

CLOSET IMPURITIES: MISCEGENATION AND THE RACIAL CLOSET IN URBANO DUARTE AND ARTUR DE AZEVEDO'S *O ESCRAVOCRATA*

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Abstract: Through a close reading of Artur de Azevedo and Urbano Duarte's 1882 play *O Escravocrata* [The Slaveocrat], I examine the period anxieties surrounding miscegenation between black men and white women in the wake of abolition and turn of the century European immigration. Juxtaposing Brazil and the United States, I argue that these socially prohibited relationships challenged both slavery as an institution and Brazilian racial categorization. Drawing from queer theory, I show how the progeny of these interracial relationships lived in what I term a "racial closet," a space marked by clandestinity and precarity, and how the constitutive practice of "racial outing," the public revelation of African heritage was a way of sustaining white supremacy and the social and political distinctions between black and white, free and enslaved.

Key words: Slavery; Miscegenation; Theater; Abolition

Resumo: Através de uma leitura atenta da peça teatral, *O Escravocrata* (1882), de Artur Azevedo e Urbano Duarte, o seguinte ensaio examina as ansiedades brancas em torno da mestiçagem entre homens negros e mulheres brancas depois da abolição e no contexto da imigração europeia para o Brasil. Por meio de uma lente crítica e comparativa entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos, proponho que tais relações proibidas desafiaram tanto a instituição escravocrata como as estruturas nacionais de categorização racial. Partindo da teoria queer, procuro demonstrar como os frutos destas relações inter-raciais acabavam por ocupar um "armário racial" – um espaço marcado pela clandestinidade e precariedade – e como a prática de "flagramento racial," a revelação pública de

ascendência africana, funcionou como método de reproduzir as estruturas vigentes de supremacia branca e as distinções sociais e políticas entre branco e negro, livre e escravo.

Palavras-chave: Escravidão; Mestiçagem; Teatro; Abolição

In the final throes of the Brazilian abolitionist debates in the summer of 1882 Northeastern writers and dramatuges Urbano Duarte and Artur de Azevedo cowrote and submitted a play entitled *A família Salazar* to the Conservatório Dramático Brasileiro. The writing duo, both equally distinguished writers and dramatuges in their own right, soon received word from the conservatory that *A família Salazar* would not see the stage. No reason was given for the rejection. Two years later, in 1884 Duarte and Azevedo decided to publish the piece under the title *O escravocrata*. In the prologue the authors speculated about the reasons for the play's rejection, "Somos levados a crer que essa nudez significa—ofensa à moral, visto como só nesse terreno legisla e prepondera a opinião literária daquela instituição" (2). But what exactly constituted an "offense to morality"? *O Escravocrata* tells the story of a seemingly typical nineteenth-century Brazilian slaveholding family. The family's patriarch, Salazar, is a staunch slaveholder whose belief in the institution of slavery is just as strong as his hatred of blacks. The household is comprised of his wife Gabriela, his two children, Gustavo and Carolina, and his spinster sister, Juliana. However, hidden underneath this seemingly normal portrait of nineteenth-century family life lies a secret that ultimately wreaks havoc upon each member of the family. All are unwittingly involved in a complex love triangle that has resulted in a child. Salazar's wife has been having an adulterous affair with his most despised slave, Lourenço, for twenty-two years, resulting in the birth of Gustavo, who Salazar believes to be his legitimate first-born and only son. Juliana is the first to discover the secret and brings it to Salazar's attention. As the play develops we also learn that Salazar, despite his hatred of blacks, is too the product of miscegenation, and is ironically the grandson of a black slave man and a Portuguese woman.

Azevedo and Duarte were well aware that their provocative plot line must have offended the conservative moral sensibilities of the conservatory, who no doubt thought that their play would have scandalized carioca viewers. The writing duo had committed

two high crimes if not mortal sins in the eyes of Brazilian slave-holding society. They had written a story about an elite married white woman who committed adultery with a slave, and to add insult to injury, had done so for more than two decades, borne his child, and passed him off as the legitimate son of her husband. Though miscegenation (between white men and women of color) throughout Brazilian history was heralded as a fact that made Brazil exceptional, the miscegenation depicted in Azevedo and Duarte's play was decidedly beyond the pale.

The two authors had witnessed the nation's hostility toward depictions of sexual relations between white women and black men in 1881 with the publication of Artur's younger brother Aluísio de Azevedo's novel *O mulato*. Though the novel ushered in the Brazilian naturalist movement, it caused such an uproar that it forced Aluísio to leave their native province of Maranhão and settle in Rio with Artur. Aluísio Azevedo's novel bears a striking resemblance to his brother's play. Both stories detail illicit miscegenation between elite white women and a mulatto. Although *O mulato* isn't a story of adultery, it depicts premarital sex between the lead protagonist Raimundo, a well-to-do, educated mulatto, and his elite white cousin Ana Rosa. Raimundo wishes to marry Ana but her family will not allow her to marry a mulatto. Ana Rosa becomes pregnant by Raimundo, similar to Duarte and Azevedo's storyline, but ultimately suffers a miscarriage. Both the play and the novel end similarly with the death of both the mulatto, their progeny, and the restoration of the white nuclear family: Raimundo is murdered and Ana Rosa is later found married to a white man, while in Duarte and Azevedo's play Lourenço and his son commit suicide, leaving Salazar, his wife, and legitimate daughter. Though the play would be written three years after *O mulato*, its rejection indicates that the theme of miscegenation between black men and white women was one that still did not sit well with some of the nation's elite.

Duarte and Azevedo argue in the preface that their story was not extracted from their "immoral" imaginations, but rather that it depicted a common reality of Brazilian slavery: "Onde é que se acha o imoral ou o inverossímil? As relações amorosas entre senhores e escravos foram e são, desgraçadamente, fatos comuns no nosso odioso regime social; só se surpreenderá deles quem tiver olhos para não ver e ouvidos para não ouvir"

(3). The writing duo make clear that sexual relations between enslaved men and white mistresses was a common reality and consequence of Brazilian slaveholding society. They further add that “seria muito bom que todas as mulheres casadas fossem fiéis aos seus maridos, honestas, ajuizadas, linfáticas, e que os adultérios infamantes não passassem de fantasias perversas de dramaturgos atrabiliários; mas infelizmente assim não sucede, e o bípede implume comete todos os dias monstruosidades que não podem deixar de ser processadas neste supremo tribunal de justiça—o teatro” (3).

The work’s rejection by the National Dramatic Conservatory brings to the fore more than questions of the organization’s conservatism or prudery, or the fact that it wanted to ignore illicit sexual relationships between slaveholding women and enslaved men. It reveals period attitudes regarding what types of spectacles were deemed not suitable for public viewing in the wake of abolition. As the authors indicate, there was a resistance to staging plays that depicted the realities of slave life and an investment in presenting an idealized Brazilian family to the public. What the two authors reveal in their response to their censors is a society that did not want to come to terms with the racial, sexual, and gendered consequences of centuries of slavery, and a public that was not prepared to accept being confronted with them on the stage.

Azevedo and Duarte’s defense of the play calls attention to the hypervisibility of miscegenation and its deviance, along with its concomitant concealment and invisibility. Using *O escravocrata*’s taboo interracial plot and writings from period observers, this article explores miscegenation, specifically between white women and black men during slavery in Brazil and the Americas as a space marked by taboo, secrecy, deception, and violence. This very characterization of miscegenation shapes the racial and social reality of the mixed-race progeny born of these liaisons and creates a precarious racial and social identity shaped by the illicit terms of their birth, in which as Judith Butler claims, they become “differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (25). To understand these complexities, miscegenation between black men and white women is examined here in relation to the period practice of racial passing¹ and the concept of mistaken racial

¹ By “racial passing” I am referring here specially to individuals who looked phenotypically white rather than the social whiteness of Afro-Brazilians who became designated as white through social ascension.

identity.

Using the character of Gustavo, the product of the affair, I examine how passing for white in the phenotypical sense and mistaken identity were employed in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature as narrative devices to expose the insidious realities of Brazilian race relations in the wake of abolition. This essay asks: Why does nineteenth-century literature insist on revealing the blackness of characters who looked white in a country with supposedly fluid racial categories and that challenged the black-white binary? Why must we know these ostensibly “white” characters are black, and what are the conditions under which their race is revealed? Why is “racial discretion” or ambiguity not a possibility?

Though the notion of mulatto as the carnal symbol of Brazil’s racial history was widely espoused among nineteenth-century Brazilian writers, intellectuals, and politicians, it is important to mention that there was no general consensus as to how mixed-race characters should be depicted in national literature.

In the wake of slave emancipation literary depictions of blacks and mulattos held a particular political resonance for pro- and antislavery advocates. Mixed-race characters in pre- and post-emancipation Brazilian literature and the literature of the Americas purposefully challenge the national “racial reading praxis” by staging critical mediations on the intersections of race, freedom, and the national body politic. But more particularly within the context of pre-emancipation Brazil, *O escravocrata* shows how white anxiety and violence over the body’s indiscernibility in racial and social terms undermine the very premise of Brazilian racial exceptionalism.

1 Women and the reproduction of slavery and freedom

In Brazil and throughout the Americas slavery, freedom, and race were reproduced through black and white women’s bodies. Under slavery those bodies were framed in an economy of use, that is, women’s bodies, sexualities, and reproduction had a

particular use, meaning, and place in the solidification of white male racial, sexual, and economic supremacy. White women across the Americas were constructed as symbols of purity and were essential to white men for the reproduction of pure white offspring and legitimate heirs. Throughout the nineteenth century, white women's bodies and notions of white female purity came to symbolize the ideal and the image that the Brazilian nation held of itself. Miscegenation presented serious threats to the corrosion of this image. Consequently, it became vital to limit white women and black men in their sexual choices in order to keep the racial-sexual order intact.

The law in slave societies throughout the Americas stipulated that children inherited the status of the mother, whether free or enslaved. With this law the children of white fathers and black mothers were born enslaved, allowing white masters to legally enslave their own progeny. Interracial sex between white women and black men posed a significant political, economic and social threat to the architecture of slavery in ways that sex between white men and black women did not. As historian Martha Hodes writes, because "the children of white mothers and black fathers were of partial African ancestry but were not slaves, they confounded legal and social presumptions of *prima facie* slavery and freedom" (117). Sex and the biracial children born to black men and white women undermined the continuity of slavery, blurred racial and social categories, and were a serious threat to white male domination. They endangered the equation of blackness and slavery (40). Under slavery there was a social and racial determinism that was made through reproduction. Because the law stipulated that children followed the condition of the mother, white women inherently reproduced not only whiteness, but freedom and legitimacy.

As Philosopher Naomi Zack has observed,

Individuals who are designated black have the ability, through the mechanism of their heterosexuality, to destroy the white identity of white families and, because race of kin determines race of individuals, to destroy the white identity of the relatives of their descendants. Thus, the asymmetrical kinship system of racial inheritance in the United States not only is intrinsically racist in favor of white people, but it defines black people as intrinsically threatening to white

families (27).

As the family in nineteenth-century Brazilian politics and literature was in many respects, metonymical for the nation, to “other” the face of the family is to threaten an impending reconfiguration of the political. Race as an inheritance of the mother not only exculpated white male patriarchal sexuality, but also locked women in their places as producers of the racial binary and the institution of slavery. Sex in the context of slavery is where legacies of freedom and bondage were reproduced, and where the distinction between citizen and alien were given form.

2 Cases of sex between white women and black men and violence

Despite the high stakes around white women’s bodies and their central role in reproducing white patriarchy, many period observers saw that behind the social construction of white female chastity and asexuality was the reality of white women of various ages and social stations throughout the Americas engaging in sexual trysts of their own. White men were not entirely successful in their efforts to keep white women locked away. Manoel Bomfim wrote in 1905, recalling the days of slavery, “Not infrequently the young mistress, who has been brought up to rub against the sturdy slave boys, yields herself to them when her nerves give way to her irrepressible desires”(106- 107). But more than young mistresses, as Frenchman Charles Expilly in 1863 asked in his account of his travels across Brazil,

what about the widows who withdraw from the world to remain faithful to their dearly departed husband? Ostensibly, they indignantly refuse the advances of their equals but more than one, from the depths of their mysterious retreat, ask for powerful consolation from their African lovers, who help them to gravely wear the mask of their eternal suffering in public (410).

The narrative of white womanhood that occluded white women from being perceived as sexually aggressive was in some instances, as some historians have observed, exploited to coerce slave men into sexual relationships. This same narrative

also protected white women when these affairs were discovered by white men, allowing them to shift the blame onto slave men. As Hodes notes, “Even as wealthier white women held the real power of coercion, they were protected from censure by those who held authority in their communities and by dominant ideas about white female virtue” (135). In her 1861 narrative Harriet Jacobs, a former slave on a plantation in Edenton, North Carolina, recalled how white mistresses, well aware of the sexual exploits of their fathers, brothers, and husbands, used their power and the prevailing narrative of white female virtue to carry out affairs with slave men:

[White women] know that the women slaves are subject to their father's authority in all things; and in some cases they exercise the same authority over the men slaves. I have myself seen the master of such a household whose head was bowed down in shame; for it was known in the neighborhood that his daughter had selected one of the meanest slaves on his plantation to be the father of his first grandchild. She did not make her advances to her equals, nor even to her father's more intelligent servants. She selected the most brutalized, over whom her authority could be exercised with less fear of exposure. Her father, half frantic with rage, sought to revenge himself on the offending black man; but his daughter, foreseeing the storm that would arise, had given him free papers, and sent him out of the state. (52)

When sexual relationships between slave men and white women reached the attention of white men, in some instances, they ruthlessly exacted their revenge. These affairs in most cases were severely punished with a range of sadistic cruelties such as torture, mutilation, lynchings, and murder. Manoel Bomfim wrote that “the Negro or mulatto is castrated with a dull knife, the wound is sprinkled with salt, and he is then buried alive. As for the lass, with an increased dowry, she is married off to a poor cousin” (107). The memoirs of period Maranhense writers and intellectuals Dunshee de Abranches and Graça Aranha provide extensive evidence of the extreme acts of violence that befell some black men following liaisons with white women. Dunshee de Abranches writes of the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner by the name of Zizi, who was left alone at home during the Balaiada revolt in Maranhão (1838-1840). According to Abranches the master “never brought her up as he should have.” Zizi escaped the

plantation with a mulatto with whom she had grown up and the two took refuge in a remote maroon community during the revolt. There the two had an affair and Abranches writes, “At the end of the insurrection, the couple was taken prisoner, now with a newborn son, and remanded to the farm from where they had escaped.” Enraged, Zizi’s father proceeded to whip her in the slave quarters and “demanded that she stab her lover through the heart with a double-edged pajaú knife.” When Zizi refused, her father “made her disrobe and proceeded to tie her body to the body of her lover, who was already dying and riddled with stab wounds. He hung her from a tree limb and ordered that the two corpses be thrown in the lowlands of Anajatuba to be eaten by the crows” (137-38).

Abranches also tells the true story of adultery between a slave mistress from one of the richest and most influential families in Maranhão and her male slave Amaro, which bears a striking resemblance similar to the story recounted in *O escravocrata*. The mistress fell in love with Amaro and the two carried on an affair for an extended period of time. Her husband had suspicions and feigned to take a trip to São Luis. He returned to the plantation at night unexpectedly and caught his wife and Amaro in the act. Abranches relates that Amaro was “tied up in the cellar in a dark room where he went days without eating or drinking” and was later “stripped naked, whipped to shreds, and tied to a pole in the middle of the field, where they smeared his body with honey so that the mosquitoes could torment him until he later died from the deadly blows by which he was barbarically mutilated” (138-39).

Graça Aranha relates a similarly gruesome tale of adultery between a white mistress and her slave, whose husband also unexpectedly caught them in the act. Aranha writes that the slave was “was arrested by other slaves and killed. His flesh was salted and thus conserved.” His wife was “locked inside the home without any communication with her husband and forced to eat the cooked flesh of the slave. She lived until there was no flesh left. When there was no more, the farmer had his wife killed and ordered her body thrown in the field to be devoured by vultures” (110-111).

Expilly also encountered the daughter of a wealthy banker who was engaged to be married to a high-ranking city official. Her father was particularly partial to the marriage, but continually ran into the “persistent refusal and opposition of his daughter.”

Suspecting that she might be romantically involved with someone else he began to have her watched and followed around and one night caught her “in the company of a slave man.” The daughter confessed that she was pregnant and her father, “blinded by rage, . . . subjected her to the most hateful brutalities,” dragging her around by her hair and bruising her body such that the following day she had a miscarriage. It was discovered that each night while her parents were asleep she would sneak into the slave man’s bedroom to have sex with him. According to Expilly the slave man “swore that he did not initiate the affair and he was only obeying the wishes of his mistress and ended up being whipped slowly to death” (408-409). Another white mistress who had been sleeping with a slave man went through with her wedding ceremony and six months later gave birth to a mulatto child. Her husband, “ashamed and furious, in her presence threw the child to the pigs” and then ordered her to be raped by the slaves. Three days later she was found dead” (409-410).

As these accounts illustrate, the children that white women had with slave men were many times murdered. Harriet Jacobs wrote that in the United States the “infant is smothered, or sent where it is never seen by any who know its history.” However, she also noted that “if the white parent is the father, instead of the mother, the offspring are unblushingly reared for the market” (52). Because the children of white men with slave women were born legally enslaved, white women in Brazil and the United States, to protect their reputations, frequently violated the law by naming a slave woman as the mother of the child and registering it under a false name. In this way, as Expilly writes, the “white woman condemns her son to servitude with no remorse, while her reputation is not affected in the least and she is protected from any harmful suspicion” (409). He continues that even though “she has lied to the authorities, the law now protects her from curious and hateful scrutiny. The law absolutely guarantees her rights when she sells her blood relatives; and the white woman continues to be treated with honor after selling either the mulatto child to whom she gave birth or the forced accomplice of her shameful roaming astray” (410).

3 *O escravocrata*

In the opening scenes of *O escravocrata* Duarte and Azevedo draw reader's attention to the tense relationship between the family's mulatto house slave, Lourenço and the Salazar, the patriarch. Lourenço has worked for the Salazar family for over twenty years and is Salazar's most despised slave. Salazar has tried for several years to get rid of him, yet his attempts are always thwarted by the supplications of the family, in particular, his wife Gabriela and son Gustavo. The children possess an almost paternalistic affection and attachment toward him and regard him as a father figure. Salazar resents the fondness that his family has for Lourenço and is the primary source of conflict between the two men. In the following scene, Salazar, in yet another futile attempt to remove Lourenço, comes face to face with him for the first time in the play:

CAIXEIRO: Cá está o mulato.

SALAZAR: (A Lourenço.) Prepara a tua trouxa; tens que seguir amanhã para cima.

LOURENÇO: (Fita-o e depois diz pausadamente.) Mais nada?

SALAZAR: (Furioso.) Mais nada! Desavergonhado! Patife! Cão! Puxa já daqui!

LOURENÇO: Não lhe quis faltar ao respeito . . . Este é o meu modo de falar.

SALAZAR: Modo de falar! Pois negro tem modo de falar? Quando estiveres em minha presença, abaixa a vista, ladrão! (Lourenço não lhe obedece.) Abaixa a vista, cachorro! Corto-te a chicote se o não fizeres! (Lourenço conserva-se imperturbável. Salazar avança com um chicote, mas Gustavo o contém.)

GUSTAVO: Peço por ele, meu pai! Lourenço é um escravo dócil e obediente. (A Lourenço, com brandura.) Abaixa a vista, Lourenço. (Lourenço obedece.) Ajoelha-te! (Idem.) Pede humildemente perdão a meu pai de lhe não haveres obedecido incontinenti.

LOURENÇO: Peço humildemente perdão a meu senhor . . . SALAZAR: Puxa daqui, burro! (Lourenço sai.) (8)

In this first encounter between Salazar and Lourenço, the tensions over black and white masculinities are brought to the surface. This scene proves pivotal, as through the interplay of verbal and nonverbal communication we bear witness to the subtle

subversion of power dynamics. Prior to Gustavo's intervention, Lourenço insists on looking Salazar in the eye and refuses to lower his head when speaking to him. Lourenço has a certain degree of confidence, refuses to act as an obedient slave, and addresses Salazar as an equal. His insistence on looking Salazar in the eye, lack of fear toward him, and his insistence on justifying his speech disrupts the master-slave dialectic. Salazar's persistence in trying to make Lourenço obey through the use of violence illustrates how the performance of slave mastery was very much entrenched in ritualistic performances of authority and power. The whip in this scene serves as a phallic symbol. The fact that it does not educe fear, submission, or provoke any reaction, points not only to Salazar's impotence as a slaveholder, but the impotence of slavery as an institution.

In addition, prior to the revelation of the affair and Salazar's mixed ancestry, Duarte and Azevedo reveal that Lourenço and Salazar are connected in ways whose extent neither truly knows. All men are biracial. As the domestic space in nineteenth-century literature served as a metonym for the nation, this incestuous household in which two families coexist, represents a Brazil that was complexly united through miscegenation.

Soon after the encounter between Lourenço and Salazar, Salazar begins to reflect upon the family's and particularly his wife's obsession with protecting Lourenço. He inveighs:

SALAZAR: Pois se eles sempre se colocam em sua frente para defendê-lo?! Ainda anteontem, minha mulher quase apanhou uma lambada que era destinada ao Lourenço! Protege-o escandalosamente, alegando ser ele cria da família, e não sei mais o quê . . . E há vinte e cinco anos, desde o meu casamento, que aturo as insolências daquele patife! Leva a ousadia ao ponto de não abaixar a vista quando fala comigo! Oh! mas desta vez, vendo-o definitivamente! (15)

Subsequently, the truth is revealed to the reader/ spectator as Gabriela and Lourenço disclose the secret that has haunted the household for over twenty years:

LOURENÇO: (Baixo e em tom de ameaça.) Não quero absolutamente afastar-me de junto dele.

GABRIELA: (Muito nervosa.) Sim, sim . . . Farei tudo quanto estiver ao meu alcance, mas não fales nesse tom, porque se nos ouvem . . .

LOURENÇO: Não tenhas susto; há vinte e dois anos que guardo este segredo, e ainda não pronunciei uma palavra que pudesse despertar desconfianças. Prometo guardá-lo até à morte, se a senhora fizer que eu me conserve sempre ao lado dele.

GABRIELA: Sim . . . prometo . . . prometo . . . (À parte.) Oh! Deus! mereço eu tamanho castigo? (Alto.) Sai daqui . . . Aproxima-se o senhor Salazar. (Lourenço sai.) (16)

Gabriela and Lourenço's affair is revealed with a relative amount of ambiguity. The authors outwardly obfuscate the details of this affair and the reader/spectator is given neither the backstory nor the conditions under which the liaison transpired. From the conversation between them, we can gather that their affair started shortly after Gabriela's marriage to Salazar. We also learn why Gabriela thwarts Salazar's attempts to sell Lourenço and why Salazar's attempts to get rid of him do not inspire any fear in Lourenço. Their agreement is that as long as Lourenço is allowed to live near his son, he will keep their affair a secret.

4 Passing and mistaken identity in nineteenth-century literature

Racial passing, or simply passing as it most commonly called, has a long and complex history throughout the Americas. Legal scholar Randal Kennedy defines racial passing as “a deception that enables a person to adopt certain roles or identities from which he would be barred by prevailing social standards in the absence of his misleading conduct” (28).

In the context of the United States, he continues, the classic racial passer has been the “‘white Negro’: the individual whose physical appearance allows him to present himself as ‘white’ but whose ‘black’ lineage (typically only a very partial black lineage) makes him a Negro according to dominant racial rules” (1145). Most racial passers in the North American tradition did so consciously.

Kennedy makes a distinction between the racial passer and a case of mistaken identity, that is a person who, “having been told that he is white, thinks of himself as white, and holds himself out to be white (though he and everyone else in the locale would deem him to be ‘black’ were the facts of his ancestry known)” (1145). Much like Aluísio de Azevedo’s *O mulato*, *O escravocrata* is a tale of both passing and mistaken identity. Gustavo as the result of Gabriela and Lourenço’s twenty-two-year affair has been passing as white his entire life, yet he is also unaware of his black ancestry. Azevedo and Duarte employ both passing and mistaken identity to examine and dismantle the claim of exceptionality of Brazilian racial relations and the purported fluidity between black and white, freedom and bondage, in wake of abolition.

Popularized in the works of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American writers such as William Wells Brown, Charles Chesnutt, Kate Chopin, Nella Larsen, and Frances Harper, the passing mulatto character in the works of nineteenth-century African American writers served as an important tool to challenge the ways in which society constituted difference in racial terms as well as to undermine the rigidity and the rationale of the color line.

Passing and mistaken identity characters in both the Brazilian and North American traditions purposefully challenge the national “racial reading praxis,” meaning how we see and understand race by staging critical mediations on the intersections of race, freedom, and the national body politic. But more particularly within the context of pre-emancipation Brazil, Azevedo and Duarte show how white anxiety and violence over the body’s indiscernibility in racial and social terms undermines the very premise of Brazilian racial mythology and the exceptional claim of Brazilian slavery as benign and devoid of racism.

In both Brazil and the United States, whether in real life or in literature, the mixed-race body conveys national constructions of the meaning of race—for the United States its rigidity, and for Brazil its presumed malleability. Though it is important to acknowledge that American literature did circulate widely in nineteenth-century Brazil, the mixed-race character served completely different purposes and interests in each context. In American abolitionist fiction, for example, slaves who looked white were sold

into slavery by relatives of the white fathers who freed them. Or, in other cases, it was the white father who sold his mulatto children into slavery. In the U.S. tradition there is a thrust, especially in abolitionist literature, to use the tragedy of the mulatto to exemplify the volatility of American race relations. For Hortense Spillers, the mixed-race character is an “accretion of signs” that embody the “unspeakable, of the very thing that the dominant culture would forget,” a subject that “plays out dimensions of the spectacular and the specular” and lives an “attribution of the illicit” (307).

As the mulatto at the symbolic level had been so central to Brazilian politics and the Brazilian racial exceptionalism, the presumed meanings of abolition—racial equality and equal opportunity—incited a fair amount of anxiety among many of the white elite. In very concrete terms, disquiet over the representation of mixed race characters in national literature often mirrored the anxiety over abolition and interracial relations throughout the Americas.

5 Passing, the closet, and racial outing

Pioneering queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in the *Epistemology of the Closet* defines the “closet” as a space in which the closeted individual must to contend with “the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden” (71). The closet provides a useful framework to understand how illegible or secreted racial identity functioned as both space and social reality.

The closet as it relates to passing as both a racial and sexual space raises fundamental personal and indeed political issues of privacy, choice, hypocrisy, stigma, and injury. The concept of “racial closet” reveals that race—particularly the black/white binary—is just as socially constructed as the hetero/homo binary, and that “outing” occurred when both established racial and sexual boundaries became or were made socially visible and transgressed.

Race (or blackness) for the passer in the wake of abolition, like the homosexuality of the closeted queer subject, was a secret that was “characterized by hypervisibility and confinement and subject to regulation and surveillance” (Snorton 5). As Siobhan

Sommerville has argued, “To be ‘in the closet’ is to be palpably invisible in a structure of visibility, proximity, and knowledge.” Moreover, she continues, “Although individuals may desire to be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the closet, one can never fully control the interpretation of one’s status” (93). The closet is a lived experience in which the subject must contend with the vulnerability of visibility, and “outing” the inability to control the terms through their bodies become legible in the public domain.

“Racial outing,” in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature more than intensifying the dramatic quality of race narratives, possessed a larger purpose than its seeming spectacularity. These public racial revelations brought to the fore the violence of confronting race as a social reality as the new nation slowly transitioned from slavery to abolition. Racial outing did not just occur in novels or was merely a figment of the literary imagination but was perhaps the greatest fear of men and women who lived socially as white, or those who presumed themselves to be. Racial outing in real life and literature served as a way of establishing and maintaining racial order, but more importantly shoring up the gap between blackness and whiteness.

Leading up to the revelation of the climactic secret of Gustavo’s blackness, there are several allusions to Gustavo being an obvious misfit within the family. Josefa, Salazar’s sister, consistently raises suspicions regarding Gustavo’s whiteness throughout the play:

JOSEFA: (...) Desde muito tempo que o tal nhonhô Gustavinho me dava que pensar! Ela é branca, o mano é muito disfarçado. . . . Porém, depois que vi o tal Gustavinho variando por causa da moléstia, confirmaram-se as minhas desconfianças, e vou dar parte ao mano, aconteça o que acontecer. . . . E de família! Já a mãe não se falava bem dela, e a irmã. . . . cala-te, boca! Elas, pelo menos, procuravam gente branca. Mas não um escravo, um negro! Oh! fico toda arrepiada quando penso nisso! (À parte.) Com um escravo! parede. (A uma cadeira.) (20)

Other than what Josefa perceives as somatic differences between Gustavo and Salazar, she and the authors also allude to Gustavo’s blackness using period pseudoscientific theories of mulatto and black degeneracy.

Gustavo is irresponsible, drinks and gambles uncontrollably, and ultimately finds himself in insurmountable debt. All of these vices, according to late 19th racial science are symptoms of his African heritage. Josefa functions as the white matriarch charged with policing and maintaining the racial purity and legitimacy of the family's lineage. The following excerpt from the memoir of Maranhense writer Graça Aranha illustrates this extreme prejudice against racial mixture and interracial unions and the investment in retaining white racial purity:

In the family of my paternal grandfather the preconception against *negros* and mestizos was aggressive. They sought purity of race with furious zeal. The Maceis Parentes and the Aranha families never mixed with Indians. Mating with *negros* and mulattos would have been an abominable thing. In the interior of the province I often met these relatives of mine, in extreme poverty, barefoot, simple workers employees on the *fazendas* [farms], but totally preserving the purity of the white blood. They were generally blond with blue eyes, with the same features that one could find in most of my father's sons and also in two of my brothers. My paternal aunts, like hunting animals, sniffed and discovered the mestizo elements no matter how one tried to hide it. Tireless fanatics in the name of this prejudice, if they knew of some relative's marriage plan, they started to investigate the entire pedigree of the suitor and if they discovered even the smallest drop of negro or Indian blood they would not give up until they saw the unhappy alliance destroyed (110-11).

Graça Aranha's memoir points to the role of white matriarchs in policing and retaining white racial purity in families under slavery. Josefa, like Aranha's aunts, were crucial to the white supremacist architecture of slavery. As the status of women defined the status of the child, white women held a key role in the perpetuation and preservation of the white patriarchal family. Josefa acknowledges that she and Salazar both have a "pé na cozinha," that is, black ancestry, like Gustavo, but also says that they are "disfarçado," or masked, disguised, suggesting that they are not only phenotypically whiter, but that their blood has been so diluted over time through miscegenation that their African heritage is sufficiently hidden to the naked eye. Here the authors present the evident hypocrisy and complexities surrounding "white" racism under slavery. Due to wide spread miscegenation over the course of centuries between the Portuguese and Africans, a significant portion of the population in nineteenth-century Brazil had some degree of black ancestry (known or unknown), many of whom belonged to the slaveholding class and who racially identified as white.

In the play's climax Josefa resolves to meet with Salazar to reveal the secret of Gustavo's paternity. What we witness is not only the revelation of this secret, but the past that Salazar himself has tried to conceal:

JOSEFA:	(Erguendo-se.) Apare o carro! Quer que eu me explique? Pois eu me explico. (Pausa.) De que cor é a sua pele?
SALAZAR:	Aí vem o estilo cabalístico! (Com força.) Branca!
JOSEFA:	Sim. . . apesar de que o nosso bisavô materno era pardo.
SALAZAR:	(Tapando-lhe a boca.) Psit, mulher! . . .
JOSEFA:	Bem pardo!
SALAZAR:	Mana!
JOSEFA:	E foi escravo até a idade de cinco anos!
SALAZAR:	Cala-te, diabo!
JOSEFA:	Ninguém nos ouve. Era mulato e escravo; mas a aliança com galegos purificou a raça, de sorte que tanto você como eu somos perfeitamente brancos . . . Temos cabelos lisos e corridos, beigos finos e testa larga.
SALAZAR:	(Sorrindo.) Você é uma toleirona. Também a mim, isto causava espécie; mas disse-me um médico ser este fato observado em famílias que contam um ou mais

ascendentes remotos de cor. Desgostou-me muito isso; mas enfim! São caprichos da natureza! Uma raça não se purifica inteiramente senão depois de séculos . . . A mestiçagem com africanos produz atavismos. . .

JOSEFA: Bem . . . não digo mais nada . . . Prefiro deixá-lo na doce ilusão. (Vai a sair.)

SALAZAR: (Segurando-a.) Com mil diabos! Já agora quero saber!

JOSEFA: Quer? Sim! Pois ouça lá, mesmo porque já estou engasgada. Sou capaz de estourar, se fico calada! Ontem à noite fui ao quarto de Gustavo . . . Ele estava ardendo em febre e delirava . . . Sabe o que dizia? Dizia assim—Eu? Filho de um negro? Eu? Negro? Eu? Ladrão?!

SALAZAR: (Muito agitado.) E o que conclui você daí?

JOSEFA: (Hipocritamente.) Concluo . . . concluo que o Lourenço é uma cria de família . . . muito estimado . . . escandalosamente protegido por sua mulher. Deus lhe perdoe, e . . . (Salazar agarra na garganta da velha, dá um grito e sai correndo.)
(24)

In this scene Josefa outs not only Gustavo to the reader/spectator, but Salazar as well. Here the authors juxtapose the two colliding backstories of Salazar's black ancestry and the racial outing of Gustavo. What is curious about the revelation of Salazar's racial history is that the authors employ the same interracial pairing (black male/white female) between his *pardo* great-grandfather and white Galician great-grandmother to show that miscegenation, over the course of Brazilian history did not exclusively follow the white male/ woman of color pairing and that Gustavo and Salazar are both racial passers. More broadly, the authors expose the fundamental hypocrisy of a nation built by miscegenation and invested in white supremacy and white racial purity. Salazar's attempt to silence Josefa when speaking of his black grandfather shows how he himself lives in fear of being outed.

The existence of Josefa and Salazar's black grandfather and their concomitant hatred of blacks, support of slavery, or in the words of George Lipsitz "possessive investment in whiteness" illustrate how performing slavery functioned as a way especially for some mixed race people to publically legitimate their whiteness and to conceal their own black heritage. The authors show how multiraciality and white supremacy under Brazilian slavery were mutually informing and constitutive. This paradox, if not

contradiction, was at the root of Brazil's racial conundrum as the nation progressed toward abolition. Through Salazar and Josefa's discussion of their own racial history Azevedo and Duarte also allude to the nation's whitening projects that were being heavily promoted in the second half of the 19th century. *O escravocrata* was written in the very last years of slavery as the nation was transitioning amid much resistance from being one of the last slaveholding nations in the Americas while also contemplating how to radically alter the race of the nation's population through strategic miscegenation. The play comes at a critical moment when thousands of European immigrants were arriving on Brazilian shores to replace the slave workforce. In this sense, the authors suggest that all Brazilians at the end of this process will to some degree be "disfarçado" like Salazar.

Through this form of social and ethnic cleansing, officials hoped to radically alter Brazil's racial makeup and its future possibilities. "In less than a century, in all probability, the population of Brazil will be represented, in its greater part, by individuals of the white Latin race, and within the same period, the black and the indigenous will have vanished from this part of the Americas. . . . A brilliant future is reserved for Brazil, which will become the principal place in South America where the Latin race will be retempered and a soon vanish through miscegenation because of their innate inferiority. "O negro e o branco, vivendo misturados socialmente durante séculos, o sangue preto naturalmente tenderá a ser eliminado no sangue branco, ou a desaparecer, cedendo essa raça o campo a outra mais preparada para a luta da vida" said Nabuco before parliament (Nabuco, *Discursos* 182). Literary critic Sílvio Romero, like Nabuco, also had faith that blacks would disappear and that "future victory in the life struggle among us will belong to the white man." But in order to achieve this victory they would first have to "capitalize on the aid the other two races can furnish, especially the black race, with which it has mixed most. After blacks have rendered necessary help, the white type will continue to predominate by natural selection until it emerges pure and beautiful as in the old world. . . . Two factors will greatly contribute to this process: on the one hand the abolition of the slave trade and the continuous disappearance of the Indians, and on the other hand European immigration!" (Skidmore 36-37). White racial purity in a multiracial society could only be achieved through the very thing that made the nation multiracial:

miscegenation. Miscegenation becomes both the cause and the cure.

Passing characters' such as Gustavo's "pé na cozinha" serves as narrative fodder in period national literature to paradoxically reveal a Brazil that boasts of the absence of nonlinear racial categorization, but is obsessed with taking racial inventory. If we place the trope of racial outing within the naturalist framework, we can see that this investment in race, and more precisely racial knowledge, is a means by which humans attempt to assert supremacy over nature. Miscegenation, therefore, does not blur racial difference, but brings forth a desire to know and distinguish difference on racial terms. The supposed blurring of racial lines inherent to miscegenation through concrete formal and informal power structures reifies the dimensional relationship between black and white, and signifies both an allusion to racial purity and disparate racial identification. The desire to know who is white or black and the fear and shame many people such as Salazar felt of their mixed race ancestry point to the hypocrisy of period Brazilian racial discourse and the complexity of the black/ white binary in Brazilian slavery society.

With the surge of medical science in the late nineteenth century, ambiguous bodies (racially and sexually) who could not be neatly categorized or placed into a binary became a threat to the social order. Racial ambiguity and transgression, the very essence of the passer, was the very thing the nation wanted to eliminate.

6 Conclusion

In the end, the outing of Gabriela and Lourenço's affair and Gustavo's blackness wreak havoc upon the Salazar household. In quintessential nineteenth-century melodramatic fashion, Gustavo, after learning the identity of his true father, suffers a fever and a severe case of delirium, and his mother Gabriela has a hysterical attack and is interred in a mental facility. No longer under the protection of Gabriela or Gustavo, Lourenço decides to commit suicide and hangs himself rather than fall prey to Salazar's sadistic whims. Gustavo soon learns of Lourenço's death and decides to kill himself at the end of the play. The corpses of father and son are found next to one another. The news of their deaths incites anger among the slaves and a slave revolt breaks out. As the slaves

storm into the house to murder Salazar, the revolt is quickly suppressed by the slaves themselves upon hearing Carolina's tearful supplications beseeching them to spare her father's life: "É meu pai! Piedade! (Os negros ficam interditos, olham uns para os outros, abatem as armas e retiram-se resmungando, Salazar abraça Carolina e chora.)" (25).

Azevedo and Duarte's *O escravocrata* is a reflection of turn of the century Brazil at a crossroads after centuries of slavery and colonialism. Many of the complexities that complicated the discussion on the nature of Brazilian slavery and abolition were rooted in the nation's long history of miscegenation.

O escravocrata exposes a nation where the lines between black and white, slave and slaveholder, freedom and enslavement were all exceptionally tenuous. Family lineage, and the confusion of the personal and political, impacted individual perceptions of the institution slavery and freedom. Miscegenation was at center of the formation of Brazil, which meant that national institutions, and the people that constituted them, were always negotiating where they were in relation to it, both individually and politically.

Miscegenation was a fundament of the architecture of Brazilian slavery, but also an allegory for the construction of the Brazilian nation, both in somatic and narrative form. The authors of the late nineteenth century wrestled with the idea of miscegenation and its implications for the past, present, and future, because it was inherently linked to the very of core of Brazilian national identity, the past many sought to erase, and the future they endeavored to envision.

The suicide of both Lourenço and Gustavo and the failed slave revolt all signal a return to the old regime. Even in the face of great upheaval and death, things return back to the way they were, leaving Salazar, his wife, sister, and his only legitimate daughter behind. Salazar returns to living in secret and remains unchanged. The ending is emblematic of the pessimism that many authors and intellectuals felt regarding the state of Brazil at the turn of the nineteenth century. For many, Brazil was in a state of complacency, denial of not only its past, but insidious contradictions that threatened its future. For a number of anti-slavery writers, writing in the wake of abolition, miscegenation was an enduring legacy of slavery and Portuguese colonialism that had to be confronted and acknowledged, and could no longer remain closeted nor be resolved

by the dilution of bloodlines or the arrival of European immigrants. Reckoning with miscegenation as both a reality and legacy was critical to working through the colonial past, abolishing slavery, and coming to terms with what it meant to be a free multiracial society.

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