mother, exactly as Augustus' parents. Unlike Augustus, he was a free man, according to the laws of the time in most Southern states.[87] He accomplished an impressive education, and as a young adult, Walker moved to Charleston. In September 1829, he published a work that soon became very popular, titled *Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to those of the United States of America*. In the book, he exhorts all black people to resist slavery and oppression and urges enslaved African Americans to fight for their freedom. Walker in the *Appeal* points to the Haitian revolution:

> [3.17] O my suffering brethren! Remember the divisions and consequent sufferings of Carthage and of Hayti. Read the history particularly of Hayti, and see how they were butchered by the whites, and do you take warning. (Walker, 1829: 53)

One of the most important points in Walker's *Appeal* is the importance of knowledge, education, and literacy of black people. Without these elements, Walker argues, the black population is condemned to slavery and submission.

In *DFE*, Augustus refers, like Walker, to the Haitian revolution in order to encourage slaves to revolt:

> [3.18] AUGUSTUS: […] For three weeks

[87] See chapter 2, section 2.3.3.

the flame raged; then the sun
broke through the smoke and shone
upon a new nation, a black nation – Haiti
[…]
[…] Now do you see
why they've kept this [slaves' rebellions] from us,
brothers and sisters? (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 7)

Moreover, Augustus states that white people deliberately keep black people in a state of ignorance to easily subjugate them, pointing out, as Walker does, that knowledge is key to emancipation and necessary for rebellion.

3.3.2. Activist-promoter of black emancipation

The second aspect that I see in the conceptual package "historical black rebel" is "activist-promoter of black emancipation". When Augustus introduces himself to the other slaves and explains the origins of their names to them, he creates a sense of embarrassment but also of admiration. On the same occasion, Augustus tells the young slave Diana that she could have known these things (Greek mythology, in particular) if she had been given the chance. Augustus, like historical black leaders and activists, is demanding and promoting the possibility of black education and enlightenment.

Augustus knows the condition of submission and inhumanity in which black people are forced to live in America. In many exchanges with the other characters, this awareness makes him a real activist and promoter of black emancipation:

[3.19] HECTOR: This is my home now.
I am king here
[…]
Every man has his place
AUGUSTUS: And you are fortunate to have found yours. They've left you in peace. But what for your brothers and sisters? They cry out in their bondage, they have no place in this world to lay their heads (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 4)

Hector, after Augustus' birth, found a place to stay (the swamp) far from the other slaves and, somehow, far from the harassment of the plantation's

owners. From Augustus' words, a feeling of closeness to the other slaves, a sense of community and belonging emerges, along with the belief that all the slaves and black people need a better place to live and be free.

It is worth noting the usage of the terms "brothers" and "sisters", not to indicate relatives and members of the family, but to invoke black unity. This metaphor maps family ties, love, and support within family members onto solidarity and unity among all African and African Americans who shared the experience of slavery, racial violence, and segregation. This metaphorical use of family terms is reminiscent of the language used by black liberation movements in the United States in the twentieth century, and therefore, I argue, associates Augustus even more closely with activists of black resistance and emancipation. Augustus not only feels his own suffering, but the sorrow and the pain of all the other slaves and thus becomes an instrument to urge the revolt.

3.3.3. Rebellion

Augustus, like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, took part in a slave rebellion. A few days after Augustus arrives at the plantation, he is contacted by some of the fictional plantation's slaves who are planning an uprising:

[3.20] LEADER: Go to your people and test their minds;
so when the fires of redemption
lick the sky of Charleston,
they will rise up.
A mighty army
marching into battle! (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 6)

Augustus is recruited by the conspirators. He starts to stir up revolt among the other slaves by narrating the events in Haiti. He strongly believes that through his actions and rebellion, there is the possibility of changing the structure of the society in which he lives.

Denmark Vesey (also known as Telemak, another classic name[88]) was an enslaved man who spent twenty years sailing with his master. Captain Vesey was a Charleston trader of enslaved people and planter; Denmark took his master's surname and accompanied him on numerous voyages (like Augustus with Captain Newcastle). Afterward, they would return to Charleston. On close inspection, the figure of Denmark is echoed partially by Augustus and partially by Benjamin Skeene, a conspirator in Jennings' plantation. After having won a lottery Denmark Vesey bought his freedom and started to work as a carpenter and read anti-slavery literature. Benjamin Skeene is also a carpenter who, thanks to his higher degree of freedom, is able to set up different deposits with weapons for the uprising. The sharing of Denmark's elements between Augustus and Benjamin does not undermine the mapping, on the contrary, it reinforces it. The mental space of "historical black rebel", impersonated in this case by Denmark, is so active in Rita Dove's mind that it is projected to the blended space of Augustus as well as to the other slaves who take part in the rebellion.

Denmark Vesey plotted a slave rebellion in Charleston. On the eve of the uprising, however, the white authorities, warned by a servant, made military preparations to avert the rebellion. Vesey was captured and, after trial, hanged with five other rebels. In the same way, Augustus and the other conspirators have to face the risk of betrayal. Augustus, who considers himself the savior of the plantation and of the slaves, kills Hector because he was trying to alarm the plantation owners. The other conspirators threaten anyone who decides to betray them, even those who look reluctant or cautious, by declaring: "who is not with us is against us" (*DFE*, Act 1, scene 6).

Unlike Denmark Vesey and David Walker, Nat Turner did not live in Charleston. He was sold three times in his childhood, eventually ending up on Benjamin Turner's plantation in Virginia. Like Augustus, he could read and write, and he was often seen absorbed in reading the stories of the Bible.

[88] Telemachus is a figure of Greek mythology; he is the son of Ulysses and Penelope.

He had become the leader of a rebellion that started in August of 1831. Nat Turner is associated with the spiritual "Steal Away" (c. 1825). This is the spiritual song sung by the slaves of the Jennings' plantation. According to several spiritual specialists like Arthur Jones,[89] Turner was the composer.

Many songs sung by enslaved people on plantations, beyond the surface of religious content and lyrics, carried a hidden message, a subtext undecipherable by white owners. "Steal Away", like many spirituals, has a double meaning. The straightforward meaning of the song is the journey from earth to the reign of God. This was the level of interpretation also accessible to white owners of enslaved people.

In her work on the metaphorical structures of spirituals, Ramey (2002) explains that the song has another level of interpretation: the possibility to reach the realm of God is metaphorically blended with the possibility to escape the constriction of the system of slavery and reach a place where the enslaved people could be free (Ramey, 2002: 361). Therefore, the spiritual was used as a coded message[90] to notify all enslaved individuals of a secret meeting in some place on the plantation or to plan an escape.

In *DFE*, the spiritual song "Steal Away" is used to warn the community of slaves to start the revolt:

> [3.21] PHEBE: They were calling for you last night.
> Didn't you hear that "Steal Away"?
> They sang till I thought the dead
> would rise out of their graves and follow!
> (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 6)

The slaves chanted the spiritual and the message, from mouth to mouth, reaches every slave on the plantation: Augustus, on one of the nights he spent with Amalia, does not hear the signal.

To sum up: several elements present in the play and many features of Augustus are projected from the input space "historical black rebel" during

[89] See Jones (1993).
[90] On the double meanings of spirituals, see also Lawrence-McIntyre (1987).

the slavery era. Even through the lenses of myth, *DFE* is firmly anchored to American and African American history.

3.4. Input space 3 “bad n-word”

1. Positive connotation for certain black people, negative connotation for white people
2. Resistant to master’s orders
3. Fearless

Figure 3.4

Rita Dove intertwines Attic tragedy with American history. Nevertheless, in the play, there are elements drawn also from African American folklore and literature. In the current and the next section, I will analyse in particular the “bad n-word” and the “tragic mulatto” figures, constitutive *topoi* of American literature.

In this section, I will define the main characteristics of the “bad n-word” that I see projected onto the blended space “Augustus”. I suggest that this fictional character is present in the perspective of some characters of the play itself who interpret Augustus’ life through that specific model.

The “bad n-word” in contrast to the “historical black rebel”, is a folkloric and fictional character. The adjective “bad” is a connotation derived from the viewpoint of white people because he violates their laws and moral codes. Nevertheless, he represents a dangerous and rebellious man, “tough and violent” who “kills without blinking an eye” (Dance, 1978: 224). The “bad n-word” is characterised by violence, justified by a system of brutality

and total oppression such as the institution of slavery. His violence and bravery are not usually organised and could culminate in isolated exploits; he has a self-destructive and dangerous nature that endangers not only white people but other black people.

3.4.1. Positive connotation for certain black people, negative connotation for white people

Daryl Cumber Dance in her work on Black American folklore points out that the fact:

> [3.22] "that the term *Bad Nigger* from its beginning has had positive connotations to certain black people and negative connotations to white people suggest its early meaning as a Black man who fought against the system" (Dance,1978: 224).

From this passage, I extrapolate the first element that I see projected onto the blend Augustus.

Augustus has a certain reputation, and before arriving on the plantation, he causes fear among the white people. Jones, the overseer, is concerned once the identity of the new slave purchased by Amalia is known: it is dangerous to bring a slave like Augustus onto the plantation.

> [3.23] JONES: Miss Jennings! You can't be serious!
> AMALIA: Something wrong, Jones?
> JONES: Augustus Newcastle? That slave's
> the most talked-about nigger along the Southern seabord!
> (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 2)

Phebe and the conspirators, instead, admire his bravery, giving him the status of a legend; "Your courage has been a beacon" (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 6) say the conspirators trying to recruit the famous Augustus.

Nevertheless, the fact that on his arrival at Jennings' plantation, Augustus is immediately chained and the fact that he remains chained throughout the night causes shock and polarises the slave community. Some of the slaves fear him: Alexander, a slave in his forties, the one who, according to Phebe and her memory, has been in the plantation longer than

anyone else calls Augustus "wild nigger" showing a certain concern and alarm. Hector, the day he met Augustus for the first time says: "You're the one who came in leg irons, along the road. I never heard of leg irons on this plantation before. You must be dangerous". (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 4.)

3.4.2. Resistant to master's order

During and after the slavery era, from the point of view of the white people, a "bad n-word" is an aggressive man who resists the orders of his master, a violent person characterised by constant disobedience and disorderly behavior. For these reasons, he is often punished, chained, and whipped.

Augustus is well known for his escape attempts, and his rebellious and aggressive nature:

> [3.24] JONES: Story goes he belonged to a British sea captain
> who treated him like his own son,
> and promised him his freedom when he died.
> But the brother who executed the estate
> sold the boy to pay off the debts.
> After that the nigger went wild.
> They lost count of how many times he ran off,
> how many times they caught him […] (*DFE:* Act 1, scene 2).

The scars on Augustus' back are seen by the white slave owners as evidence of his bad temper, the difficulty of controlling him and his evil nature:

> [3.25] JONES: here it is "Twenty-two
> acts of aggression and rebellion".
> Twenty-two separate acts!
> […] They say
> his back's so laced with scars
> it's as rutted as a country road.
> (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 2)

3.4.3. Fearless

In African American folklore and literature, the "bad n-word" has an undeniable masculine charisma. He resembles a romantic and heroic character who is not afraid of anything, neither being whipped nor being put

to death. The young slave Phoebe, when she first met Augustus, is intrigued by his good looks and bravery. When she asks Augustus if he has ever been scared, Augustus answers valorously:

[3.26] AUGUSTUS: Of what? White folks?
They're more afraid of me. Pain?
Every whipping's got to come to an end.
PHEBE: I heard you've been whipped
so many times, they lost count.
AUGUSTUS: They think they can beat me to my senses.
Then they look into my eyes
and see I'm not afraid. (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 4)

The "bad n-word" does not fear punishment and neither does Augustus. Augustus is not afraid; on the contrary, white people fear him. Augustus's life, before the arrival at Jennings' plantation, is characterised especially by hate: "Everything was so simple before, hate and be hated" (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8). He has a purpose, not to be submitted to the abuses of the white man.

3.5. Input space 4 "tragic mulatto"

1. Miscegenation
2. Ambiguous relationship with the father
3. Parricide

Figure 3.5

In this section, I illustrate what I consider to be the main features of the input space "tragic mulatto" projected onto the blended space "Augustus". According to the Oxford Dictionary, the first usage of the term "mulatto" dates back to the XVI century and is derived from the Spanish word "mulato" (young mule). As the Oxford Dictionary states, it is "an offensive word […]

for a person with one black parent and one white parent". As pointed out by Bada: "as the child of an interracial couple in the Deep South, he [Augustus] is also inscribed in the literary tradition of the '*Tragic Mulatto*'" (Bada, 2008: 119).

The "tragic mulatto" is a very typical character in American literature, and critics trace its first appearance back to the works of Lydia Maria Child (*The quadroons*, 1842). The literary trope of the "tragic mulatto" has been used for different purposes and agendas by many authors through different periods; it is not easy to give an account of its complexity and telling its long story would exceed the purpose and the size of this work.[91] Nevertheless, as pointed out by Mafe "as a literary device, the tragic mulatto has certain consistent markers –racial mixedness and tragedy being the obvious ones– but the character is hardly static" (Mafe, 2013: 18).

I have designed an input space that is necessarily partial and therefore only representative of a specific "tragic mulatto": a male character, son of a white slave owner and a black enslaved woman, in the pre-Civil War South. In this section, I highlight the elements that recur in other works (notably Langston Hughes' play *Mulatto*) and some of the key features of the literary *topos* of the "tragic mulatto" as delineated by Sollors (1997) and Mafe (2013), which I believe are present not only in Dove's portrayal of Augustus, but also in Augustus' own mind (as reflected in Dove's work). In fact, I argue that the mental space of the "tragic mulatto" is active and functional in Augustus for the interpretation and understatement of his own life course. In other words, Augustus receives, reads, and inscribes himself in the literary tradition of the "tragic mulatto".

[91] For a more extensive treatment of the topic see, Brown (1937); Sollors (1997); Adesola Mafe (2013).

3.5.1. Miscegenation

Miscegenation, as previously discussed,[92] describes a relationship between people of two different races. For the typical "tragic mulatto", as for Augustus, the relevant dichotomy is that between black and white people. This opposition has a marked gendering, since in almost any story of "tragic mulatto" in the plantations, the white parent is the man, the plantation owner, and the black parent is the enslaved mother. There is, therefore, an imbalance of power due to race and gender. Laws and penal codes criminalised interracial unions. However, despite the prohibition of miscegenation, forced interracial unions were common, almost commonplace on the plantations. It is for this reason that Augustus, as shown in section 3.2.1., thinks that he is the result of a rape perpetrated by a white man against a black woman.

During a conversation with Phebe, Augustus is asked if anyone has ever tried to kill him:

[3.27] PHEBE: And ain't nobody ever tried to kill you?
AUGUSUTS: Oh, yes. First time,
I was hardly alive.
They ripped me from my mother
the night I was born
and threw me out like trash.
I didn't walk until I was three.
PHEBE: Lord have mercy.
AUGUSUTS: Mercy had nothing to do with it!
Missy couldn't stand the sight of me.
Just look at me! It's an old story. (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 4).

Augustus tells his own version of his story. He was born the son of a slave owner and a slave woman, which is why he was torn from his mother's arms by the vengeful mistress. He therefore inscribes himself in the stream of "tragic mulatto" stories. As I will show in the next sub-sections, by "writing" his story in this manner, he is prompted to act in a specific way. The input space of the "tragic mulatto" is therefore active, functional and relevant to specific choices made by Augustus.

[92] See chapter 2, section 2.2.1.

3.5.2. Ambiguous relationship with the father

As highlighted by many scholars (Hathaway 1989; Mafe 2013), one of the most recurrent and peculiar elements of the "tragic mulatto" literary trope is the rejection of the "mulatto son" by his father. Having his birthright denied and, instead, being one of his father's properties, he nurtures feelings of hate and revenge. Nevertheless, the "tragic mulatto" hates his father on the one hand, but on the other, he reclaims the father-son bond, and the absence of the father figure becomes an obsessive presence in his mind.

After Augustus has been ordered to kill his masters he enters their house and stumbles upon Louis. During the exchange, Louis, unaware of Augustus' true identity, describes the basket in which Amalia's son had been taken away years before. The basket becomes a token of recognition and Augustus realises that he was born on Jennings' plantation.

Augustus maps the prototypical situation of the "tragic mulatto" to his situation and believes that Louis, the white slave owner, is his father. However, Louis does not confirm this theory, and, instead, asks him surprised: "Me, your father? You think I'm your father?" (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8). Augustus is firmly convinced of his own story. I would add that Augustus might see Louis' words as prototypical of the white slave owner's refusal, in the "tragic mulatto" narrative, to acknowledge paternity and the father-son bond with his mixed-race son.

Each of Augustus' words echoes the *topos* of the "tragic mulatto". Augustus, who has never seen his father, admits that he has constantly thought of him, trying to imagine his appearance and features:

[3.28] AUGUSTUS: All my life I tried to imagine
what you would look like.
Would you be tall or stooped over?
Blue eyes, or brown?
Would you dress in white linen
or dash around in a dusty greatcoat?
To think that your blood flows
through my vein. (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8)

These lines recall the confrontation between another "tragic mulatto" character and his biological father, namely Robert Norwood and Colonel Norwood, from the novel *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes. As already summarised,[93] Robert is the son of the slave owner Colonel Norwood and the black housekeeper Cora. Robert is determined to claim his birthright and familial incorporation:

> [3.29] Norwood: Nigger women don't know the father. You are a bastard.
> Robert:[…]You are talking about my mother.
> Norwood: I am talking about Cora, yes. Her children are bastards.
> Robert: (Quickly) And you are their father. (Angrily) How come I look like you, if you are not my father?
> Norwood: Don't shout at me, boy. (Hughes, *Mulatto*, Act 2, scene 1)

As it emerges from this exchange, Robert, unlike Augustus, knows from the beginning who his father is and perceives his similarity to him. Nevertheless, there is the same intense desire to look at the father, examine and find similarities, as in Augustus' imagination.

A comparison between Robert and Augustus has already been made by Bada (2008), who points out that the education, rebelliousness and experience that each character has gained away from the plantation are elements that are present in both. Nevertheless, besides the single association between Augustus and Robert, I suggest that the most prototypical elements of the "tragic mulatto" fictional character are present in Augustus' mind. This is why Augustus, when he thinks of his father, imagines a white man.

3.5.3. Parricide

The "tragic mulatto" hatred toward the father usually ends up with parricide (Mafe, 2013: 15). The motivations for the desire to kill the father are multiple: it is an act of revenge for the rejection of paternity that the "tragic mulatto"

[93] See chapter 2, section 2.3.6.

has to face; it is an act of revenge against the entire structure of white power and enslavement; it is an act of revenge for the violence acted on his mother.

The "tragic mulatto" is usually allied with his black mother with whom he shares racial oppression, the condition of enslavement, and the rejection of the white man.

> [3.30] In a traditional triangle the mulatto son is allied with the maternal line, and in this miscegenous trio that alliance is even stronger because of mother and son's shared and socially stigmatizing color. (Hathaway, 1989: 159)

For this reason, the desire of killing the father is combined with the desire to avenge his mother. This element is present in Hughes' *Mulatto*:

> [3.31] Robert: […] You had no right to raise that cane today when I was standing at the door of this house where you live, while I have to sleep in a shack down the road with the field hands. (Slowly) But my mother sleeps with you.
> Norwood: You don't like it?
> Robert: No, I don't like it.
> Norwood: What can you do about it?
> Robert: (After a pause) I'd like to kill all the white men in the world. (*Mulatto*, Act 2, scene 1)

The tension between Colonel Norwood and Robert grows and eventually ends up with a parricide.

Similarly, in *DFE*, the tension between Augustus and Louis is heightened when Augustus recalls the violence and rape he believes Louis committed against Augustus' mother: "(AUGUSTUS): When I think of you forcing your wretched seed into my mother, I want to rip you" (*DFE*: Act 2, scene 8). This scene follows the "tragic mulatto" pattern, and the dialogue between Augustus and Louis ends with Augustus stabbing and killing the man he believes to be his biological father.

I argue that this parricide is the consequence of the mental blend that Augustus himself operates between his own life and the fictional character of the "tragic mulatto". Augustus commits a second parricide when he kills another father, his true biological father, Hector. This parricide, which occurs

chronologically before Louis' one, as is previously explored,[94] should be put in relation with the parricide in *Oedipus the King*. Augustus, as a blended space, has a complex destiny, and in this complexity, there is the duplication of fathers.

3.6. The blended space "Augustus". Living in the Blend

1. Unaware of his real origins
2. Quest for identity/rebellion
3. Dichotomy between Augustus and the community
4. Confident in his knowledge
5. Blind
6. Educated
7. Activist-promoter of black emancipation
8. Positive connotation for certain black people, negative connotation for white people
9. Resistant to master's orders
10. Fearless
11. Miscegenation
12. Ambiguous relationship with the father
13. Parricide

Figure 3.6

There are several scenes in *DFE* where characters (especially Augustus) are reading, writing or telling stories. I suggest that these scenes can be traced back to specific earlier traditions (input spaces) with which Rita Dove is in

[94] For the emergent meaning of the duplication of fathers and the presence of two parricides in *DFE* see chapter 1, section 1.5.5.

dialogue. I articulate the emergent meaning of Augustus in terms of activities of reading and writing as well as the scars written on his body. By analysing the moment in which these acts occur, I do not only recap all the features projected from the four input spaces, but I believe that my previous analysis of the input spaces active for the formation of the identity of Augustus gains further solidity.

The first moment I will analyse is Augustus' storytelling. Augustus is a reader; I mentioned, in section 3.2.5., that Augustus reads Greek mythology, literature (Milton), and the Bible. However, Augustus is also a storyteller. Rita Dove created a character with this particular feature; in the 2002 interview with Pereira, Dove imagines that, in different circumstances, Augustus could have been a poet: "in a different world, Amalia (the Jocasta figure) might have been a woman of independent means and Augustus (who recalls Oedipus) a poet" (Pereira, 2003: 37). His poetic identity is recognised by Amalia when she first meets him while he is giving a revolutionary speech to his fellow slaves:

[3.32] AMALIA: A lovely speech

The SLAVES are horrified. AUGUSTUS stands impassive

I see you are a poet
as well as a rebel. (*DFE*: Act 1, scene 7)

Therefore, it is possible to identify Augustus as a poetic figure parallel to Rita Dove who tells a different story about his origins.

When Augustus recounts Amalia the circumstances of his birth,[95] the beginning of his description is very prototypical and reminiscent of a fairy tale: "one soft spring night [...]" and the language he uses is metaphorical and poetic. When Augustus tells Phebe about his past, he talks about himself as an old story "Just look at me! It's an old story".[96] In both passages, Augustus

[95] For an analysis of this passage in *DFE*, see section 3.2.1.
[96] See section 3.5.1.

inscribes himself in the "tragic mulatto" narrative, and, I argue, he sees himself as a personification of the literary character; as one of several examples of this very typical tale pattern. Through Augustus' narration of his own life, Dove is in dialogue, and therefore, projecting specific elements from the input space of the "tragic mulatto". As I have shown, there are common features between Augustus' story and the prototypical fictional character of the "tragic mulatto" but there are also many divergences and Augustus cannot be interpreted as an example of this tradition exclusively, as he is a complex character, a blended space.

The second moment I will analyse is the reading scene occurring in Act I, scene 8. Amalia and Augustus converse about literature and art. Augustus knows Greek myths, and when Amalia gives him the book "Tales of the Greeks", he confesses that he has already read it and that he finds the Greeks 'too predictable'. It is possible to postulate that the book they are talking about is, or contains, the myth of Oedipus. By incorporating an object metonymically referring to the Greek tales in the exchange between the two characters, Rita Dove explicitly establishes her own dialogue with Greek myths, reading and re-writing them in such a creative way that Augustus is unable to interpret himself as partially an Oedipus.

The third passage I will focus on is a writing scene in Act I, scene 6. Augustus, when recruited by the group of rebels, has to sign the "Book of Redemption". This moment is solemn:

[3.33] LEADER: Augustus Newcastle: are you prepared to
slay out oppressors,
male and female,
when it is deemed time, according
to the plans of insurrection
drawn up and approved by members present?
AUGUSTUS: I am
LEADER: Enter your name in the Book of Redemption!
(*DFE*: Act 1, scene 6)

The "Book of Redemption" contains the list of slaves who take part in the rebellion against the slave owners. Through the writing of names in the book,

I suggest that the author connects Augustus to the course of history and the category of the "historical black rebel". This book, as with "The Tales of the Greeks", is an important, metonymic object present in the play that helps to interpret and understand Augustus' complexity, as it is linked to the mental space of the history of uprisings and liberation struggles of enslaved people. At the core of his identity, fictional characters act as input spaces, along with real historical figures.

The fourth element I will analyse is Augustus' scarred back. Scars characterise the American language of slavery, and therefore they can be considered as linguistic signs inscribed on the black body, which becomes a written object, the text of the white narrative. These marks, carried different meanings, depending on the purpose and the function they had (Henderson, 2002). The 'branded' scar was a sign that the owners of enslaved people made on the body of the enslaved person to show their ownership. The 'whipped' scar is the result of a wound inflicted by the slave owner on the body of the enslaved person to punish them for behavior such as attempting to escape.

On the auction block, the place where enslaved people were exposed and sold, their bodies were observed and scrutinised. As stated by Henderson the scar "became the signifier for the rebellious slave" (Henderson, 2002: 36). Any scars found were analysed and read; they evoked stories. Stories of fugitives, of "bad black men, and rebellious enslaved individuals". The story of the "rebellious slave" was created and written on the black body in order to be read by white slave owners, but also by the enslaved people, as a written reminder of the consequences of rebellious action.

On Augustus' back, there are traces of innumerable whippings at the hands of his different owners. These marks are recognisable to all as signs because they are a well-known language and part of collective knowledge. Augustus' body is a narrative body. I propose the following conceptual metaphor, AUGUSTUS' BACK IS A BOOK, which is implicitly and explicitly suggested by the play.

The overseer and everyone else can read Augustus' scars, and they tell the story of a wild and dangerous slave. When Jones the overseer finds out that Amalia bought a slave named Augustus, he is worried because of the information he has gathered through Augustus' back (see quotation [3.25]). Augustus' back functions as an element that represents the white view of Augustus' character and the story they write and read about him; therefore, I suggest that these scars are linked to the input space of the "bad n-word".

A book can be read and interpreted in different ways. Amalia, while caressing Augustus, notices the scars on his back and says:

[3.34] AMALIA: Your back is like a book
no-one can bear to read to the end-
each angry gash, each proud welt
(*DFE*, Act 2, scene 5)

Amalia explicitly associates Augustus' back with a book, and reads each scar as a story. In this moment, the white master is reading the book of slavery and it is too painful to read until the end; she is reading and facing history. This scene is also preceded by a moment in which Amalia reflects on her role as master, as the only cause of the pain of others, a role from which she cannot escape, because she is trapped by her fate.[97]

[3.35] AMALIA: Don't you think I see the suffering?
Don't you think I know I'm the cause?

With sarcasm and self-loathing

But a master cannot allow himself
the privilege of sorrow. A master
must rule, or die. (DFE, Act 2, scene 5)

Scars of his enslavement are not the only ones Augustus has. Amalia recognises that there are scars that differ, ones that tell a different story.

[3.36] AMALIA: But these scars on your side are different

Touching them gently

[97] For an analysis of this passage from *DFE* and the elements of fate and slavery, see chapter 1, section 1.4.

> They couldn't have come from a whipping.
> They're more like-more like
> markings that turn up in fairy tales
> of princes and paupers exchanges at birth.
>
> […]
>
> AMALIA: They even look like crowns.
> Or suns-exploding suns!
> How did you come by them? (*DFE*, Act 2, scene 5)

She cannot read the scars, she is, in a certain way, illiterate and therefore asks Augustus to explain them to her, but Augustus, showing again the merging of storytelling and the body, says: "no more stories". Amalia attempts to decode the signs, she perceives that they are different, mysterious, ambiguous, she even understands that they come from a very distant past, but she is not able to read the scars because of the lack of shared experience between Amalia and Augustus. Amalia did not experience the moment when Augustus was scarred directly, as she did not know that her husband put spurs in his basket.

As I have already pointed out,[98] these scars are pretty much similar to Oedipus' scars. Both Augustus and Oedipus suffered a great injury in their childhood; both wounds were inflicted by their fathers and are signs of their exposure. These signs are the symbol of their trauma, but they are also the symbol of their glorious survival and of their heroic spirit. These scars represent both Augustus' and Oedipus' complex relation with the past and prefigure, as signs of their curse, also their future.

My analysis of reading and writing scenes highlights how Rita Dove is reading, responding to, and creatively weaving different input spaces into the fabric of Augustus. Augustus emerges from different traditions, but as a blended character, he develops new elements, a new emergent structure that is not present in any input space. As a "bad n-word", all he had ever known is to hate and be hated. He gained legendary status, and his attempts to fight back against the system and his rebellious story are written, in the form of

[98] See chapter 1, section 1.5.4.

scars, on his back. However, unlike the "bad n-word", his hatred does not escalate into isolated or self-destructive acts of violence, but is combined with specific features of the "historical black rebel", and Augustus emerges as an activist for the emancipation, education and liberation of slaves. Unlike Oedipus, in fact, his destiny is inscribed with social and historical reasonings; this is why the quest for identity is, for Augustus, inextricably intertwined with rebellion and with the death of his masters. Nevertheless, his love for Amalia demolishes his belief system and he has to choose between love and freedom:

[3.37] AUGUSTUS: Everything was so simple before!
Hate and be hated.
But this-love or freedom-
is the devil's choice. (*DFE,* Act 1, scene 8)

The complex and ambiguous relationship with his father and the alliance with his mother, typical of the "tragic mulatto", here assume really tragic undertones because of the Oedipal plot and the inversion of the gender of the parents. Therefore, the alliance with the mother, typical of the "tragic mulatto" stories, is blended with the Oedipal incestuous relation between mother and son. Nevertheless, Augustus is not devastated and does not blind himself because of crossing the barrier of the greatest taboo, incest, as Oedipus does in the Greek tragedy. He is overwhelmed because he lost, in one single moment, his lover and the mother he had just found. Incest becomes a tool to unveil inner intimate connections that exist within a strictly racially divided country.[99]

In the end, Augustus emerges as something different from all the stories that have been told about him and the stories he has told about himself. The various interpretations of Augustus given by the overseer, the other slaves, Amalia and Augustus himself are incomplete. He is a man who is crossed by

[99] For a detailed analysis of the element of incest and the characterisation of the play as a revolutionary love story, see chapter 2.

strong and conflicting emotional forces, whose most unique feature, according to the author herself, is his humanity.

> [3.38] "But the important thing that happens to Augustus is that he becomes human. He messes up everything else, but he's human- humane-by play's end. Male heroes don't achieve that very often, and I wanted Augustus to find that humanity in himself". (Steffen & Dove, 1997: 116)

From a rich and complex conceptual integration network, between stereotypes and literary archetypes Augustus emerges as a full human being.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter explained the author's process of character formation as blending. Through a detailed textual analysis, I have represented the input spaces of the literary and historical entities that I see as active and productive in the creation of the protagonist Augustus, and placed the relevant information for the respective fictional and non-fictional entities. This cognitive linguistic approach shows how Rita Dove writes and creates a new modern hero (the emergent meaning of the blend). Augustus is not a character flattened by stereotypical patterns and characteristics; he frees himself from limited definitions.

Dove, through scenes of reading and writing, through the presence of specific objects (the Book of Redemption, Greek stories, body text), reads and dialogues with earlier traditions, with the Western classics and American literature, creating a new myth. The author digs deep, into tradition and history, where she finds the core of the character she wanted to create, challenging every stereotype. This theatrical work is at the crossroads of many input spaces, but is still an original creation of the author; Dove writes an original, unpredictable story.

Part II. *Mother Love*

Chapter 4. Paris-Underworld. The Metaphor of Death in *Mother Love*

In this chapter, I take into account Rita Dove's poetry collection *Mother Love.* I will focus my analysis on specific sonnets from sections III and IV, in which it is possible to identify a single Persephone-like persona and a clear narrative plot. The main protagonist of these sections is Persephone, a young American student living in Paris, exploring the adult world and everything it has to offer. Her erotic curiosity leads her to meet a Hades-like man with whom she begins a relationship.

Through an application of cognitive linguistic findings, such as image schemas and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and an analysis of Greek parallels from the main source of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, I explore how the mythical Persephone's journey to the Underworld is used to conceptualise and structure a student's journey to Paris. I also show how the mythical, ancient Greek metaphoric conflation between marriage and death is used to understand and interpret modern relationships between women and men. My formulations of these specific metaphors are: GOING TO PARIS IS DEATH and MARRIAGE TO A MAN IS DEATH.

In section 4.1., I offer a summary of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. In section 4.2., I take into account the structure of the work *Mother Love,* exploring the seven sections into which the work is divided. In section 4.3., I analyse Dove's own interpretation of the Greek myth and how the author has creatively reworked it. In section 4.4., I show that the life of the American exchange student, Persephone, her erotic curiosity, and her romantic relationships are built on the image schema UP-DOWN, and metaphorically represented as a descent into Hell. In section 4.5., I explore how the lexical items used to describe the food that Persephone and her mother, Demeter, eat in a French restaurant and the words used by Demeter to describe her married daughter are connected to the semantic frame of death. In section 4.6., I analyse several expressions to show that in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

Persephone's descent into the Underworld is metaphorically associated with death. In section 4.7., I focus on the link between marriage and death in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. In section 4.8., I present the conclusion of my analysis.

4.1. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was composed during the second half of the first millennium BCE and is the main and most complete source text describing Persephone's abduction by Hades and her mother Demeter's search for her. Here I briefly summarise the myth as it appears in the *Hymn*.

Persephone, daughter of Demeter, the Goddess of grain, is playing on a meadow with the daughters of Oceanus. They are flower picking when Persephone sees a narcissus. When Persephone tries to reach for it, the earth opens and Hades kidnaps her. By the time Demeter hears her daughter's screams, Persephone has already disappeared. Demeter searches for her daughter for nine days; on the tenth Helios, the sun god who sees everything, pressed by Demeter's questions, reveals what happened. After discovering that Persephone was kidnapped by Hades and with the permission of Zeus, Demeter angrily leaves the gods and wanders on earth, disguised as an old woman.

She arrives in Eleusis and meets Metaneira and her husband Celeus, the rulers of Eleusis. Here Demeter is not recognised as a goddess but looked upon with awe and reverence by Metaneira and is asked to be the nurse of Demophon (Celeus and Metaneira's son). Demeter, while holding Demophon over the fire to make him immortal, is interrupted by Metaneira's cries. Enraged, Demeter reveals her identity as an Olympic goddess. Then she orders the people of Eleusis to build a great temple and altar in her honor. This is the foundation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the most important of the mystery cults of antiquity.

Demeter leaves Eleusis and, angered by the loss of Persephone, causes a terrible famine on the earth that deprives mortals of their harvest and immortals of gifts and sacrifices. For this reason, Zeus sends Hermes to Hades to ask him to return Persephone to her mother. He accepts, but before sending her back, he gives her a pomegranate that will forever link her to the Underworld. She would therefore live one third of the year as wife of Hades and queen of the Underworld and the other two-thirds in the upper world.

4.2. *Mother Love*'s structure

Dove's *Mother Love* is a collection of sonnets published in 1995, based explicitly on the myth of Demeter and Persephone. The author sees her work, given the choice of the form of the sonnet, as an homage to Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, however, consciously interwoven with a feminist stance. The decision to work on the myth of Demeter and Persephone is the result of Dove's intention to focus on female goddesses, as she stated in her 1995 interview with Bellin:

> [4.1] "My Persephone and Demeter poems, for instance, actually began as a technical exercise. One day I was thinking, "I'm tired of all the male gods; what's a good female deity?" Since Rilke had written sonnets to Orpheus, I decided to write sonnets to Demeter". (Bellin, 1995: 23)

Through the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, Dove centers her work on female experience and focuses exclusively on female voices. With its focus on mother figure, the bond between mother and daughter, and the passage from childhood and womanhood, in fact, "the myth of Demeter and Persephone has been identified as an archetypal narrative of women's experience" (Hurst, 2012: 176). As the classical scholar Foley points out in her commentary on the *Hymn to Demeter*:

> [4.2] Furthermore, in contrast to the Homeric epics, the *Hymn* puts female experience at the center of the narrative by giving the privileged

> place to the point of view of the divine mother and daughter on their shared catastrophe. (Foley, 1994: 80)

In the same 1995 interview with Bellin, Rita Dove recognised that the decision to explore the myth had an unconscious, personal implication that only became clear to the author later:

> [4.3] "For a while I believed I had chosen Demeter because of Rilke's Orpheus. When I look back now, it's so obvious? my daughter Aviva was about five years old at the time, just about to enter kindergarten, to go out into the world. I had some readjustment to do as a mother". (Bellin, 1995: 128)

As a mother herself, the author experienced Demeter-like moments when faced with her first separation from her daughter and her daughter's increasing independence.

The volume is divided into seven sections, each containing a different number of sonnets of varying length and structures. The collection opens with an introduction entitled "An intact world", in which the author briefly summarises and provides an explanation of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone.

Section I contains a single sonnet, "Heroes". The title "Heroes" positions the reader in the realm of myth, while the sonnet itself presents a re-elaboration of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in the form of an anecdote. The narcissus in the sonnet is a poppy, the meadow is weedy, and a male perpetrator steals a flower from the garden of a woman, who is eventually killed by the thief.

Section II is set in the suburbs of an unspecified city in the United States. This section is the one most closely related to the *Hymn* as it is centered on the rape and abduction of a young child named Persephone and her mother, Demeter, in distress. Section II ends with the sonnet "Golden Oldie". The protagonist of the sonnet is a different incarnation of Persephone. This time she is not a child who gets lost while playing with her friends. Rather, she is a young adult who daydreams of a love she has not found yet. The sonnet does not have any explicit mythical resonance. Therefore, the sonnet seems

to be incongruous with the rest of section II. Nevertheless, the sonnet is, from my point of view, a connection to and an anticipation of section III. The protagonist of the sonnet, a girl eager to live her life and erotically curious, resembles the protagonist of section III.

In section III, Persephone is an American college student who tries to live a full and fulfilling life in the city of Paris. She longs to live her life as an individual, freed from her mother's identity and protection. The passage from innocence to experience, from childhood to womanhood is conceptualised as a fall in the Underworld. Section IV shows Persephone's life with Hades in Paris and the encounter between mother and daughter in the French restaurant "The Bistro Styx". In this section, as I will show in section 4.5., Persephone, now living with her partner Hades, is described by her mother as the living dead.

Sections V and VI present isolated sonnets, mostly about Persephone-like experiences, used as a metaphor to analyse male-female relations and women's folklore. Section VII is the lyrical transposition of Dove's travel in Sicily searching for traces of myth under the Italian infernal heat.

In *Mother Love*, we can distinguish two trajectories: a vertical trajectory and a horizontal one. The vertical is that of Persephone's descent into Hell, mapped onto Paris. Demeter's trajectory is also vertical, as she, in this revision, goes to Hell (Paris) to visit her daughter. The horizontal trajectory is a continuous shifting of spaces and locations in the Upperworld (Arizona, unidentified U.S. cities, Mexico) connecting different experiences of women, and one man (in the sonnet "Political").

4.3. *Mother Love* and the Greek myth

Rita Dove describes the myth of Demeter and Persephone in the introduction "An intact world" as the story of a "violated world". A women-centered world, the one of mother and daughter, is thrown into chaos by male intervention. Moreover, Rita Dove considers the ancient story as a "modern

dilemma" of the mother who cannot protect her daughter anymore once the world is open to her.

As emerges from the collection, the relationship between mother and daughter is complex because it is characterised by two opposing forces. On one side, there is the daughter's desire for independence, for separation and detachment from her mother. On the other side, there is the struggle of the mother who suffers the traumatic rupture of the bond with her daughter and realises that she can no longer protect her from the dangers of the outside world. In the last long sonnet of *Mother Love*, "Her island", the author revisits the mythological plot in a few lines:

> [4.4] Through sunlight into flowers
> she walked, and was pulled down.
> A simple story, a mother's deepest
> dread-that her child could drown
> in sweetness. (*ML*, section VII, "Her Island")

The mother struggles with the loss of her daughter and she does not accept her new independent life. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Lofgren (Lofgren, 1996: 140) the separation is crucial and necessary for the growth of the daughter and for the mother to re-acquire her independent status.

The vulnerability of the mother persona, the wounds resulting from the daughter's passage from childhood to womanhood, and her relationships with men are the focus of the collection, explored through mythic lenses. The author, in fact, besides exploring mother and daughter relationships, deals with a trans-historical imbalance of power between men and women, the subjugated role of women and the demeaning effect that relationships with men have on women.

Relationships between men and women are depicted without any positive connotations. At various moments in the work, men are metaphorically represented as sharp, dangerous objects (knives, scissors) and encounters with men are represented as physical laceration: a wound on

female bodies.[100] Moreover, love relationship and marriage are spaces for the manifestation of male power and female abuse.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is specifically focused on Demeter, her anger, and her search for her daughter. Only at the end of the *Hymn*, when Persephone finally reunites with her mother, is there space for Persephone to tell the story from her point of view. In *Mother Love*, many sonnets and the entire section III are structured from Persephone's point of view in Hell. Moreover, the focus is not only on the relationship between mother and daughter; a large space is given to the one between Persephone and Hades.

Mother Love continuously shifts perspective between Demeter(s) and Persephone(s). There is not, in fact, just one Demeter and there is not just one Persephone. *Mother Love* substitutes single characters of myth with a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives (Pereira, 2003: 137). Throughout the collection, it is not always clear who is the referent behind the first-person pronouns; fragments of lives create the different angles from which the myth reverberates. The interweaving and overlapping of voices and experiences underline the universality of the myth and its recursiveness. The collection *Mother Love* is an exploration of different variations and manifestations of the story of Demeter and Persephone.

The plot of the ancient story does not unfold linearly but in a fragmentary manner. The form of the sonnets isolates lyrical moments, replacing the continuity of the *Hymn*, and losing the linearity of the narration. This fragmentation is the result of the use of a different literary genre, poetry, which is not the best suited for the linear unfolding of a complex, unitary story composed of different episodes and events. Fragmentation is a conscious poetic choice, the result of a specific creative process explained by the author herself:

[100] For a detailed analysis of the element of the wound, see chapter 5 sections 5.4 and 5.5.

[4.5] In *Mother Love*, coherence is achieved more through quilting than a straightforward storyline or a chain with discrete links. Since everybody knows what happens to Persephone, the story, in and of itself, isn't important; instead, I explore different ways in which mothers and daughters manifest the myth, using both Classical and contemporary backdrops. Quilt or chain, though, I love working with the concept of a poetry book as one coherent text. *(*Rowell, 2008: 724)

It is worth focusing on the metaphor of quilting and the conceptual mappings and analogies that can be derived across the domains of quilting and mythmaking.

Quilting is the act of stitching together several layers of fabric of different shapes and patterns. Different experiences and manifestations of the myth are the different patches of the quilt. The myth is the thread that connects these particular experiences and the poet is the tailor who combines isolated pieces. The author, by weaving together different pieces (manifestations of the myth), moves in liminal spaces, blending multiple experiences and individualities. The borders are not separating lines but the connection points where echoes of mythical voices blend with urban voices. Therefore, borders become sites of intersection and not divisions; they are spaces of dialogue. The author, in fact, is not only interested in the story of Demeter and Persephone, as such, but rather in finding the connection between myth and modern life.[101] In *Mother Love*, Dove connects different experiences of women that differ in terms of class, time, and space. These particular, individual experiences are made universal, as they are trans-historical, trans-geographical expressions of archetypal patterns.

In the sonnet "Blue Days", mythical echoes resonate in a contemporary American setting where a truck driver tells a misogynistic joke:

[4.6] Under pressure Mick tells me one
of the jokes truckers pass among themselves: *Why*
do women have legs? I can't imagine;
the day is too halcyon, beyond the patio too Arizonan
blue, sparrows drunk on figs and the season's first corn
stacked steaming on the wicker table….*I*

[101] See General Introduction, section 0.2.

give up; why do they? As if I weren't one
of "them". Nothing surpasses these
kernels, taut-to-bursting sweet,
tiny rows translucent as baby teeth.
Remember, you asked for it:
to keep them from tracking slime over the floor.

Demeter, here's another one for your basket
of mysteries. (*ML*, section V, "Blue days", italics in the original)

Many elements connect the sonnet to the myth of Demeter, mapped onto a setting and narrative that initially seem far from the mythic realm. The element of the figs, as I will show in section 4.5., is to be connected to the pomegranate, the fruit that, in the *Hymn*, Persephone eats in the Underworld. Another element is the corn, of which Demeter is the goddess and, at the end of the sonnet, the references to the myth are explicit with the linguistic elements of "Demeter", "basket" and "mysteries". The fundamental element of the myth, the Eleusinian ritual and mystery, has been re-elaborated. There is no religious dimension in *Mother Love*. There are, however, new rituals, like the one of drinking a martini cocktail with olives, in the sonnet "Breakfast of champions", and new mysteries.

Mysteries are, in this case, the juncture points where explicit and implicit misogyny bind every woman, mythically and historically, to a condition of inferiority. Myth is a torch, to stay in the language of myth,[102] to find these little mysteries, folds in the lines of time and space. The basket is one of Demeter's symbols, and it becomes a container for the violence, offence, abuse, and episodes of subjugation that women face in a male world.

The collection blends Greek mythology and modern and popular culture, black music and traditions, African American communities, as well as European culture and language. The author incorporates a multiplicity of experiences, narratives, stories, traditions, and mythologies.[103] Rita Dove

102 Demeter wandered the earth for nine days carrying torches (δαΐδας) to find Persephone. The torch is, therefore, a mythical element associated with Demeter. The carrying of torches was a practice of the initiates during the rite of Eleusis, which also included a torchbearer.

103 For further analysis of Rita Dove's poetics, see General Introduction section 0.1.

rewrites the myth from a perspective marked by race, but transcends any attempt to categorise her poetry and art within a specific set of cultural expectations. In her poetry, blackness is not confined and restrained by limits and boundaries. In her 1994 interview with Lloyd, Dove states:

> [4.7] "[I]f I'm writing a poem in which I notice a flower, if I felt it was important to talk about this flower, I would be dishonest not to do it just because I thought it wasn't directly about being black and a woman. Besides, how do I know it ISN'T about being black or a woman?" (Lloyd 1994: 22)

In Rita Dove's own conception of art, there is no limit to what a "black poem" should be or what it should talk about, and she defends her poetic and expressive freedom.

The previous passage from Dove's interview resonates with the analysis of *Mother Love,* with its focus on the element of the flower and its association with Persephone, an African American child. Mythological association between Persephone and the reign of the plants and flower is used to explore black femininity, as in the sonnet "Protection":

> [4.8] Are you having a good time?
> Are you having a time at all?
> Everywhere in the garden I see the slim vine
> of your neck, the stubborn baby curls
> I know I'm not saying this right.
> "Good" hair has no body
> in this country; like trained ivy,
> it hangs and shines. (*ML*, section II, "Protection")

Demeter, after Persephone's abduction, is inconsolable. She is contemplating her garden, which reminds her of her daughter. The plant is a black child,[104] and the mythological association of Persephone with the plant world, in this sonnet, is the tool that introduces the issue of good and bad hair and the questioning of stereotypical beauty, centred on white models. On one hand, blackness ceases to be the "other" par excellence and it becomes

[104] For a detailed analysis of this metaphor, see chapter 5 section 5.7.

universalised. On the other, Greek myth is a tool to explore particular racial experiences.

The tragedy of an abducted child resonates in a black neighborhood. Persephone, while playing with her friends and gathering flowers is raped and abducted by a man. A chorus from the African American community, a sort of black sisterhood (Steffen, 1997: 231), tries to comfort Demeter, "blown apart by loss", by offering her some distractions. In what follows, the different voices from the neighborhood, as a Greek chorus[105] who follows and comment on the events, are the counterparts of the gods sent by Zeus to convince Demeter to rejoin Olympus and end the famine.

[4.9] I told her: enough is enough.
Get a hold on yourself, take a lover,
help some other unfortunate child.

To abdicate
To let the garden go to seed

[…]

I say we gotta see her through
I say she can't be left too long in that
drafty old house alone.

No end-of-day delight
At the creak of the gate

[…]

Sister Jeffries, you could drop in
tomorrow morning, take one
of your Mason jars, something
sweetish, tomatoes or bell peppers

no tender cheek nor ripening grape
destined for wine

Miz Earl can fetch her later to the movies
a complicated plot should distract her

The last frail tendril snapped free

[105] See General Introduction, section 0.2. for the parallelism established by Dove between Greek chorus and African American traditions. Connections between the Greek chorus and African American communal structures (e.g. church, neighborhoods) have also been highlighted by Toni Morrison in "*Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*" (1988).

(thought the roots still strain toward her)
(*ML*, section II, "Grief: The Council", italics in the original)

The chorus of black women is blended with a voice that is coming from the mythic space describing the neglected duty of Demeter, in a call-and-response interaction that dilates the barriers of time and space. Elements of nature and agriculture are blended with elements of the modern world, like the Mason jars and the movies. Myth penetrates everyday life, and the mythical element of the loss of a beloved child becomes an everyday drama.

[4.10] Yes it's a tragedy, a low down shame,
but you still have your own life to live. Meanwhile,
ain't nothing we can do but be discreet
and wait She brightened up a bit, then.
I thought of those blurred snapshots framed
on milk cartons, a new pair each week. (ML, section II "Grief: the Council")

In the words of one of the women of the chorus, Persephone's face is like that of many other missing girls, lost in the Underworld, stamped on milk cartoons, a new one every week.

4.4. Metaphors of death

In sections III and IV of *Mother Love*, unlike in section II, Persephone is a young woman, an exchange student living in Paris. In this section, I analyse Dove's sonnets from a micro-linguistic point of view to show how the entrance of women into the adult world and their relationships with men are metaphorically represented as a fall into the Underworld. The complex narrative assumes a schematic spatial connotation. I focus on sonnets and some selected verses in which it is possible to find occurrences of the UP-DOWN image schema and the metaphor DEATH IS GOING DOWN, which contributes to the coherence and cohesion of the otherwise fragmented narrative.

In cognitive linguistics, image schemas[106] are the foundations for organising knowledge and reasoning about the world (Oakley, 2007). The image schema UP-DOWN (figure 4.1) is based on our physical and cultural experience and reflects, in particular, our upright standing bodily experiences in a gravitational field. We experience a correlation between a certain emotional state and our posture; for example, if we are depressed or sad, our posture is most likely hunched, we experience a correlation between illness and the necessity to lie down, and also between being down and being dead. Such correlations are the basis for a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), in this case, a conceptual metaphor whose source domain is a spatial orientation such as up and down, and whose target domain is an emotion like happiness or sadness or states like being alive or being dead.

The vertical axis of the image schema UP-DOWN structures a coherent system of concepts such as HAPPY IS UP/SAD IS DOWN, CONSCIOUS IS UP/UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN, and, more importantly for my analysis, HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP/SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN. Lakoff and Johnson present a list of conventional phrases and everyday expressions that should be considered as linguistic manifestations of the HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP/SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN conceptual metaphor, such as "his health is declining" and "he dropped dead" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 15).

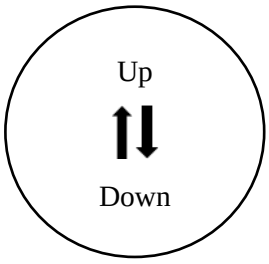

Figure 4.1

[106] See General Introduction 0.6.

In what follows I concentrate on the variation of the metaphor HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP/SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN in sections III and IV of *Mother Love.* The journey from America to France, and therefore the entire experience of a young student in Paris, is structured on a vertical axis and conceptualised as a metaphorical death.

Section III opens with "Persephone in Hell", one of the longest sonnets in the collection. Divided into seven parts, it is a long monologue that begins with Persephone recalling the first time she moved to Paris. The title provides the first spatial connotation and hints at the metaphorical blend between Paris and Hell.

The passage from America to Europe (Paris) is described in terms of an opposition innocence/perdition, a dichotomy between "the stereotypes of an innocent America and a Paris of erotic experience" (Steffen, 2001: 131). Throughout the sonnet, in addition to the title, other movements and spatial connotations turn Paris into an urban hell, and Persephone's walk through the streets of Paris into a continuous descent into the Underworld.

> [4.11] I was not quite twenty when I first went <u>down</u>
> into the stone <u>chasms</u> of the City of Lights, every morning
> four flights creaking under my rubber soles (*ML*, section
> III, "Persephone in Hell", emphasis added)

The word "down" defines the journey from the United States to Paris not as a horizontal movement but as structured on the vertical axis of the image schema UP-DOWN. Moreover, the word "chasm" defines a deep fissure on the surface of the earth: an opening to descend into hell.

Persephone's walk in the city is marked by the repetition of the word "down": "I climbed <u>down</u> guided by the smell of bread". Persephone climbs down the four flights of stairs and enters a bakery. She then continues her walk.

> [4.12] Cross the Sein, avoid Our Lady's
> crespuscolar shadow. Chill at my back
>
> *Which way is bluer?*

> One round of Boul' Mich: bookstore, kiosk,
> heat blast from the metro pit. Down, then. (*ML*, section III, "Persephone in Hell", emphasis added)

The action of Persephone crossing the river Seine does not surprise us, as we recall the corresponding situational script of being a tourist, which implies walking around a city and crossing rivers to get to the other side. However, I suggest that this script resonates with another script present in Western thought and mythology: crossing a specific river is a metaphor for a particular act, namely dying. Therefore, in the topography of the city of Paris blended with that of Hell, I submit that the river Sein instantiates the infernal river Styx, which is also the name of the restaurant where Persephone will meet her mother later on.

The heat blast coming from the metro recalls the intense heat traditionally associated with Hell. Persephone continues her descent, travelling deeper underground. She is not abducted; she chose the "bluer" way. The position of the word "down" at the beginning of a short and striking sentence in the final part of the line highlights the focus on downward movement. Moreover, the conciseness of the statement shows Persephone's firm and unyielding determination to offer herself to the abyss.

The degradation of the city reinforces the image of Paris as an infernal city.

> [4.13] Through the gutters, dry rivers
> of the season's detritus
> wind soughing the plane trees
> I command my knees to ignore the season
> as I scuttle over stones, marking pace
> by the intermittent evidence of canine
> love: heaped droppings scored with frost.
> (*ML*, section III, "Persephone in Hell")

Paris has lost its romantic charm; it is a desolated city, beaten by wind, full of dirt, dog droppings, and arrogant men whistling at women like wolves.

The downward movement is associated with Persephone's intercourse with men:

[4.14] There was love, of course. Mostly boys:
a flat-faced engineering student from Missouri,
a Texan flaunting his teaspoon of Cherokee blood.
I waited for afterwards—their pale eyelids, foreheads
thrown back so the rapture could evaporate.
I don't believe I was suffering. I was curious, mainly:
How would each one smell, how many ways could he do it?
I was drowning in flowers. (*ML*, section III, "Persephone in Hell", emphasis added)

The lexical item "drown" incorporates the basic structure of the image schema UP-DOWN as it implies a submersion under the water. Moreover, it is part of the semantic frame of "death". To drown is a vertical movement, from the top downwards, which implies death.

Flowers,[107] as a metaphor for men, are objects of desire, a symbol of erotic pleasure and they stimulate the curiosity and desire of Persephone, causing her fall into the Underworld. Lust, desire, erotic curiosity, and love relationships are constructed on a vertical axis and conceptualised as causes of metaphorical death.

At the end of Persephone's descent, she meets Hades, a Parisian artist. The sonnet "Hades' pitch" describes the moments after Hades and Persephone's first encounter. Persephone's seduction is described through the metaphor of the fall:

[4.15] Was she falling for him out of sheer boredom —
Cooped up in this anything-but-humble dive, stone
gargoyles leering and brocade drapes licked with fire?
(*ML*, section IV, "Hades' Pitch", emphasis added)

"Falling for him" and "dive" are metaphoric expressions based on the image schemas UP-DOWN. Moreover, the word *dive* is similar to the image of drowning in the previous sonnet as they are both related to the domain of

[107] For a detailed analysis of the metaphoric values of "flower" in this passage, see chapter 5, section 5.6.

water. The place where Persephone falls is clearly connoted by a gothic and infernal atmosphere, "gargoyles leering and brocade drapes licked with fire". Falling in love is here metaphorically described as a fall into the Underworld. Not only is violent abduction and rape understood as a metaphorical death and fall into the Underworld, but relationships with men are, in general, seen as a death-like experience, a transitional phase involving change, growth, and the loss of part of oneself for a different and new existence.

In the sonnet "Lost Brilliance", Persephone, now Hades' partner, describes Hades' house:

[4.16] I use to stand at the top of the stair
where the carpet flung down
its extravagant heart. Flames
teased the lake into glimmering licks.
(*ML*, section V, "Lost Brilliance")

As several scholars have attested,[108] entering the house of the deity of death, in this case Hades, is a metaphorical way of conceptualising death found in ancient Greek as well as other Indo-European traditions. The love relationship with the Parisian Hades-like artist is therefore described as having a lethal effect on the woman, who departs from the world of the living.

[4.17] I could pretend to be <u>above the earth</u>
rather than <u>underground:</u> a Venetian
palazzo or misty chalet tucked into
an Alp, that mixture of comfort
and gloom…nothing was simpler
to imagine. […] (*ML*, section V, "Lost brilliance", emphasis added)

In the sonnet, the mythical opposition between the upper-world and the Underworld is even more explicit, and it is blended with real, famous European tourist sites.

To summarise this first part of my analysis, the journey of an American exchange student to Paris, represented as a downward movement built on the

[108] See among others, Horn (2018); Horn (2020); Ginevra (2021);

image schema UP-DOWN, presents instances of the orientational conceptual metaphors: HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP/SICKENESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN. For this reason, I suggest the following conceptual metaphor: GOING TO PARIS IS DEATH.

The expressions "fall", "drowning", "dive", "above the earth", and "underground" even as they carry different metaphorical value, are image schematically connected and create the same pattern, through which the author conceptualises the larger theme of heteroerotic relations. I formulate the following conceptual metaphors: TO BE WITH MEN IS TO DROWN and TO BE IN LOVE WITH A HADES-LIKE MAN IS TO FALL INTO HELL. Moreover, Dove re-elaborates, creatively, the following conceptual metaphors: DEATH IS ENTERING HADES' HOUSE, and DEATH IS CROSSING A RIVER.

4.5. MARRIAGE TO A MAN IS DEATH

In this section, I focus on the sonnet "The Bistro Styx" in section IV of *Mother Love*. I analyse words linked to the semantic field of death to show how a consensual romantic relationship is described by the mother of the female partner as having a fatal effect on the daughter. As I will argue in the next subsection, the American student Persephone in this sonnet is now the wife of the Parisian bohemienne artist Hades. Therefore, I formulate the following conceptual metaphor that I see present in *Mother Love*: MARRIAGE TO A MAN IS DEATH.

A Parisian bistro is the setting for the encounter between Persephone and Demeter. The name Bistro Styx linguistically reflects a conceptual blend of the infernal river Styx and the name of a typical French restaurant. In this scenario, Persephone is represented as a non-living entity from the point of view of Demeter who does not accept the new lifestyle of her now married daughter. As highlighted by Righelato, "the Bistro Styx is primarily registered

through the cynical yet anxious maternal consciousness" (Righelato, 2006: 159).

Demeter is negatively surprised when she sees the daughter coming towards her.

> [4.18] She was thinner, with a mannered gauntness
> as she paused just inside the double
> glass door to survey the room, silvery cape
> billowing dramatically behind her. *What's this,*
> I thought (*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx", italics in the original)

Demeter does not recognise her daughter's changed condition. The first hint of her death-like status is her unhealthy thinness. The term "gaunt" is used to refer to someone ill or close to death. In this passage, Persephone's unhealthy status (gauntness, thinness) is metonymically associated with the domain of "death" and "illness".

The description continues, as Demeter sees her daughter's full figure.

> [4.19] that's when I saw she was dressed all in gray,
> from a kittenish cashmere skirt and cowl
> down to the graphite signature of her shoes (*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx")

I suggest that grey and dark clothing are a consequence of the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS DARKNESS as opposed to the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS LIGHT.[109] The Underworld has a specific range of colors, linked to shades of black and black itself. In Greek mythology, Ἔρεβος (Erebus), one of the primordial gods, the personification of darkness, is the word used to refer also to the darkness of the Underworld, and, metonymically, to the Underworld itself. Therefore, the darkness of the Underworld becomes the palette of Persephone's clothes, representing her dead-like status.

[109] For an analysis of these conceptual metaphors, see Lakoff & Johnson (2003) and Ruiz (2007).

Demeter criticises her daughter's way of life. Persephone is described as a passive entity, the artist's muse:

[4.20] How's business? I asked, and hazarded
a motherly smile to keep from crying out:
Are you content to conduct your life
as a cliché and, what's worse,
an anachronism, the brooding artist's demimonde?
(*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx")

Finally, Demeter depicts Persephone as a dead entity: "she did look ravishing spookily insubstantial, a lipstick ghost on tissue". Persephone is a deadly beauty, she has no concrete substance, she is an eidolon, she is a phantom, a trace of the person she once was, like lipstick on a tissue. The term "insubstantial" is a linguistic expression of the metaphor DEATH IS LEAVING THE BODY. Moreover, the terms "spookily" and "ghost" are related to death and entities of the living dead.

Persephone's love for Hades is physically consuming.

[4.21] […] Nothing seemed
to fill her up: she swallowed, slice into a pear
speared each tear-shaped lavaliere
and popped the dripping mess into her pretty mouth
(*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx")

Persephone is deprived of energy, or rather vital energy, and this condition again metonymically refers to the domains of "death" and "illness", as opposed to a well-functioning and healthy state associated with the domain of "life".

4.5.1. Food of death

Food has a fundamental role in the myth of Demeter and Persephone; it is only after eating pomegranate seeds that Persephone is eternally bound to the Underworld. Since the encounter between mother and daughter occurs in the restaurant "The Bistro Styx", food is central in Dove' sonnet and thus the author indulges in the descriptions of several entrées.

The sonnet unfolds as the different courses of a single meal come in. The blend between the modern metropolis and the mythical Underworld is constructed on the linguistic choices made by Dove to describe the food in the bistro. The first course is meat:

[4.22] The chateaubriand

arrived on a bone-white plate, smug and absolute
in its fragrant crust, a black plug steaming
like the heart plucked from the chest of a worthy enemy;
One touch with her fork sent pink juices streaming.
(*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx")

The terms used are connected to the semantic field of death and violence: the whiteness of the plate evokes skeletal imagery, the meat is the heart ripped from the enemy, the juices streaming from the rare meat recall the blood that leaves a body beaten to death.

This feast of death is accompanied by red wine: "a bloody Pinot Noir brought color to her cheeks". The adjective "bloody" used by Dove to describe the wine is more than just a touch of descriptive color. I argue that Persephone is drinking a bloody wine because she is conceptualised as dead. From a mythological perspective, the act of drinking blood has a distinctive function in the Underworld. Although there is no direct parallel for Persephone drinking blood in the *Homeric Hymn*, there are several instances of drinking blood in the Underworld in the *Odyssey*, in particular in Book XI.

Book XI describes Odysseus' katabasis (κατάβασις a Greek word meaning the descent to the Underworld). The book is connected to this sonnet insofar as both Odysseus and Demeter descend into the Underworld. The drinking of blood by the dead in the *Odyssey* has been analysed extensively[110] and interpreted in various ways. However, Martin highlights that "[t]he common denominator of these theories is the belief that the blood restores something to the dead, be it awareness, recognition, speech, or a combination of all three" (Martin, 2014: 2). Heath (2005) hypothesises that Anticleia

[110] See Rohde (1925); Heath (2005); Martin (2014).

(Odysseus' mother) drinks blood to speak or even to recognise Odysseus. Therefore, drinking blood is necessary to accomplish various activities: to recollect memory, speak, and be conscious.

I assume that what Persephone drinks is real blood, and that is why Demeter, as a living person, does not partake. In *Mother Love*, Persephone is already talking to Demeter; the wine/blood does not have the function of enabling the dead to have a meaningful conversation. Nevertheless, the bloody wine colors her cheeks and therefore restores her and brings her to life for a moment.

The sonnet and the mother-daughter encounter end with Persephone eating fruit.

> [4.23] "But are you happy?" Fearing, I whispered it
> quickly. "What? You know, Mother"-
> she bit into the starry rose of a fig-
> "one really should try the fruit here."
> *I' ve lost her*, I thought, and called for the bill.
> (*ML*, section IV, "The Bistro Styx", italics in the text)

The fig is in my opinion to be associated to the pomegranate of the *Homeric Hymn*. In the *Homeric Hymn*, after eating the pomegranate, Persephone becomes the wife of Hades and is forced to return to the Underworld for part of the year. In *Mother Love*, after Persephone has eaten the fig, Demeter exclaims "I've lost her", a very conventional expression for the death of a loved one and a linguistic manifestation of the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS DEPARTURE. The young student is now Hades' wife and, in her mother's eyes, dead.

4.6. Persephone's journey to the Underworld in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

In this section, I show that Persephone mythic journey to the Underworld and back to the world of the living is structured on the vertical axis of the image schema UP/DOWN and is metaphorically conceptualised in terms of life and

death. Greek gods and goddesses are immortal, but in the *Hymn*, the distinction between mortality and immortality is blurred.

When the earth gapes open (χάνε), after Persephone's attempt to pluck the flower, Hades rises up from beneath the earth; the Underworld is located, in fact, in the depths of the Earth.

[4.24] καλὸν ἄθυρμα λαβεῖν: χάνε δὲ χθὼν εὐρυάγυια
Νύσιον ἂμ πεδίον, τῇ ὄρουσεν ἄναξ Πολυδέγμων
ἵπποις ἀθανάτοισι, Κρόνου πολυώνυμος
υἱός. ἁρπάξας δ᾽ ἀέκουσαν ἐπὶ χρυσέοισιν ὄχοισιν
ἦγ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένην: ἰάχησε δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὄρθια φωνῇ[111]

to take the lovely toy. The earth with its wide ways yawned
over the Nysian plain; the lord Host-to-Many rose up on her
with his immortal horses, the celebrated son of Kronos;
he snatched the unwilling maid into his golden chariot
(*HDem*. 16-19, emphasis added)

After Zeus orders Hermes to bring Persephone back from the Realm of the Dead, he goes down:

[4.25] Ἑρμῆς δ᾽ οὐκ ἀπίθησεν, ἄφαρ δ᾽ ὑπὸ κεύθεα γαίης
ἐσσυμένως κατόρουσε λιπὼν ἕδος Οὐλύμποιο.

Hermes did not disobey. At once he left Olympus's height
and plunged swiftly into the depths of the earth (*HDem*. 341-342, emphasis added)

When Persephone is finally reunited with her mother she tells her side of the story, and again, her journey is structured on the opposition UP-DOWN, through the same formulaic expression used by Hermes (ὑπὸ κεύθεα γαίης):

[4.26] ὡς δέ μ᾽ ἀναρπάξας Κρονίδεω πυκινὴν διὰ μῆτιν
ᾤχετο πατρὸς ἐμοῖο, φέρων ὑπὸ κεύθεα γαίης,
ἐξερέω, καὶ πάντα διίξομαι, ὡς ἐρεείνεις.

For the rest—how seizing me by the shrewd plan of my father,
Kronos's son, he carried me off into the earth's depths—
I shall tell and elaborate all that you ask. (*Hdem*. 414-416, emphasis added)

[111] The translation of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is taken from Foley (1994). Translations of other Classical sources are taken from the Loeb Classical Edition.

And again:

[4.27] αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ δρεπόμην περὶ χάρματι: γαῖα δ᾽ἔνερθε
χώρησεν: τῇ δ᾽ ἔκθορ᾽ ἄναξ κρατερὸς Πολυδέγμων:
βῆ δὲ φέρων ὑπὸ γαῖαν ἐν ἅρμασι χρυσείοισι
πόλλ᾽ ἀεκαζομένην: ἐβόησα δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὄρθια φωνῇ.
ταῦτά τοι ἀχνυμένη περ ἀληθέα πάντ᾽ ἀγορεύω.

As I joyously plucked it, the ground gaped from beneath,
and the mighty lord, Host-to-Many, rose from it
and carried me off beneath the earth in his golden chariot
much against my will. And I cried out at the top of my voice.
I speak the whole truth, though I grieve to tell it. (*Hdem.* 429-433, emphasis added)

Persephone, after the abduction, is taken down into the depths of earth where she spends one-third of the year. After this third, she will rejoin her mother, rising up again:

[4.28] ὁππότε δ᾽ ἄνθεσι γαῖ᾽ εὐώδε[σιν] εἰαρινο[ῖσι]
παντοδαποῖς θάλλῃ, τόθ᾽ ὑπὸ ζόφου ἠερόεντος
αὖτις ἄνει μέγα θαῦμα θεοῖς θνητοῖς τ᾽ ἀνθρώποις.

When the earth blooms in spring with all kinds
of sweet flowers, then from the misty dark you will
rise again, a great marvel to gods and mortal men. (*HDem.* 401-403, emphasis added)

Returning to the realm of the living is conceptualised as an upward movement.

As pointed out by Ginevra (2021), several poetic expressions that are linked to the concept of "death", or "non-ideal life", present a similar phraseology with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The combination of χάσκω 'gape open' with a subject χθών 'earth', for example, is attested twice in the *Iliad*, in relation to a person who is in danger or dies. Therefore, the expression of the earth opening under a person is a metaphor for DEATH.

Horn (2020) examines conceptual metaphors to express the concept of "death" in the *Iliad* and detect the metaphor DOWN IS INACTIVE/ DEAD in several expression such as:

[4.29] τὼ δ’ ἄμφω γαῖαν ἐδύτην.

both sank below the earth. (Hom. *Il*. VI. 19)

ἔδυν δόμον Ἄιδος εἴσω.

they went down into the house of Hades. (Hom. *Il*. XI. 263)

To conclude: in figure 4.2, I show the correspondence between mythical spatial location and the abstract concepts of life and death.

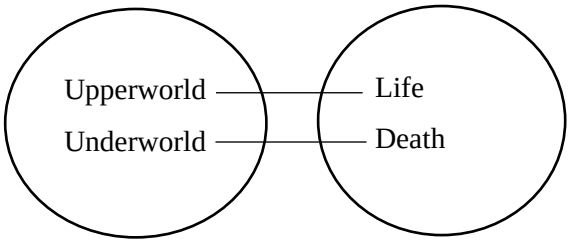

Figure 4.2

Figure 4.3 reflects Persephone’s journey as structured on the same vertical axis that underlies the metaphorical conceptualisation of death and life. To move downward into the gaping earth and to go into the Underworld is mapped onto Persephone’s change of status from living to dead.[112]

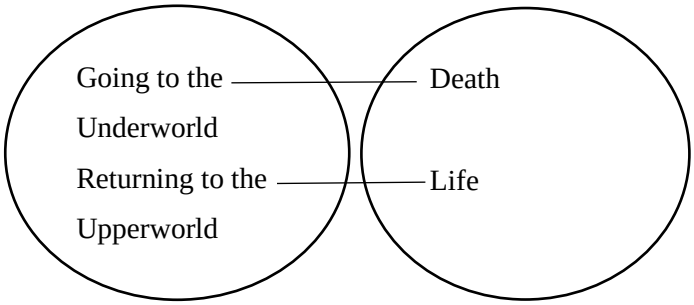

Figure 4.3

[112] For a complete and detailed analysis of the conceptualization of Persephone’s journey in terms of life and death, see Ginevra (2021).

The vertical axis that structures Persephone's journey in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is metaphorically mapped onto the journey from America to France (figure 4.4), and therefore, the entire experience of a young female student in Paris is conceptualised as a metaphoric death (figure 4.5).

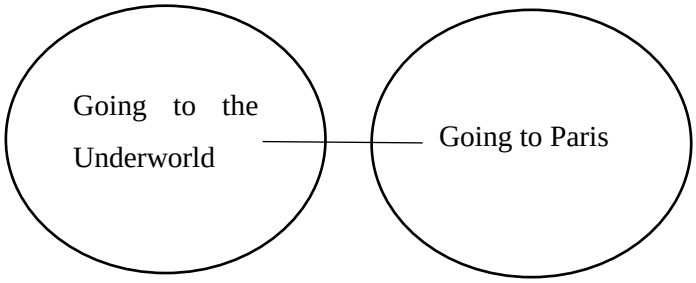

Figure 4.4

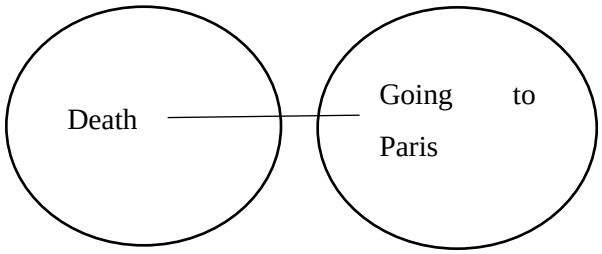

Figure 4.5

4.7. Marriage and death in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

Several scholars[113] point out that weddings and funerals, marriage and death, were associated in Ancient Greece. Both were rites of passage and involved similar elements and consequences for the bride, such as a change of state and place, a separation from loved ones and family, as the bride was to leave her father's household and move to her husband's.

[113] Seaford (1987); Foley (1994); Rehm (1994); Mackin (2018).

As Foley (1982) points out, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, for example, the sacrificial ritual of Iphigenia is disguised as a wedding ritual, and in the end, the heroine is married not to Achilles but to Hades:

[4.30] τὴν δ᾽ αὖ τάλαιναν παρθένον – τί παρθένον;
Ἅιδης νιν, ὡς ἔοικε, νυμφεύσει τάχα

The poor maiden – yet why do I call her that when
Hades, it seems will soon make her his bride?
(Eur. *IA*. 460-1)

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hades abducts Persephone in order to marry her, as the god Helios told Demeter, who was desperately searching for Persephone:

[4.31] ἀχνυμένην περὶ παιδὶ τανυσφύρῳ: οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
αἴτιος ἀθανάτων, εἰ μὴ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς,
ὅς μιν ἔδωκ᾽ Ἀίδῃ θαλερὴν κεκλῆσθαι ἄκοιτιν
αὐτοκασιγνήτῳ: ὃ δ᾽ ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόεντα
ἁρπάξας ἵπποισιν ἄγεν μεγάλα ἰάχουσαν.

[…] No other
of the gods was to blame but cloud-gathering Zeus,
who gave her to Hades his brother to be called
his fertile wife. With his horses Hades
snatched her screaming into the misty gloom.
(*HDem.*77-81, emphasis added)

Persephone's marriage to Hades is inextricably linked with death, as Rehm notes: "the *Homeric hymn to Demeter*, the story of Demeter and Persephone, provided the principal mythical paradigm for the association of death with marriage" (Rehm 1994: 110). Moreover, Mackin (2018), among others, highlights that from the moment Persephone eats the pomegranate death and marriage are bound together.

Foley (1994), commenting on the following passage of the *Hymn* where Persephone eats the pomegranate, explains that when a bride eats in her husband's house, she is accepting her transition to a new life under her husband's authority and therefore the passage signifies Persephone's commitment to her husband.

[4.32] μηδέ τι δυσθύμαινε λίην περιώσιον ἄλλων:
οὔ τοι ἐν ἀθανάτοισιν ἀεικὴς ἔσσομ᾽ ἀκοίτης,
αὐτοκασίγνητος πατρὸς Διός: ἔνθα δ᾽ ἐοῦσα
δεσπόσσεις πάντων ὁπόσα ζώει τε καὶ ἕρπει,
τιμὰς δὲ σχήσησθα μετ᾽ ἀθανάτοισι μεγίστας.
[…]
ὣς φάτο: γήθησεν δὲ περίφρων Περσεφόνεια,
καρπαλίμως δ᾽ ἀνόρουσ᾽ ὑπὸ χάρματος: αὐτὰρ ὅ γ᾽ αὐτὸς
ῥοιῆς κόκκον ἔδωκε φαγεῖν μελιηδέα λάθρῃ,
ἀμφὶ ἑνωμήσας, ἵνα μὴ μένοι ἤματα πάντα
αὖθι παρ᾽ αἰδοίῃ Δημήτερι κυανοπέπλῳ.
ἵππους δὲ προπάροιθεν ὑπὸ χρυσέοισιν ὄχεσφιν

Do not be so sad and angry beyond the rest;
in no way among immortals will I be an unsuitable spouse,
myself a brother of father Zeus. And when you are there,
you will have power over all that lives and moves,
and you will possess the greatest honors among the gods
[…]
Thus he spoke and thoughtful Persephone rejoiced.
Eagerly she leapt up for joy. But he gave her to eat
a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, stealthily passing it
around her, lest she once more stay forever
by the side of revered Demeter of the dark robe.
(*HDem.* 362-374)

Persephone's marriage to Hades implies her separation from her mother and from Olympus, so her union with Hades could be seen as a metaphorical death she undergoes before she assumes her new identity as Hades' wife and queen of the Underworld.

As I showed in section 4.5.1., the association between marriage and death found in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is present in *Mother Love*. Dove creatively reworks the conceptual metaphor MARRIAGE TO HADES IS DEATH to conceptualise modern love relationship and the change the young woman undergoes in the eyes of her mother.

4.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed cognitive templates and conceptual structures constituting Dove's re-elaboration of Persephone's fall into the Underworld as a modern student's journey to Paris. Through a cognitive linguistic

analysis, I showed that the phraseology used to describe the journey and experience of a young woman in Paris are instances of the orientational conceptual metaphors HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP, SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN.

I showed the parallels between narrative elements and metaphors attested in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the ones in *Mother Love*. The metaphor GOING TO THE UNDERWORLD IS DEATH, present in the *Hymn*, has been creatively reworked by Dove in the following GOING TO PARIS IS DEATH.

A cognitive-linguistic analysis gives an account of the abundant use of linguistic elements metonymically associated with the domains of "death" and "illness", through which a modern Persephone is described as a dead entity in the city of Paris. Moreover, a cognitive linguistic approach pointed out the several death-related conceptual metaphors present in the collection: TO BE WITH MEN IS TO DROWN, TO BE IN LOVE WITH A HADES-LIKE MAN IS TO FALL INTO HELL, DEATH IS DEPARTURE, DEATH IS CROSSING A RIVER, DARKNESS IS DEATH, DEATH IS ENTERING HADES' HOUSE, MARRIAGE TO A MAN IS DEATH, through which Dove explores the life of a young woman in a male-dominated world.

Chapter 5. Flowery Metaphors. A Cognitive Approach to Dove's Visual Imagery

This chapter aims to give an account of Rita Dove's creative re-elaboration of the images of the flower and of the earth's opening in the ancient myth of Demeter and Persephone in the collection *Mother Love*. The flower is an element that recurs multiple times in *Mother Love*, becoming the source domain for different targets linked to different motif patterns. The image of the earth opening in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone is reworked by Dove and mapped onto a wound on Persephone's body caused by her interactions with men.

Rita Dove's poetry is rich, dense, and complex in its visual imagery. The narrative emerges from the poetry's lyric imaginative complexity: image patterns, repeated with slight variations in the poems, form a web of metaphorical meanings that contribute to the narrative cohesion. In *Mother Love*, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is fragmented into different experiences of women, who transcend the unity of time and space in the myth.[114] Connecting the image of the flower with different moments of the narration requires a recognition of analogies among aspects of particular scenes and events that are otherwise disconnected from one another; it requires the perception of the universal in the particular.

In section 5.1., I analyse the elements of the flower and the meadow in ancient Greek literature and in Greek myths of abducted girls, particularly in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. In section 5.2., I focus on the metaphorical values of the narcissus flower in *Mother Love.* In section 5.3., I explore the use of the metaphor WOMEN ARE FLOWERS in Dove's sonnets. In section 5.4., I focus on the re-elaboration of the image of the earth opening in *Mother Love* and how it is mapped onto Persephone's body. In section 5.5., I analyse several linguistic expressions of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A

[114] For an analysis of the collection *Mother Love*, see chapter 4 sections 4.2 and 4.3.

FLOWER present in *Mother Love*. In section 5.6., I focus on the metaphor BOYS ARE FLOWERS. In section 5.7., I consider the metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A PLANT in the sonnet "Protection" in *Mother Love*. In section 5.8., I present the conclusions of my analysis.

5.1. Flowers and meadows in Ancient Greece

The element of the flower is decisive in Persephone's destiny, and, as I show in this section, central to several Greek tales of abduction. Persephone, while playing in a meadow with the daughters of Oceanus, sees a wonderful narcissus.[115]

[5.1] θαυμαστὸν γανόωντα, σέβας τό γε πᾶσιν ἰδέσθαι
ἀθανάτοις τε θεοῖς ἠδὲ θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις.
τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ ῥίζης ἑκατὸν κάρα ἐξεπεφύκει
κηώδης τ᾽ ὀδμή· πᾶς δ᾽ οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὕπερθεν
γαῖά τε πᾶσ᾽ ἐγελάσσε καὶ ἁλμυρὸν οἶδμα θαλάσσης.

a flower wondrous and bright, awesome for all to see,
for the immortals above and for mortals below.
From its root a hundredfold bloom sprang up and smelled
so sweet that the whole vast heaven above
and the whole earth laughed, and the salty swell of the sea.
(*HDem.*10-14)

The narcissus is not only a real flower; it is the trick that Gaia prepared to facilitate the implementation of a plan hatched by Zeus and Hades to kidnap Persephone. The flower's beauty is out of the ordinary ("hundredfold bloom") and its overpowering scent, spreading over the sky above, attracts Persephone. When Persephone tries to stretch it out, the earth opens and Hades raises up with his chariot and kidnaps her. Within an analysis of the flower in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, a focus on the space of the meadow in ancient Greek myth is also fundamental.

115 For a complete summary of the myth of Persephone and Demeter, see chapter 4 section 4.1.

The meadow is an open, non-domestic, and unbound place, freely accessible. For this reason, it should be distinguished from the protected and limited space of the garden. Moreover, Calame points out that the garden and the meadow differ in the products typically associated with them (Calame, 1999: 160). Gardens produce fruits like apples, pomegranates, and quinces, while meadows are covered with wildflowers such as hyacinths, crocuses, safran, lilies, and narcissi.

Motte, in his work on the functions and values of meadows and gardens in ancient Greece, after analysing many examples of meadows, concludes:

> [5.2] De l'examen compare de multiples emplois analysès dans leur context, il resort que leimon signifie le plus souvent une large étendue de terre humide, pourvue d'une vegetation abondante et spontanée.
>
> From a comparative study of the multiple uses analysed in their context, it appears that leimōn [meadow] most often means an extended area of moist soil, with abundant and spontaneous vegetation.[116] (Motte, 1973: 7)

Motte points out that flowers are probably the most relevant element in the meadows:

> [5.3] L'abondante diversité des fleurs, le chatoiment de leurs couleurs, la rosée qui les rend scintillantes, leur parfum délectable et leur saveur printanière, autant de motifs qui ont séduit les poètes, autant de richesses qui rendaient fascinante à tous les Grecs la presence des praires.
>
> The abundant diversity of the flowers, the glistening of their colors, the dew that makes them sparkle, their delectable perfume and their spring nuance, so many motives that seduced the poets, so much luxuriance that made the presence of the meadows fascinating to all Greeks. (Motte, 1973: 9)

The meadow of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is beautiful, luxurious, and rich with flowers:

> [5.4] ἄνθεά τ᾽ αἰνυμένην ῥόδα καὶ κρόκον ἠδ᾽ ἴα καλά

[116] Translations from Motte are mine.

λειμῶν᾽ ἂμ μαλακὸν καὶ ἀγαλλίδας ἠδ᾽ ὑάκινθον
νάρκισσόν θ᾽, ὃν φῦσε δόλον καλυκώπιδι κούρηι

plucking flowers in the lush meadow—roses, crocuses,
and lovely violets, irises and hyacinth and the narcissus,
which Earth grew as a snare for the flower-faced maiden
(*HDem.* 6-8)

In the *Iliad*, the sexual union between Hera and Zeus produces a meadow:

[5.5] Ἦ ῥα, καὶ ἀγκὰς ἔμαρπτε Κρόνου παῖς ἣν παρά-κοιτιν·
τοῖσι δ᾽ ὑπὸ χθὼν δῖα φύεν νεοθηλέα ποίην,
λωτόν θ᾽ ἑρσήεντα ἰδὲ κρόκον ἠδ᾽ ὑάκινθον
πυκνὸν καὶ μαλακόν, ὃς ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὑψόσ᾽ ἔεργε.
τῷ ἔνι λεξάσθην, ἐπὶ δὲ νεφέλην ἕσσαντο
καλὴν χρυσείην· στιλπναὶ δ᾽ ἀπέπιπτον ἔερσαι.

At that, the son of Cronos clasped his wife in his arms, and beneath them the bright earth made fresh-sprung grass to grow, and dewy lotus, and crocus, and hyacinth thick and soft that kept them from the ground. On this they lay, and were clothed about with a cloud, fair and golden, from which fell drops of glistening dew. (Hom. *Il.* XIV, 346-350)

The previous passage presents the prototypical description of the meadow with some of its most common features: soft, fresh grass, dew drops, and, most importantly, flowers. The fact that the meadow appears in the *Iliad* with, and as a result of the embrace of Zeus and Hera clearly shows its erotic implications.

The presence of a meadow in Ancient Greek poetry and myth usually precedes erotic, sexual intercourse: the flowery meadow is a place of love. Motte (1973) states that the Greeks could not ideally represent the amorous union without the emerging mental image of green space, and that erotic unions are therefore inextricably linked to the specific space of the meadow.

The meadow is not only the set for unions between gods, like the one between Zeus and Hera, but its description generally "occurs frequently in a context of female beauty to be enjoyed" (Bremer, 1975: 1). Calame recalls scenarios from Archaic Greek poets such as Anacreon, Sappho and Theognis, where love, seduction, and desire are placed and addressed in flowery

meadows and states that “the erotic space for females’ realization of love is the flower-studded meadow” (Calame, 1999: 153). Therefore, I suggest that flowery meadows are metonymic elements of the frame of the “erotic union”. As metonymic element of a specific narrative frame, it enables the reader of such stories to anticipate the events and interpret the situation.

Moreover, flowery meadows, described with luxurious vegetation and covered by soft, humid, and fertile grass, are metaphorically associated with young women reaching maturity. As pointed out by Henderson:

> [5.6] a description of flowery places in a sexual context has specific symbolic connotations: the meadow with its soft, fresh flowers symbolizes both the springtime of nature and the springtime of the female. (Henderson, 1976: 167).

The meadow is fertile, moist, and lush, hence the metaphorical association with female fertility and female genitalia.

5.1.1. Tales of abducted girls

The flowery meadow is the setting for many of the abduction scenes that fill Greek mythology. The meadow is, paradigmatically, a place far from home, and from parental supervision, where the girls are alone, without protection, often in the company of other girls of the same age.

The narrative frame of the “girl abducted” has certain common features. In these myths, girls wander in the non-domestic space of the meadow. These young women, depicted while taking part in activities stereotypically associated with women, are then interrupted by a male intruder (usually a male god) who abducts and rapes them. The abducted girls are virgins and unmarried.

Persephone is one of a long list of abducted girls. Scholars such as Campbell (1991) and Deacy (2013) make connections between the abduction of Persephone and Europa, a Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus, and Lefkowitz (1993) between Europa and Creusa, the daughter of the archaic king of Athens, Erechtheus, who was abducted by Apollo.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter's daughter Persephone is called Korê before her abduction. Korê is usually translated as "maiden", but since it is associated with the term "parthenos", it is also a synonym for unmarried virgin. Only after her abduction and rape by Hades is she named Persephone, the etymology of which is uncertain. Therefore, the change of the name identifies the crossing of a virginal, daughter-status; the daughter is now Hades' wife and a goddess with added power (Goddess of the Underworld).

A relevant element of the tales and myths of abducted girls is the activity performed by the girls. Usually, they are playing away from home in a meadow, and they are collecting flowers in the company of other girls.
As pointed out by Calame: "[i]n myth, the flowers that adorn the meadow of love thus first appear at the precise moment when their respective eponymous heroes are themselves in the flower of youth" (Calame, 1999: 162). Foley, referring to Persephone, states that:

> [5.7] the adolescent girl's attraction to the seductive narcissus and the location of the rape in the flowery meadow (where such divine rapes typically occur) suggest Persephone's readiness for a new phase of life. (Foley, 1994: 127).

Gathering flowers and wandering alone or with other female companions are signals of the readiness of the girls to enter into womanhood and marriage. Therefore, flowers and the action of gathering flowers are metonymically linked to the frame "abduction and erotic initiation".

The flower also represents a desired object and therefore carries an erotic connotation. Persephone and other abducted girls in the myth are seduced by the beauty of the meadow, resplendent with the colours and fragrance of the flowers. Persephone is amused by the beautiful narcissus, Europa by the scent of saffron, the same flowers that Creusa was collecting before being abducted.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, flowers and the meadow are associated with the domain of Eros. Persephone, while narrating her version of the story of her abduction to Demeter, says:

[5.8] ἡμεῖς μὲν μάλα πᾶσαι ἀν᾽ ἰμερτὸν λειμῶνα

We were all in the beautiful meadow
(*HDem*. 417, emphasis added)

A few lines later, she adds:

[5.9] παίζομεν ἠδ᾽ ἄνθεα δρέπομεν χείρεσσ᾽ ἐρόεντα

playing and picking lovely flowers with our hands,
(*HDem*. 425, emphasis added)

The flowers/blossoms are defined as "ἐρόεντα", and the meadow as "ἰμερτὸν". Both the terms, as highlighted by Deacy (2013), are linked to the sphere of desire and love.

In the myth of Europa, Zeus turned himself into a bull, in order to conquer and possess the woman. As in the *Hymn*, Europa is collecting flowers in a meadow before she is abducted. The saffron is associated with the animal breath of the bull/Zeus, and, therefore, acquires a powerfully seductive and sexual force.

The meadow is a space with sexual allure, and the flower a desired object, linked to specific frames of "love" and "desire", appealing to the young girl's senses. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the eroticised desire of the girls for the flowers may not be intended as an indication of the woman's desire for intercourse with men or gods. In these myths, in fact, young women are taken away against their will. As pointed out by Deacy (2013), desire and eroticism are not generated by male intruders, but by the sensual environment of the meadow.

5.1.2. The metaphors of plant and flower in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the widespread metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS[117] is present. The structural conceptual mapping between the source domain PLANTS and the target domain PEOPLE is traceable in modern and ancient literature and through different cultures and is entrenched in conventional and everyday usages. According to Kövecses: "[o]ur experiences with the physical world serves as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains" (Kövecses, 2002: 6). The domain of plants is stored in the long-term memory, it is part of everyday people's experience, and, therefore, is used metaphorically to understand and conceptualise different aspects of human life and human beings themselves. The conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS is mostly used unconsciously at a conceptual level, and many linguistic metaphorical expressions underlying the mapping between the two domains are embedded in our vocabulary and have become highly conventional, such as the following expressions: "a young sprout; in full bloom; withering away" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 6).

The metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS maps the cycle of the life of plants onto the cycle of life of human beings. The following schema (figure 5.1) is the representation of the conceptual mapping between domains as elaborated by Filipczuk-Rosińska (2016):

SOURCE DOMAIN:		TARGET DOMAIN:
PLANTS		HUMAN BEINGS
vegetation	⇨	life
planting		inseminating
growing		developing
sick plant		sick person

[117] For this metaphor, see Lakoff & Turner (1989); Basson (2006); Filipczuk-Rosińska (2016). For an analysis of the metaphor within the broader Great Chain of Being Theory, see also Kövecses (2002).

withering	ageing, dying
fertilizing	stimulating development
ripening	maturing
roots	human being's background
destroying a plant	disposing of human beings

Figure 5.1 (Filipczuk-Rosińska, 2016: 17)

The stages of human life correspond to the seasonal changes and stages of plants. More precisely, Lakoff and Turner point out that:

> [5.10] [people] are viewed as that part of the plant that burgeons and then withers or declines, such as leaves, flowers, and fruits, though sometimes the whole plant is viewed as burgeoning and then declining as with grass or wheat (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 6).

This is particularly relevant in section 5.2., where I will explore the re-elaboration of this metaphor in *Mother Love*, as the flower is fragmented in its parts and each of them is a source domain for a different target.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* Persephone's stages of life are conceptualised through the stages of the life of plants. Her maturity and sexual readiness are linked to the blooming and fertile stage of plants through the expression θαλερὴν ("fertile"):

> [5.11] ἀχνυμένην περὶ παιδὶ τανυσφύρῳ: οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
> αἴτιος ἀθανάτων, εἰ μὴ νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς,
> ὅς μιν ἔδωκ᾽ Ἀίδῃ θαλερὴν κεκλῆσθαι ἄκοιτιν
>
> […] No other
> of the gods was to blame but cloud-gathering Zeus
> who gave her to Hades his brother to be called
> his fertile wife. (*HDem*. 77-80, emphasis added).

The adjective θαλερός belongs to the world of plants but is frequently used metaphorically to denote people in their youth. In a literal way, it means "blooming". In its metaphorical sense, the organic process of bearing flowers and opening in blossoms of the plants is mapped onto the stage of a woman's

life when she is most vigorous and fertile. Flowers and plants therefore have metaphorical values, as they represent women who have reached sexual maturity, who are at the height of their desirability and therefore ready to marry. The presence of flowering meadows and flowers metaphorically signifies the sexual readiness of women to have intercourse with men.

In a different passage, Persephone is defined by Demeter as a "shoot": "the daughter I bore, a sweet offshoot (θάλος) noble in form" (*HDem*. 66). The metaphor maps the early stage of the life of plants onto the early stage of the life of people. The list of passages in Ancient Greek literature in which the term θάλος is associated with young people and children is very long. The same term is used to denote Demophon, the infant son of Metaneira and Keleos:

[5.12] ἦστο παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο,
παῖδ᾽ ὑπὸ κόλπωι ἔχουσα, νέον <u>θάλος</u>· αἳ δὲ παρ᾽
αὐτήν

their regal mother sat by the pillar of the close-fitted roof,
holding on her lap the child, her young <u>offshoot</u>.
(*HDem*.186-188, emphasis added)

The domain flower is also used as a source to conceptualise people's beauty and youth. Youth and beauty are not permanent, they go through stages: developing and acquiring beauty are conceptualised as the blossoming of a flower, while a fading beauty is rendered with a dying, withered flower. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter,* the term καλυκῶπις ("like a budding flower in face", "blushing"), which is usually associated with flowers, is used to refer to Persephone, the "flower-faced maiden" (καλυκώπιδι κούρῃ) (*HDem*. 8), establishing a metaphoric mapping between the flower and the goddess. The same metaphoric expression is used to describe Persephone's companion Okyrhoe: "flower-faced Okyrhoe" (Ὠκυρόη καλυκῶπις) (*HDem*. 420).

In conclusion, elements of the domain of plants are used in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to conceptualise a specific moment of human life. Plants and flowers are, in our experience, deeply connected and drenched in our

perception of time (Pollan, 2001: 68). These metaphors are not as evocative, nor do they rely as heavily on mental imagery, as the ones in Dove's collection, as I will show in the next sections.

5.2. A meadow of metaphors

The elements of flower and meadow assume different connotations in *Mother Love*. In *Mother Love*, as I explained in chapter 4, there are different Persephone-like personas. The child Persephone of section II is conceptualised as the plucked narcissus, therefore I formulate the following conceptual metaphor: PERSEPHONE IS A NARCISSUS. The domain of flowers is used to metaphorically conceptualise women (WOMEN ARE FLOWERS), and, within this conceptual metaphor, the sexual and erotic intercourse between women and men is described with the metaphorical image of falling petals.

The mythical image of the earth opening is a visual input to conceptualise the passage from childhood to womanhood, signed by male intervention, as a laceration and wound of the female body, through the metaphors FEMALE BODY IS THE EARTH. There is a complex re-elaboration of the conventional metaphor LOVE IS A FLOWER. Flowers are also used to conceptualise boys as objects of desire through the metaphor BOYS ARE FLOWERS. The conventional metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS is also present in the collection.

5.2.1. PERSEPHONE IS A NARCISSUS

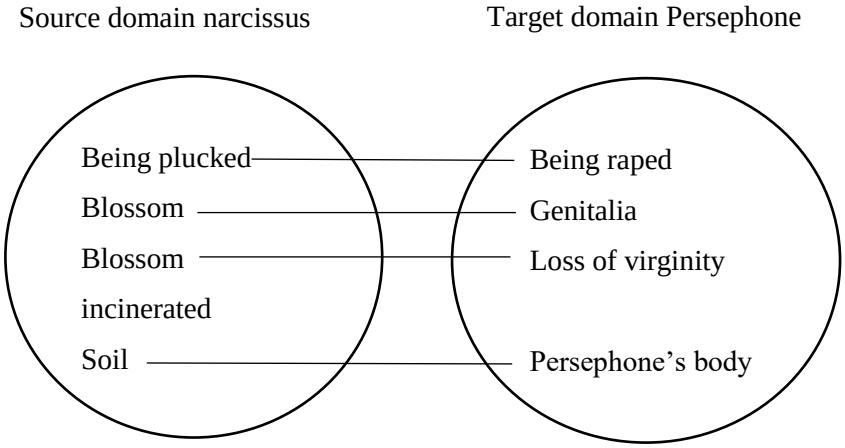

Figure 5.2

I suggest that in two sonnets of the collection, ("The Narcissus Flower" and "Missing") Persephone is conceptualised as the plucked narcissus of the *Hymn*. I start my analysis with the sonnet "The Narcissus Flower", contained in section II. The sonnet describes the moment of the earth opening and the destruction of the flower:

> [5.13] I remember my foot in its frivolous slipper,
> A frightened bird… not the earth unzipped
>
> but the way I could see my own fingers and hear
> myself scream as the blossom incinerated. (*ML*, section II, "The Narcissus Flower")

The first word of the sonnet is the personal pronoun "I" which refers to Persephone. The shift from the title, "The Narcissus Flower", to the lyric voice of Persephone, invites, in my opinion, the identification of Persephone with the flower.

Persephone/Narcissus is remembering the moment in which the earth unzipped. The verb "to unzip" refers to the act of opening something, usually clothes, with a zipper. The earth-opening of the myth is metaphorically mapped onto the act of unfastening women's clothes. In this way, the

mythical scene of the earth opening is linked to a sexual act which, as I will show, is forcibly acted on the African American child Persephone.

Persephone focuses on specific details, a series of images that stimulate the reader's visualisation of the scene described: the slipper she was wearing, a frightened bird. Then, the attention turns to Persephone's self, in a kind of depersonalisation, an out-of-body experience caused by the traumatic event, and the girl sees herself from the outside: "I could see my own fingers and hear myself scream". The powerful image of the "blossom incinerated" implies a sense of violence and brutality.

A common trait of Dove's reworking of mythic images and common metaphors is the process of de-familiarisation they undergo and their evocative visual and image-related nature. I suggest that in the metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A NARCISUSS, the blossom[118] represents female genitalia and the expression "blossom incinerated" metaphorically represents Persephone's violent loss of virginity. The narcissus and Persephone are the same thing and the plucked flower is a metaphor for Persephone's rape.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the language used to describe the mythical event of the opening of the earth and Persephone's fall into the underground ("plunge") evokes an act of sexual violence.

[5.14] And though nothing could chasten
the plunge, this man
adamant as a knife easing into

the humblest crevice, I found myself at
the center of a calm so pure, it was hate. (…) (*ML*, section II, "The Narcissus Flower")

In this passage, the man (Hades) is metaphorically conceptualised as a knife, penetrating the female's genitalia ("humblest crevice"). The sense of violence and destruction due to male intervention emerges from the sonnet.

[118] For an analysis of the element of the blossom in *DFE*, see chapter 3, section 3.2.1.

Since the opening of the earth is metaphorically used to describe Persephone's rape, as shown above, I suggest that the soil is metaphorically conceptualised as a psychic and physical shell, and that Persephone's skin and the surface of the earth communicate through a metaphorical extension. For this reason, in the sonnet "The Narcissus Flower", there is a compression of the voices of the narcissus and Persephone herself. This metaphorical extension between Persephone and the surface of the earth recurs in the sonnet "Afield", which I will analyse in section 5.2.2.

The second example of the metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A NARCISSUS is in the sonnet "Missing" in section VI:

> [5.15] I am the daughter who went out with the girls,
> never checked back in and nothing marked my "last
> known whereabouts", not a single glistening petal.
>
> (…) (*ML*, section VI, "Missing")

I argue that the daughter of the sonnet "Missing" is the abducted child Persephone of section II. Flowery imagery is the metaphor for the violence acted on the female body and its consequent laceration, loss, and fragmentation. The blossom incinerated (in "The Narcissus Flower") and the falling petals (in "Missing") are linked to the motif of rape and loss of virginity. The man, as a knife, is the one entering, rupturing, and perturbing the order.

The action of plucking a flower in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is mapped onto the action of abduction and rape. Unlike in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in *Mother Love* it is possible to metaphorically associate the plucking of the flower with rape because in Dove's sonnets it is not Persephone who plucks the flowers, but the man.

5.3. WOMEN ARE FLOWERS

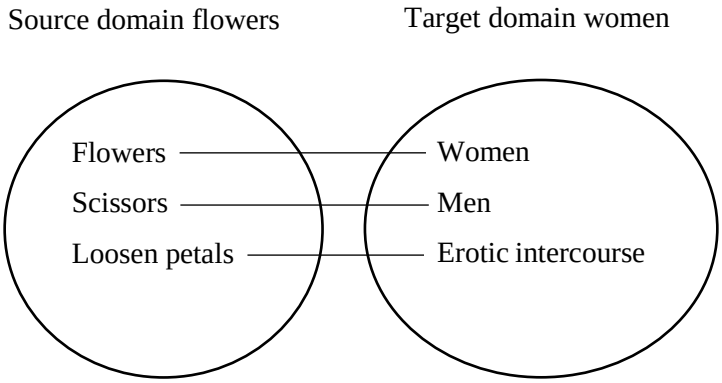

Figure 5.3

In "Party dress for a first born", third sonnet of *Mother Love*, the protagonist of the sonnet is a young Persephone-like girl eager to be independent. The sonnet is divided into two sections. The first one is characterised by the girl's own reflection on her new relationship with her mother. There was a time when they were in symbiosis and her mother was everything she saw:

> [5.16] When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant,
> as a cornstalk at the edge of field,
> nothing else mattered: the world stood still. (*ML*, section I, "Party dress for a first born")

The passage from childhood to womanhood is signed by the rupture of the totalising bond with the mother and by Persephone's strong desire for independence.

In the second part, the young girl is getting ready for a party, and the internal monologue continues:

> [5.17] Tonight men stride like elegant scissors across the lawn
> to the women arrayed there, petals waiting to be loosen.
> When I step out, disguised in your blushing skin,
> they will nudge each other to get a peek
> and I will smile, all the while wishing them dead.
> Mother's calling. Stand up: it will be our secret.
> (*ML*, section I, "Party dress for a first born")

Sexual awakening, and, at the same time, repulsion towards men characterise the growing up of this Persephone-like American girl. In the sonnet, mythic

imagery, represented by elements metonymically linked to Demeter goddess of grain and agriculture (cornstalk) and to the narcissus flower (petals), is blended with a modern rite of passage: the party of a young girl with her peers.

The important element I would like to focus on is the opposition between male and female, as they are lined up on opposite sides and metaphorised in very different ways: women are flowers and men are scissors. The element of the flower is present through one of its parts, the petals: the exterior that protects the core of the flower. I argue that the image of the petals being removed by the scissors is a variation on the plucked narcissus of the Greek myth. There is no violent abduction and rape, but the contact with the male counterpart is nevertheless described as dangerous for women, implying violation of boundaries, loss and dissection. Women coming of age are flowers, waiting to lose their petals, to be damaged.

The metaphor WOMEN ARE FLOWERS is also present in the sonnet "Mother Love". The sonnet recalls the episode of Demophon in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, when the goddess Demeter, wandering on earth after Persephone's abduction and disguising her divine appearance by looking like an old woman, arrives at Eleusis. There she meets the four daughters of Metaneira and Celeus, the rulers of the city, who bring her to their home. Demeter is asked by Metaneira to nurse her only male child Demophon. In the *Hymn*, the daughters of Metaneira are described with the following conventional metaphoric expression linked to the domain of flowers: "τέσσαρες, ὥστε θεαί, κουρήιον ἄνθος ἔχουσαι" (Like four goddesses they were in the flower of youth) (*HDem.*108).

In mapping the life cycle of plants, the flower in bloom is mapped onto the young and active life of a young person (in this case a woman), implying her sexual maturity. In fact, the girls are ready to marry, and when Demeter meets them, she wishes them to find a husband and have children:

[5.18] ἀλλ᾽ ὑμῖν μὲν πάντες Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχοντες
δοῖεν κουριδίους ἄνδρας καὶ τέκνα τεκέσθαι,
ὡς ἐθέλουσι τοκῆες· ἔμ᾽ αὖτ᾽ οἰκτίρατε, κοῦραι.

> But may all the gods who dwell on Olympus
> give you husbands to marry and children to bear,
> such as parents wish for. (*HDem*. 135-137)

In Dove's re-elaboration, the Demophon episode is used to cynically reconsider the notion of motherhood. The overprotective attitude takes on grotesque (Steffen, 1997: 233) connotations when the mythical image of Demeter holding Demophon over the fire to make him immortal is blended with the imagery of an American barbecue: "I laid him on the smoldering embers, sealing his juice in slowly so he might be cured to perfection" and " at the heart a muttering crone bent over a baby sizzling on a spit as neat as a Virgin ham".

In this sonnet, the four daughters of Metaneira are also depicted with a floral metaphor:

> [5.19] So when this kind woman approached at the urging
> of her bouquet of daughters
> (one for each of the world's corners,
> one for each of the winds to scatter!)
> and offered up her only male child for nursing
> […] (*ML*, section II, "Mother Love")

The association between young women and marriage is conveyed through the very evocative and visual metaphor of the "bouquet of daughters". The expression compresses the idea of womanhood and the idea of marriage and sexual maturity through, again, a flowery metaphor. The bouquet is a composition of the most beautiful flower, cut and arranged together for specific purposes, usually for weddings. The association of women with a flower in a bouquet is not neutral but rather carries a specific connotation. It dehumanises the woman, reducing her to an aesthetic object, ready to be delivered.

A cognitive linguistic analysis of the network of flowery metaphors and the mappings of the individual metaphors can help to understand Dove's reworking of Greek myth and worldview in a specific context and can provide plausible interpretations that may differ from previous ones. Walters (2007),

for example, describes Dove's Persephone as a "liberated woman" (Walters, 2007: 153), and interprets the second part of the sonnet "Party dress for a first born" as depicting a "mating dance" during which Persephone recognises her sexuality as "empowering, for with her body she can control male desire" (Walters, 2007: 155). As noted above, and in contrast to Walters, I argue that in the sonnet the act of cutting the flowers is a variation on the original "plucking of the narcissus" in Greek myth, is a metaphor for the first male-female erotic intercourse, and it implies an asymmetry of power and force between men and women.

The repetition of similar flowery imagery, in distant parts and different sections[119] of the collection, reveals analogies among aspects of particular distinct scenes, connecting individual experiences of women in different times and places, into one pattern, the fall into a man's world. In the work *Mother Love*, flowers are associated with death, violence and deception, contrary to the metaphorical use of flowers in everyday modern language. The metaphor of the flower is used by the poet to highlight the unbalance of power between men and women, to conceptualise women as fragile elements, and to describe them as subject to external factors that can harm them.

5.4. FEMALE BODY IS THE EARTH

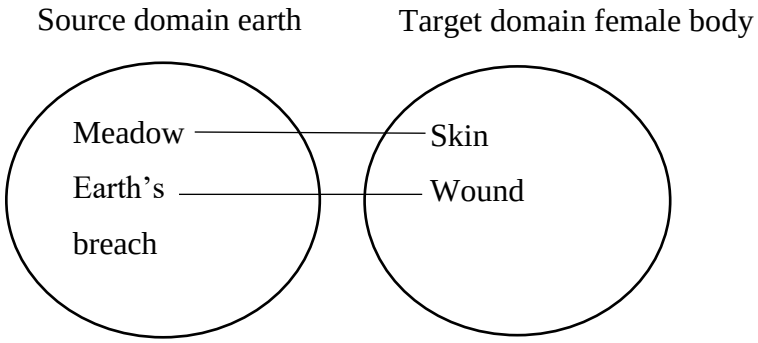

Figure 5.4

[119] Section II, V, VI of *Mother Love*.

The metaphor of the opening of the earth as a wound on the female body is explicit and powerful in the sonnet "Afield". The sonnet is contained in section V and I suggest that it should be read as a continuation of the sonnet "Exit". The protagonist of these sonnets is a now grown-up Persephone-like persona.

In "Exit", she is described leaving the maternal house and entering the world. The dichotomy of inside (house)-outside is also marked by the opposition of colours:

[5.20] The windows you have closed behind
are turning pink, doing what they do
every dawn. Here it's gray. The door
to the taxicab waits. This suitcase,
the saddest object in the world.
Well, the world's open. (ML, section V, "Exit")

The windows of the house are pink because they reflect the dawn; pink is the colour metonymically associated with girls, the outside world is grey, and grey is metonymically associated with the Underworld.[120] For a woman, leaving the maternal home and entering the world is metaphorically conceptualised as a fall into the Underworld.

The final stanza of the sonnet "Exit" is one of the keys to understanding the collection.

[5.21] Well, the world's open. And now through
the windshield the sky begins to blush,
as you did when your mother told
you what it took to be a woman in this life.
(*ML*, section V, "Exit")

The book is an exploration, through the metaphorical use of ancient myth, of the bond between mother and daughter. Focusing on both mother and daughter, the collection also investigates the vulnerability of the mother and the exposure and helplessness of young women when the world is open to

[120] For the association between the Underworld and a particular colour range, see chapter 4, section 4.5.

them. Leaving the mother's house to enter into a man's world involves many risks for a woman, and it is easy for her to fall into the Underworld.

The sonnet "Afield" presents the same woman now far from her mother's house, wandering in a meadow. As in ancient Greek poetry, the meadow is conceptualised here as an outer space, in opposition with the domestic familial space, represented by the house of the sonnet "Exit" and in opposition also with the garden, conceived in *Mother Love* (in the sonnet "Protection"), as a space still under the sphere of influence of the mother.

In ancient Greek poetry and mythology, poets usually depict these spaces during the spring season, when the meadows are in bloom and colourful, with soft grass and dew (see section 5.1.).The meadow of the sonnet "Afield" is very different from the meadow described in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (see quotation [5.8]):

[5.22] Out where crows dip to their kill
under the clouds' languid white oars
she wanders, hands pocketed, hair combed tight
so she won't feel the breeze quickening.
(*ML*, section V, "Afield")

The meadow is depicted during the season of death; a gloomy atmosphere is represented by the presence of the crows and carcasses of dead animals. The space anticipates the dark atmosphere of the Underworld. Persephone, in fact, after the season spent in the maternal home, is trying to find a way back to her lover.

In the sonnets "Exit" and "Afield" the act of travelling echoes the succession and alternation of periods spent in the upper world and the Underworld by Persephone in the Greek myth. In fact, the way back to her lover is mapped on a vertical axis and is conceptualised, metaphorically, as a descent into the Underworld and, therefore, as death.[121] This metaphoric path implies a breach in the ground:

[5.23] As if she were trying to get back to him,

[121] For a detailed analysis of Persephone's journey as a metaphorical death, see chapter 4.

> find the breach in the green
> that would let her slip through,
> then tug meadow over the wound like a sheet. (*ML*, section V, "Afield")

From this passage, the overlap between the earth and the female body is clear. The meadow is mapped onto the skin and the image of the mythical breach in the ground from which Hades' chariot emerges is creatively mapped onto a wound on the female body.

Like in the sonnet "The Narcissus Flower", the meadow is a psychic and physical shell; the naturalistic landscape is blended with Persephone and is therefore personified, continuing the indistinct dialectic between the external world and the inner world. The powerful image of the opening of the earth from the Greek myth leads Rita Dove to conceptualise the passage from childhood to womanhood, marked by encounters with men and the entry into a patriarchal society, as a continuous loss and physical rupture, a laceration that women must suffer when they leave their mother's house.

In the sonnet "Afield", the mythical element of the meadow becomes an existential and psychological space. The female body becomes the site of myth, history, experience, and, finally, memory. Therefore, the wound is a place to inhabit, an abyss to dive into, the passage from the maternal place (garden, house) to the (male) world. The body becomes the site of inscription and narration; it is the place where the relationship with the world and with others, in particular with the male other, occurs.

5.5. Meadow of Love

The meadow of the sonnet "Afield", cold, grey, and dry, clearly described in opposition to the meadows of myth, is a space in which the intercourse with the man has already occurred. In the sonnet, Demeter, the lyric voice, describes the relationship between Persephone and Hades. From her point of view, the relationship is deprived of nurture and satisfaction and instead filled with dependency and toxicity.

[5.24] I've walked there, too, he can't give
you up, so you give in until you can't live
without him. (*ML*, section V, "Afield")

In this complex metaphorical re-elaboration of the myth, the result of an unequal relationship with men, and men's abusive behavior is metaphorically conceptualised, again, through a flowery metaphor.

[5.25] Like these blossom, white sores
burst upon earth's ignorant flesh, at first sight
everything is innocence-
then it's itch, scratch, putrescence.[122]
(*ML*, section V, "Afield")

The element of the flower is present in the sonnet with one of its parts: the blossom. In the sonnet "The Narcissus Flower", the blossom is a metaphor for the female sexual organ and the 'blossom incinerated' is a powerful image to represent the rape of Persephone and her loss of virginity (see section 5.2.2. of this chapter). In the sonnet "Afield", the blossoms become the source domain for a different target.

I suggest that the previous passage is a linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A FLOWER. This conceptual metaphor is relatively common and conventional in many languages. Knowledge about how to grow a plant or a flower is accessible and, to a greater or lesser extent, part of our everyday experience. This is the reason why people in different countries and different cultures use the concept of the flower to describe an extremely complex and deep emotion, such as love and the state of being in a love relationship. Linguistic expressions of this conceptual metaphor are, for example, "their love flowered", and the similar Italian idiomatic expression "è sbocciato l'amore" ("love has blossomed").

More elaborated, sophisticated expressions of these metaphors are present in the realm of poetry. In the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet* there is the metaphor THE BEGINNING OF A LOVE STORY IS A BUD:

[122] This passage is also discussed in chapter 3, section 3.2.1., as part of a broader analysis of the element of flower in Dove's works.

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath/ may prove a beautiful flower when next we meet." *(Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, scene 2, lines 120-122). Despite Shakespearean lyricism, the conceptual mapping underlying the metaphor in the play, and the common, conventional, everyday expression "their love flowered" remains the same.

For the metaphor LOVE IS A FLOWER in *Mother Love*, I hypothesise a mapping of this kind:

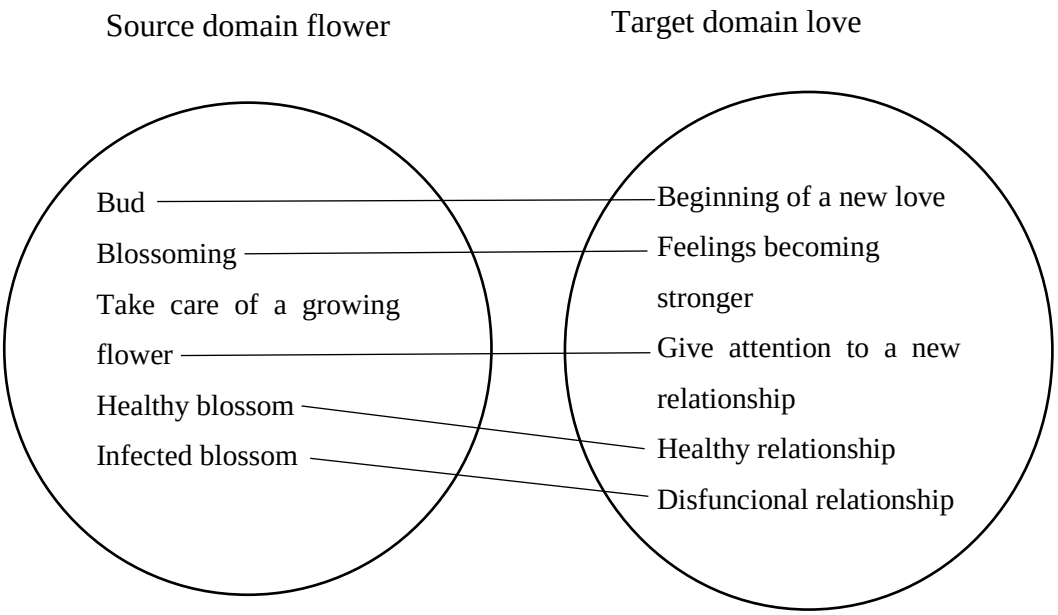

Figure 5.5

In this conceptualisation, to take care of a growing flower is to give attention to and protect a new love relationship. To have a healthy relationship requires constant care and nurturing gestures, a balance among the partners so that both can grow as individuals and as a couple. If the seed is planted correctly, in well-drained soil, and is watered properly, the bud will blossom and give life to a beautiful flower. If the root of the plant or flower is polluted or affected by a disease, the flower is affected, and, even though it might seem to be in good condition, is actually dying.

The elaborate metaphor LOVE IS A FLOWER presents mappings between sexuality and the natural world that are motivated by the myth. In *Mother Love*, the flowers are metaphors for relationships that are unfulfilling and toxic for women. They are at first sight desirable and beautiful, but they grow from polluted soil and are therefore infected. Moreover, the visual imagery is enriched by the motif of the wound; flowers are itchy and septic, just as an infected wound can be.

A similar metaphor occurs in the sonnet "Demeter's prayer to Hades". The sonnet comes at the end of the mythological sections. The last section, VII, is actually an autobiographical account in verse of Dove's journey to Sicily with her husband. As the last mythological poem, it represents a kind of acceptance by Demeter of the new order.

The Goddess' words addressed to Hades do not show a reverential attitude, instead, the prayer is a cynical and harsh accusation against Hades, metonymically representing all men, who pursues his desire without worrying about the consequences.

[5.26] This alone is what I wish for you: knowledge
to understand each desire has an edge,
to know we are responsible for the lives
we change. [...] (*ML*, section VI, "Demeter's prayer to Hades")

The prayer deals with Hades' abuse of power and the impact his actions have on others. In the central part of the sonnet, the result of divine/masculine desire and abuse is expressed again with a metaphor linked to the domain of plants:

[5.27] Now for the first time
I see clearly the trail you planted,
what ground opened to waste,
though you dreamed a wealth
of flowers. (*ML*, section VI, "Demeter's prayer to Hades")

Demeter, as the Goddess of corn, is using concepts and language borrowed from agriculture. When desire is inextricably connected with an imbalance of

power and social roles, with abuse and neglect of the needs of others, the result is damage, metaphorically represented by the image of a wasteland.

I see in this passage a linguistic expression of the metaphor MARRIAGE IS GARDENING, a sub-type of the more generic conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A PLANT. At this moment of the myth/collection, in fact, Hades and Persephone are already married.[123]

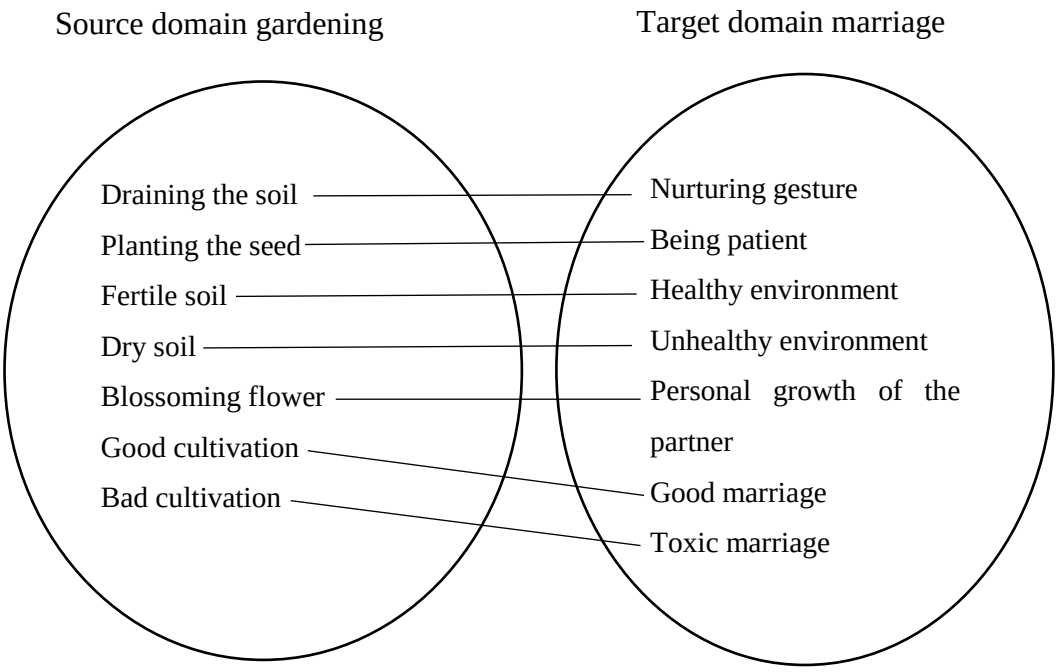

Figure 5.6

The domain of gardening, shown in Figure 5.6, is characterised by different elements and actions, such as: draining the soil and planting a seed. As a garden, the marriage is characterised by different moments, and it can grow and wither, or it can die.

In the sonnet, a path planted with violence that does not grow flowers metaphorically describes a marriage based on abusive behavior. Selfish and callous actions of man have unproductive and destructive consequences on

[123] I infer from the sonnet "The Bistro Styx", in which Persephone eats the fig, that the young woman Persephone of *Mother Love* is married to the Parisian artist Hades. As I explain in chapter 4, section 4.5.1., the scene recalls the moment in the *Homeric Hymn* when the goddess Persephone eats the pomegranate and thus becomes the wife of Hades and queen of the Underworld.

their relationships, just as bad cultivation has on growth, it does not produce. In a perspective reversal, nothing grows from the sown soil, but it opens on waste, on the abyss: the Underworld. As in the sonnet "Afield", "Demeter's Prayer to Hades" combines elements of fertility, sexuality, agriculture, violence and subjugation to represent the physical and psychological damage inflicted on women by narcissistic and abusive partners.

In the previous sections, I have shown, together with the complexity of the metaphoric value of the flower, that the image of the earth opening has been mapped onto different kinds of scenes and moments of women's lives, in which encounters with men are traumatic and leave wounds on the female body. The metaphor of the meadow as the female body, and therefore, of the earth opening and the fall into the Underworld as a laceration caused by the violent contact with the man, is used to conceptualise the heteronormative relationship as a dynamic in which one partner wounds and the other is wounded.

In the last sonnet of the triad composed by the poems "Exit", "Afield", and "Lost Brilliance", Persephone is now back in the Underworld. The title alone describes the loss of light and the return to the grey and dark reign, but also the loss of Persephone's own vividness. Amidst the gothic atmosphere and dark splendour, there is only one hint of colour: "marble flayed with the red plush of privilege". The privilege, as Pereira notes (2003), is to be in a heteronormative relationship in a patriarchal society.

This position of privilege, nevertheless, locks the woman in a condition of submission. In this sonnet, Persephone describes her relationship with Hades with the following words:

[5.28] I had been travelling all these years
without a body,
until his hands found me-
and then there was just
the two of us forever:
one who wounded,
and one who served. (*ML*, section VI, "Lost Brilliance")

The concept of being wounded is reiterated and is the essence of the relation between Persephone and Hades. The imbalance of power, the subordinated condition of women, is a repeated story, an "old drama" as Demeter calls it (in the sonnet "Persephone in Hell"), that reiterates from myth to history, expressed metaphorically through the wound on the female body.

5.6. BOYS ARE FLOWERS

In the flowery metaphors I have analysed, Persephone is the object of men's gazes and their violence. The flower, and especially its most fragile parts, which can be easily damaged and destroyed, is the source domain for conceptualising the wounded body and the violence inflicted on the female body and mind. Nevertheless, in *Mother Love*, Persephone is not only depicted as a passive object of desire.

In section III, in a creative, metaphoric reworking of the myth, Persephone is a young woman living in the urban hell of the city of Paris, trying to separate herself individually from a maternal influence.[124] In the second part of the long sonnet, Persephone returns to the memory of her French love experiences, and, in a conversation with herself, says:

[5.29] There was love of course. Mostly boys:
a flat faced engineering student from Missouri,
a Texan flaunting his teaspoon of Cherokee blood.
I waited for afterwards-their pale eyelids, foreheads
throw back so the rapture could evaporate.
I don't believe I was suffering. I was curious, mainly:
How would each one smell, how many times could he do it?
I was drowning in flowers. (*ML*, section III, "Persephone in Hell")

[124] For a detailed analysis of this section of *Mother Love*, see chapter 4 section 4.4.

Persephone is remembering some of the boys she has met. She talks about two of them in detail, revealing what has been until that moment her sentimental and sexual education in Paris.

Unlike the sonnets analysed in the previous sections and the *Homeric Hymn*, in this sonnet, Persephone is an active subject and the boys are the object of the woman's gaze. In this role reversal, the boys are conceptualised as flowers. This interpretation is favored by the proximity in the lines between the boys and the element of the flower, and by the focus of Persephone's curiosity on the boys' scent. The scent, in fact, together with the bright colours, is the most defining feature of the flowers, an element of fascination and seduction for girls in many of the Greek myths of abduction.

As in ancient Greek poetry and myth, the flower in this sonnet is an object of desire with a highly erotic connotation. However, as I have shown in section 1.2., in Greek tales of abduction, the flowers picked by young girls arouse desire and pleasure in and about the girls, and the erotic desire is directed towards the meadow and the flowers; any pleasure is derived from the young women enjoying their mutual company. On the contrary, in the sonnet "Persephone in Hell", through the metaphor BOYS ARE FLOWERS, erotic desire is directed at the male counterpart. Dove's Persephone is consciously exploring sexuality, which, this time, implies the consummation of desire; she is willingly losing herself to pleasure

Like the beautiful blossoms of the sonnet "Afield", also in this sonnet, flowers are deceptive elements. The metaphorical expression "drowning in flowers", as I have already explored,[125] is structured on the image schema UP-DOWN and is linked to the domain of death. Therefore, Persephone's erotic experiences are conceptualised as a metaphorical death.

5.7. PERSEPHONE IS A PLANT

[125] See chapter 4 section 4.4.

Unlike the conceptual metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A NARCISSUS, the metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A PLANT, while similarly linking Persephone to the domain of plants, is not linked to the specific flower of narcissus. As pointed out in section 5.1.3., the conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS is structured on the mapping of the stages of the cycle of the life of the plants onto the stages of the cycle of life of people.

The metaphor is also based on the similar physical configuration between plants/trees and human beings: trees stand vertically, the crown of the tree is comparable to human heads and hair, and the branches of the trees are similar to human arms. It is this structural similarity that underlies the metaphor in the sonnet "Protection":

[5.30] Are you having a good time?
Are you having a time at all?
Everywhere in the garden I see the slime vine
of your neck. The stubborn baby curls […]
(*ML*, section II, "Protection")

Demeter, after Persephone's abduction, is contemplating the garden and compares the vine to her daughter, in particular to her thin neck. In this sonnet, the vine becomes an image metaphor, as the vine is used to describe the physical aspect of Persephone. The metaphor PERSEPHONE IS A PLANT reinforces the link between Persephone and the natural world and is, therefore, motivated by the myth and the association of Demeter with agriculture.

I suggest, however, that in this brief passage there is not only the mythic resonance of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, but also an echo of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's work, the appearance of Adam and Eve is conveyed through the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A PLANT, and in particular, MARRIAGE IS THE JOINT BETWEEN THE VINE AND THE ELM:[126]

[5.31] Shee as a veil down to the slender waist

[126] For a complete cognitive analysis of the metaphor, see Bare (2016).

> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
> As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
> Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
> Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
> And sweet reluctant amorous delay.
> (Milton, *Paradise Lost*. IV. 295-311)

The couple is described through the classic topos of the vine and elm, present in Biblical, ancient, and modern texts.[127]

The metaphor of the vine growing on the elm commonly represents conjugality and the union between man and woman. The purpose of the elm is to give strength, its function is to support the vine. These elements are mapped onto the role of the husband. The weaker nature of the vine, which needs support to grow, is mapped onto the wife, as dependent and subject to the husband's will. Since the agricultural practice of cultivating vines trained on elms is a common image for marriage, "the vine not yet joined to an elm is compared to an unwed virgin" (Sammons, 1986: 118). It is therefore possible not only to consider the expression in Dove's sonnet "the slim vine of your neck" as an image metaphor, which associates the resemblance of the neck of a child to a thin branch but also to interpret it as a metaphor for the virginal status of the abducted Persephone-like girl.

Dove, like Milton, focuses on the description of the hair. Demeter defines Persephone's curls as "stubborn" before she corrects herself, saying that there is no such a thing as "good hair". In Dove's sonnet, hair has a symbolic value and is assigned a moral quality. The association between Persephone and the plants, the echoes of Milton and his description of Eve's vine-like hair, are, in Dove's sonnet, re-elaborated and re-rooted in an all-American debate on good and bad hair. The element of hair is a marker of race and difference, but also of identity for black people. Greek myth is

[127] For an analysis of the garden imagery of the elm and the vine to describe marriage in literature, see Demetz (1958); Sammons (1986).

blended with a critique of the white standard of beauty which implies a moral distinction between good hair (straight) and bad hair (curly).

5.8. Conclusion

My analysis has highlighted that the domain of flower is pervasive throughout the entire *Mother Love* collection, via a series of patterns of images and themes. Despite floral metaphors being conventional, Dove's creative re-elaboration relies on visual imagery.

Flowery metaphors are linked and rooted in the specific myth that Rita Dove reworks. Persephone is, in fact, associated with the reign of plants, and Demeter, as the Goddess of agriculture, uses the metaphor of planting and seeding. Nevertheless, the source domain of the flower is not only linked to the Greek myth and to a conventional way of conceptualising human beings, and women in particular, but, as I have shown through a cognitive linguistic analysis, it also represents a specific perspective in which women are in a subordinate position in relation to men.

The flowery metaphors are not only grounded in the perception of time and mapped onto the stages of human life, as in the *Homeric Hymn*. In my opinion, this aspect is almost neglected in *Mother Love*; instead, the flowery imagery is explicitly linked to the domains of sexuality, violence, and brutality and becomes a tool to investigate, on a psychological level, the passage from childhood to womanhood, and the dimensions of eros and desire.

Images are connectors between the inwardness of the poet/lyrical voices and the outside world. Therefore, the image of the flower is connoted by meaning added by the different personal individual senses of self of the different Persephone and Demeter-like-persona. The characters' own re-elaborations of this element enrich its value, which goes beyond its meaning in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

Conclusion

The study has investigated the creative process of Rita Dove's reworking of ancient Greek myths, in particular, the myths of Oedipus and Demeter and Persephone. My intention was to propose an interpretation of Dove's re-use of myth that was grounded on a close reading of the texts; therefore, the first step of my work was a linguistic analysis.

Linguistic expressions are not independent products of a separate cognitive ability, but they are linked and understood within domains of knowledge. Therefore, a cognitive linguistic approach combining language and human cognition provided useful tools for linking textual analysis to phenomena of greater scale and scope.

I have assumed that the micro and macro constructions of Dove's works are the result of a blending process. By linking textual clues to conceptual structures, I have inferred the origin of blends in terms of input spaces and domains, and I have attempted to represent the complex conceptual relationships that extend across large sequences of discourse.

Through Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), I gave an account of Dove's works on different levels. Blending, in fact, plays a role in different aspects and parts of narration. In my work, I have concentrated on several areas, from larger to smaller scale levels and I have shown how CBT and CMT can contribute to the understanding of the production of a literary text, while, at the same time, developing a new approach to the study of classical reception.

In the first part of the thesis (chapters 1 to 3), I focused on macro structures of the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*, such as story-plots, episodes, characters, and relationships between characters. I explained that *DFE* is characterised by conceptual integration networks extending over long stretches of discourse, and that it represents a blend emerging from several input spaces, one of which is the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus.

In Chapter 1, the framework of CBT has enabled me to give an account of the intuition at the base of the author's creative process and to represent schematically the mappings between structures, concepts, characters and roles of the institution of slavery and the mythic Greek universe. In this way, I showed why and how the Greek myth of Oedipus was structurally blended with the system of slavery and with issues of racism and oppression.

CBT was also used to analyse the characters of Amalia and Louis as complex blended spaces modelled on multiple input spaces and subjected to different forces such as myth and history, developing new and original features. I believe that a blending-based approach has been able to account for the complexity of the inputs underlying the formation of the characters, and for Dove's creative process of de-familiarising and de-categorising earlier traditions, forcing the reader to reconsider their previous knowledge.

Blending theory has emerged as a useful approach to analysing and interpreting a single episode in the life of Augustus, resulting from the blending of the prototypical story of the 'exposed child', the exposure motif as elaborated in *Oedipus the King*, and the historical practice of the transatlantic slave trade. A cognitive linguistic approach has therefore been able to disentangle and explain the author's creative process of mythologising history and historicising myth. Moreover, a cognitive linguistic approach provided new insights on the interpretation of one of the new emerging meaning of *DFE*, such as the original presence of two parricides.

In Chapter 2, I focused my analysis on one of the main conceptual metaphors I have individuated in *The Darker Face of the Earth*: MISCEGENATION IN *THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH* IS INCEST IN *OEDIPUS THE KING*. First, I have shown that correspondences and analogies between incest and miscegenation found in American family discourse underpin the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST. Therefore, by analysing the individual elements mapped from the source domain of incest to the target domain of miscegenation, I explained how the metaphor of incest was used to reconceptualise interracial relations

in a specific context. I showed that metaphors are not neutral, they imply a particular perspective, in this case a racial perspective with a strong emotional charge, which guides the evaluation of the phenomenon of miscegenation.

Through a cognitive linguistic analysis of micro- and macro-structures, I have shown that the role and function of miscegenation in *DFE* and Dove's reworking of the concept of incest in *Oedipus the King* depend on the conceptual metaphor MISCEGENATION IS INCEST. I have argued that the element of miscegenation in *DFE* is blended with the element of incest in *Oedipus the King* and have provided evidence for the creative reworking of incest in the context of *DFE*, a phenomenon that in previous interpretations has been perceived as secondary to, or less influential than, miscegenation in the play.

A cognitive approach to metaphors has proved to be a valuable tool not only to investigate a system of interrelated linguistic metaphors expressing the same conceptual metaphor, but also to propose a different and richer interpretation of *DFE* in relation to the concepts of incest and miscegenation. By means of CMT and CBT, I could give an account of the hidden interrelations between the historical discourse around family in the specific context of the nineteenth United States and Dove's play.

In chapter 3, I used CBT to analyse Augustus, the main character of the play. I argued that Augustus is not only modelled on the straightforward character Oedipus from Greek myth, but that he receives elements and characteristics from several other input spaces and develops new structures that can be explained by the blending theory. Through cues and information gathered from a detailed textual analysis, I have delineated and represented the input spaces associated with the literary, folkloric and historical figures instrumental in shaping Augustus. A blending-based approach to characterisation captures character complexity, the dynamic development and interaction between different character manifestations and their implicit aspects, and provides new insights into character reading and interpretation.

In the second part of the thesis, I have considered the work *Mother Love*. I focused especially on small linguistic constructions and gave an account of cognitive templates, images, conceptual structures, and creative reworkings of conventional metaphors. In Chapter 4, I have analysed conceptual schemata, narrative elements and conceptual metaphors underlying both the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and *Mother Love*. By using the notion of image schema and the cognitive theory of metaphor, I have explained how different constructions reflect the same conceptual metaphors HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP AND SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN.

A cognitive linguistic analysis has given an account of the metonymical association of linguistic elements to the domain of death and of several death-related metaphors, through which Dove has creatively conceptualised and explored the life and the erotic experiences of a modern young Persephone in a male dominated world. Moreover, it gave a plausible explanation for a variety of analogies beyond intertextuality manifested primarily in the language and stylistic configuration of the text.

In Chapter 5, I focused on Dove's reworking of the elements of the flower and the mythic image of the opening of the earth central to the *Homeric Hymn*. A cognitive linguistic approach was helpful in identifying and explaining similar metaphors and image patterns that recur at different moments in the collection, in demonstrating the cohesion and unity within a non-linear and episodic collection, and in interpreting Dove's own approach and reworking of Greek myth.

An analysis focused on the various conceptual mappings between different domains turned out to be useful to explain individual poems and to examine the multiple metaphoric connotations assumed by the element of the flower in *ML*. A poetic analysis within cognitive framework proved to be useful to explain the author's imagery and creative elaboration, extension and composition of metaphors present in the Greek myth and conventional metaphors rooted in everyday language.

My work has attempted to explain Dove's reworking of Greek myths within the richness and multi-dimensionality of her sources of inspiration and influences. It has not always been easy to account for the complexity of Dove's works in terms of mental spaces; I have postulated conceptual integration networks to give an account of Dove's classical reception, but these are necessarily partial, and other literary and cultural inputs that might have been taken into account have been left out.

To summarise, my research has demonstrated that a cognitive linguistic approach can serve to different aims and explain a variety of phenomena.

Cognitive linguistics provided a useful framework and methodology for explaining Dove's classical reception and how Greek myths were engaged, interpreted, reinvented and incorporated into her literary creations. Moreover, it can help to make explicit the cognitive process of myth-making. In particular, CBT is a useful tool for analysing literary works that merge different stories by providing a plausible explanation of which and how conceptual structures, protagonists and narrative motifs from different literary traditions are blended.

A cognitive approach can be used not only to explain explicit intertextuality between literary works, but also to identify and depict implicit similarities. By explicit intertextuality, I refer to texts that are openly evoked through direct references or subtle allusions implied by the discourse. By implicit intertextuality, I refer to indirect connections that underlie the narrative structure: conceptual structures, schemata and templates, literary scripts, scenarios, conceptual metaphors and image patterns shared by different texts.

An analysis of classical reception within a cognitive framework is capable of unravelling the complexity of a literary work, revealing and making visible how the ancient myth is incorporated, re-rooted, adapted and interwoven in a context marked by race. Blending theory by giving an account of the new emerging meaning can be a useful tool to explore how ancient

myth is metaphorically reworked to address issues of racism and oppression, and to de-legitimise racist beliefs and oppressive practices.

By considering metaphors not only as stylistic device, and by focusing on the continuum between the verbal and the conceptual, a cognitive linguistic approach to poetic metaphor is helpful in providing a coherent account of the poet's construction of reality. A cognitive linguistic approach can help to articulate plausible alternative analyses and interpretations of poems, especially to explain creative poetic metaphor and figurative language. Moreover, a focus on conceptual mapping can illustrate the reader's processing of metaphorical expression and can provide a possible explanation of the writer's creative process. Cognitive linguistic tools, such as image schemas, can make explicit the narrative element embedded in the lyric poetic unit giving an account of events and situations. Finally, CMT can explain highly lyrical and compressed visual imagery and clarify the relationship between the poems' recurring images.

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