

Hugo dos Santos' Oblique Dialogue with Otherness in *Then, There*

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Abstract

Looking for Portuguese American “ethnic signs” – a phrase we associate with Werner Sollors and William Boelhower – in Hugo dos Santos’s *Then, There*, a collection of stories is, as we learn in a popular saying, like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Not really impossible, but almost impossible. These Portuguese allusions appear under the guise of vague references to some Portuguese bakery, specific foodstuffs (cow tongues and pig heads) or drinks, such as the *galões* (a glass of hot coffee with milk), Lisbon or a brief, vague reference to some Catholic religious practice or ritual/prayer. For someone familiar with the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey and aware of the significant Portuguese presence there for the past five or six decades, along with a few street names that sporadically crop up, this ethnic presence and awareness of it would also be helpful. My contention is that *Then, There* is about (mostly) Newark, a collection of (predominantly) urban stories with a few faceless Portuguese in the background or protagonists with flimsy ethnic “strings” or attachment.

Keywords

Hugo dos Santos; *Then, There*; Portuguese American Literature; The Ironbound; Newark, New Jersey

Resumo

Em demanda de sinais (ou referências) étnicos – uma expressão que associamos com Werner Sollors e William Boelhower – em *Then, There*, uma coletânea de contos de Hugo Santos, é, tal e qual como quando nos referimos num ditado popular, andar à procura duma agulha num palheiro. Não é verdadeiramente impossível, mas quase impossível. Estas alusões em português surgem no texto como que disfarçadas ou sob a capa de uma ou outra referência vaga alusiva a uma padaria portuguesa, determinados produtos alimentares (línguas de vaca ou cabeças de suíno) ou bebidas, tais como os galões de café com leite, Lisboa ou uma breve, vaga alusão a alguma prática religiosa, ritual ou oração católicas. Para quem esteja familiarizado com o Ironbound, um bairro na cidade de Newark, no estado de Nova Jérсия, e saiba da significativa presença portuguesa aqui há pelo menos cinco ou seis décadas a esta parte, juntamente com algumas referências a nomes de ruas em alguns destes contos, o conhecimento da existência desta presença étnica, será, sem dúvida, bastante útil. O nosso argumento neste ensaio é que *Then, There* é acerca de (ou sobretudo sobre) Newark, isto é, uma coletânea de contos urbanos contendo (predominantemente) algumas referências esbatidas a portugueses, alguns dos quais também se apresentando como protagonistas portadores deste

legado identitário, embora, por vezes, despersonalizados e com ténues laços à sua origem étnica.

Palavras-chave

Hugo dos Santos; *Then, There*; Literatura Luso-Americana; O bairro do Ironbound; Newark, New Jersey

After writing about the specificities of Chicano literature in “The Evolution of Chicano Literature,” Raymund A. Paredes ends his lengthy essay with a final question: “What exactly is Chicano literature?” and answers it right away, noting that “Chicano literature is that body of work produced by United States citizens and residents of Mexican descent for whom a sense of ethnicity is a critical part of their literary sensibilities and for whom the portrayal of their ethnic experience is a major concern” (1982). After reviewing a plethora of Chicano writers and discussing how their writings addressed these criteria, Paredes notes, however, that “any attempt to categorize literature presents serious difficulties” (1982). “For example,” he writes, “the work of Oscar Zeta Acosta is problematic here because Acosta wants so desperately to retrieve his ethnic heritage. But the reader is struck by the superficiality of his quest and the flimsiness of the foundation on which he hopes to build his ethnic identity” (1982). In “Emergent Literatures,” a quite lengthy section in volume seven of *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Cyrus R. K. Patell elaborates on this view, noting that

What Paredes takes for granted here is that ethnic identity must lie at the core of a Chicano’s personal identity if he is to be a true Chicano, for surely Acosta fulfills both criteria that Paredes designates for Chicano literature: Acosta’s novels devote considerable space to representing the psychological damage inflicted upon a Mexican because of his ethnicity. What truly makes Acosta problematic is his refusal to grant the ethnic component of his identity primacy: he writes explicitly at the end of *Brown Buffalo* that his “single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history.” Acosta’s novels finally insist on the need for individualism, and insofar as individualism is a dominant component of mainstream American ideology, this insistence places both the author and his novels at odds with Chicano culture. (1999)

Readers may ask why I delve into Chicano literature and, for that matter, the writings of Acosta. My assumption is that in *Then, There* we are presented with a similar situation. Looking for Portuguese American “ethnic signs” – a phrase we associate with Werner Sollors and William Boelhower – in Hugo dos Santos’s aforementioned collection of stories is, as we learn in a popular saying, like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Not really impossible, but almost impossible. These Portuguese allusions appear under the guise of vague references to some Portuguese bakery, specific foodstuffs (cow tongues and pig heads) or drinks, such as the *galões* (a glass of hot coffee with milk), Lisbon or a brief, vague reference to some Catholic religious practice or ritual/prayer. For someone familiar with the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey and aware of the significant Portuguese presence there for the past five or six decades, along with a few street names that sporadically crop up, this ethnic presence and awareness of it would also be helpful. My contention is that *Then, There* is about (mostly) Newark, a collection of (predominantly) urban stories with a few faceless Portuguese in the background or protagonists with flimsy ethnic “strings” or attachment. Bearing some of these introductory remarks in mind, my approach and analysis of the thirteen stories composing this volume will be sequential rather than thematic since it is quite difficult to group some of these stories into thematic clusters. This stems from the “nature” of this collection of stories, which are mostly about or take place in the larger Newark and not just in the Ironbound section. This wider scope, therefore, zooms in on its ethnic diversity, some of its residents, and what happens there.

Who is, then, Hugo dos Santos and what are his affinities with Portuguese American literature, culture, and identity? In 2014, Marina Carreira wrote in an article in the *Luso-Americano Newspaper* that “Dos Santos attended Newark public Schools, followed by Rutgers-Newark for his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He continued in Newark, working at the *Star-Ledger*, (the former) Broad National Bank, and as a public school teacher.” Moreover,

Dos Santos attended Disquiet in June of 2014, where he worked with Katherine Vaz in a multi-genre workshop titled Writing the Luso Experience. One of the discussions that resulted was on how food in literature conveys taste and smell and thus ‘invites memory’. Dos Santos grew up in a household where his family always ate together: as a consequence, his characters often engage in dialogue over a meal.

In a more recent interview, Millicent Accardi notes that:

Hugo dos Santos [is] a Luso-American writer, editor, and translator based on the Iron-bound area of Newark, New Jersey. A co-founder of the Brick City Collective and associate editor at *DMQ Review*, Hugo is the author of *Then, There* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019), a collection of Newark stories, and the translator of *A Child in Ruins* (Writ Large Press, 2016), the collected poems of the Portuguese writer José Luís Peixoto titled *A Criança em Ruínas*, which translation was a staff pick at *Paris Review Daily*. (2019)

In the introductory epigraph to this collection, in Portuguese, extracted from Fernando Pessoa’s (1888-1935) poem, “A Tabacaria,” dos Santos taps into his ancestral language and literature to set this entire collection in motion. Clearly, the choice of the excerpted passage was neither a random or naïve one because it foreshadows many of the themes and issues *Then, There* delves into. In addition, it attempts to bridge the author’s ancestral language with the Portuguese diaspora community based in Newark and the larger New Jersey state through Portugal’s most prominent modernist writer, Pessoa. Conveyed from the point of view of Álvaro de Campos, one of Pessoa’s heteronyms (voices), “A Tabacaria” (Tobacco Shop), a possible translation of the original passage into English might be as follows:

Windows of my room,
Of my room of one of the million in the world such that nobody knows whose it
is
(And if they knew whose it is, what would they know?),
You open up to the mystery of a street crossed constantly by people,
To a street inaccessible to all thoughts [...]

This short quotation placed at the very beginning of this collection of stories intends to suggest its theme. “A Tabacaria” is simultaneously a personal portrait of Álvaro de Campos and a collective one. In several passages of this poem, the poetic voice speaks about himself, but also about the Other, while acknowledging the existence of a common, shared feeling, which brings all human beings together, who are all united and plunged in their own existential doubts and problems which, after all, are always the same. His own windows are like everyone else’s in their own (bed)rooms and the aura of mystery also hovers or suffuses over all beings who, like himself, feel utterly lost. After all, he is a common man like everybody else, someone with whom we can identify, all of us possessing the very same philosophical worries and doubts. With this preamble to *Then, There*, let us move on to the stories themselves.

Synopsis of stories

The first short story in this collection, “Borders,” delves into the lives of two neighbors, who live in an apartment building. It is narrated from the point of view of a younger brother. His sibling, parents,

and he often prayed. For them, the problem was their neighbors – a lady (referred to as Ms), who lived next door with her son and daughter. In his view, this woman did “evil things” like leaving supermarket plastic bags on the sidewalk with garbage, which would be scattered all over the place, stinking up the entire neighborhood. As if this were not enough, they watched movies with the TV on very loudly, never vacuumed, and left the front door open to the street. The narrator never spoke to this family and imagined what they did and how they spent their time, but his mother often “talked to their mother in the stairwell” (Santos, 2019). The boy “heard them talking but [he] never paid attention to what they said. They would be out there for a long time, on the landing. Sometimes one hour. One time they were out there longer than that, each with a laundry basket on her hip, just talking” (Santos, 2019).

While this boy finds the neighbors lifestyle strange and, presumably, does not speak to or befriend the two neighbor kids because of the language barrier, his mother speaks the same language as the neighbor. Most likely, they speak Portuguese even if readers are not told so. The boy also thinks that some of the foods they ate were “weird” and “made the landing we shared with them outside our apartment smell for days. I had heard that people from where the Ms were from even ate cow tongues and pig heads” (Santos, 2019). At some point, the Ms started to dry their clothes on the landing on cold winter days. Moreover, the boy “realized that the Ms spoke a different kind of E than we did. I had always just thought it was their accent but some of the words they used weren’t words at all, just made up names for things that had proper names if only the Ms spoke proper E” (Santos, 2019). One wonders if the “E” stands for English or, instead, a language, like European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese, and how this Americanized boy (who might not be able to distinguish between both types of Portuguese) has picked up on the prejudices and stereotypes between both peoples. This reference points to inter-ethnic prejudice as represented by the food eaten by other ethnic minorities. In America, notes Donna R. Gabaccia, food and ethnic stereotyping have been used to demean Otherness: “When we want to celebrate, or elevate, our own group, we usually praise its superior cuisine. And when we want to demean one another, often we turn to eating habits; in the United States we have labelled Germans as ‘krauts’, Italians as ‘spaghetti-benders’, Frenchmen as ‘frogs’, and British as ‘limeys’” (1998). Roger Abrahams has also argued that in America, Chicanos/as have been associated – and often denigrated – for their tamales, while the Frenchmen have been stereotyped as eaters of frog legs, and Southern blacks as possum-eaters (1985). What is at stake here, however, is that this denigration and stereotyping is voiced or felt by someone from an ethnic minority whereas in the past it was mostly the Anglos who did so. “Borders” highlights the extent to which immigrants, but really all people, erect personal borders to ‘other’ individuals who are not all that different. These behaviors are passed down through generations. In this story it is possible that we are witnessing an instance of inter-ethnic prejudice between the Portuguese and Brazilians in the North America diaspora. From the voice in this story, it sounds like some attempt at payback, especially considering that it has been a generational or “ethnic wave” feature passed on to the next ethnic minority immigrating to an American ethnic enclave. The Portuguese, too, have not been exempt from such a treatment as well. My childhood recollections of Newark, New Jersey in the late-nineteen sixties and seventies of the Portuguese as sardine and codfish eaters along with the “pork chop” and “pork and cheese” ethnic slurs are still imprinted on my mind. Fortunately, these days belong to the past – or, for the sake of political correctness, are they, instead, voiced in the privacy of one’s home or within the confines of one’s ethnicity? On these issues, my article, “The Tastes from Portugal: Food as Remembrance in Portuguese American Literature,” might be of help (2008).

Considering Brazilians have moved to the United States in the previous decades in much greater numbers – even to the Ironbound section of Newark, New Jersey – it is possible this young boy is voicing adults’ prejudices. Another possible way of interpreting this passage is that this story foregrounds the clash between Portuguese immigrants who had arrived recently in the United States,

whose habits still reflect rural ways back in Portugal as opposed to those who had already “Americanized” much more. Or is it that they live in a country, the United States, where racism, bigotry, and ethnic stereotypes have thrived to the point of even old-timer immigrants having endorsed them later on, too? With their own father also assisting the boys in bashing their neighbors, making them feel very uncomfortable and unwelcome to the point of moving out, the story ends with another family moving into this vacated apartment. “They spoke our kind of E...they had a vacuum...we never heard their tv...[and] they started coming to our church” (Santos, 2019).

Without clearly identifying which ethnicity or ethnicities are at stake in this story, “Borders” is an appropriate title for this story considering the physical, ethnic and racial borders people often place among themselves, especially in multi-ethnic communities in the United States such as this one, the Ironbound (or “Down Neck”), as it is often referred to. In this story, as in most in this collection, the Luso/Portuguese “ethnic signs,” a word coined by Werner Sollors (and also used by William Boelhower) in some of their scholarship, are quite dim and weak. At this juncture, they are clearly becoming dimmer and dimmer after the Portuguese, too, have moved to the suburbs. The heyday of their mass migrations to the United States (mostly to the Middle Atlantic States) in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s have subsided considerably. If those who are referred to in this story as also speaking (a different kind of) “E” are indeed a Brazilian family, then “Borders” invites a reflection on this immigration pattern to Newark or other places within the United States and considers how both the Portuguese and Brazilians have interacted.

The single-paragraph story titled “Passage” refers to a seven-year-old girl born in Portugal and how she made it to American soil through the help of a “surrogate” or, rather, fake American father. As an older, adult woman now, she reminisces about this man, what he looked like, and how she arrived in the United States:

It had all started with him, the doors and life and existence that formed her now as much as that birthing Portuguese village faded behind yellowed curtains of hovering dirt. A fake father was all it took to come to America. After the flight and the questions and the suitcases, he disappeared into a cab and she was back to being someone else’s daughter. (Santos, 2019)

Her concern, however, was finding out who her real father was,

A father who was there, not just a name to a framed picture in the living room. And then, outside the Departures terminal, was that what an American father looked like – younger and in a denim jacket? She memorized his birthdate, the color of his eyes. He complimented her for being such a smart girl. (Santos, 2019)

As an adult, she tries to figure out who this man was, how he came to meet her mother, what their relationship amounted to, what kind of arrangements both adults had made for the mother’s and daughter’s illegal emigration to the United States, but there is nobody who could provide her with such answers from the past. In a review of the first draft of this essay, dos Santos noted that “One of the most marking memories of my childhood is hearing friends recount stories like this one about their experiences entering the US.”

“Night” takes us to a sequence of three dreams (or nightmares) that occurred between one and two in the morning when the author of this collection (here a character) either wakes up or dreams he wakes up in the middle of the night to go urinate. With several similarities, but also with a few variations, the dreams are all about “three small creatures in surgical masks and lab coats, each no more than two feet tall, engaged in some kind of group preparation outside his son’s bedroom” (Santos, 2019). Every time the father tries to protect his son, “the creatures...easily wrestled him

facedown to the dark oak floor and pinned his arms. They covered his mouth with a handkerchief that smelled faintly of his mother's perfume" and the "scent brought back an Easter from his childhood: pink candy-covered almonds on a festive tablecloth" (Santos, 2019). This took place on November 13, 2012, but on March 5, 2015, the dream and accompanying scent "guided him to a memory of one of his mother's outfits from one of their first Christmases in the States, a green dress with shoulder pads and gold buttons down the front" (Santos, 2019). Finally, the last dream on January 3, 2018 left no memory of what had occurred and, as in the previous two instances, he ends up calling his mother from work. Through time, this father figure manages to overcome his fear when he "started to hear a faint shuffling on the hardwood floor in the hallway," realizing that there was no point in "bring[ing] himself to go look" (Santos, 2019).

This autobiographical story seems to draw our attention to the cycle of life in which a son-turned-father learns to "wean" himself from the habit of turning to his mother in moments of fear, anxiety, and need for motherly comfort. As an adult, he must learn to grapple with the hardships of providing for and rearing a child just as his progenitors had done before him. Such is the cycle of life, with the cycle of dreams preparing him for the bad dreams that await us all throughout our lifetime. With each difficulty we learn a few survival skills and become stronger and more resilient.

The city of Newark, New Jersey is – for bad reasons – nicknamed the carjacking capital of the United States. The fourth story in this collection, "Ghost," takes us on a tour of juvenile shoplifting and delinquency there and in the region. Before delving into this reality, in the article titled "An Epidemic of Carjackings Afflicts Newark," published in the *New York Times*, on December 28, 2013, by Marc Santora and Michael Schwartz, we read about this felony and how Newark has been a locale where juvenile and young adult delinquency are rampant. This story focuses on a local store owner who testified on account of a young lawyer who was "shot and killed as he struggled with assailants intent on stealing his 2012 Range Rover in the parking garage of the Mall at Short Hills, a retail center in Millburn, N.J., that attracts the affluent." Newark, he claims, "is like a diseased town" (Santora & Schwartz, 2013). Moreover, "There are a lot of predators" there and this has been going on now for decades (Santora & Schwartz, 2013). "Carjackings are nothing new to Newark," we further read in this article, "a city that was among the nation's worst for such crimes in the 1990s." In 2013, the "rise in carjackings comes at a time when Newark is experiencing high rates of other violent crimes. With a population of less than 300,000 people, Newark has already seen at least 100 murders this year, and the feeling of lawlessness among some residents is palpable." In New Jersey, we further learn, "most carjackers are between the ages of 16 and 33, and often live in Essex County." Newark's location near two ports, we read in page two of this article, "is a major attraction. One such ring was run by Hope Kantete, who was convicted in June for leading a group that shipped carjacked or stolen cars from New Jersey to Africa. Over 18 months, according to the authorities, Ms. Kantete orchestrated the illegal export of cars worth more than \$1 million to countries like Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone" (Santora & Schwartz, 2013).

With this background information, in the story "Ghost" readers are left with the impression that for many juveniles from the Essex County theft is a way of life. A group of friends spend some of their time stealing merchandise in shopping malls and whatever "catch" on a particular outing comes their way, they give it as a present to the girl(s) they are going out with:

First year or so, just me and Zay in a coupe. Didn't know anything back then – hit up malls no disguise or anything. Just our faces on the closed circuit security feeds. It was small time, though. We got jeans and coats, mostly. Couple hundred a piece each hit. A little jewelry every now and again. Didn't think of much beyond each get, just came back on the block with some fresh gear and gifts for whatever girls we were trying to smash. They'd ask where we got shit

like that and we told them not to worry. Said: Baby girl, chill, there's plenty more where that came from. (Santos, 2019)

Afterwards, they moved on to department stores, supermarkets, electronics stores, but never returned to the same spot twice. In the meantime, Sammy opened up an account with a fake ID card. This led to another fake ID and then another. "She had fake IDs on her, multiple identities for the day's run. If they looked through her wallet they'd find everything. She'd be done" (Santos, 2019). In the end, the narrator says that "We all know to be careful but we watch for the wrong thing. Already dead but don't know it yet. Ghosts like everybody we know" (Santos, 2019). It is not clear whether "Ghost" purports to be a didactic story or a realist portrait of crime in the Newark area. The truth is that hundreds of youngsters die every year and truly become "ghosts."

In the short piece, "The Dead," a mother figure laments the loss of a daughter while attempting to find answers for why this happened to her: "parents are not meant to bury their children" (Santos, 2019). Devastated and feeling utterly empty inside, she cannot understand or even accept her predicament, considering this untimely loss: "No word, no sentence, just the absence of her from the world. Her end came before mine and what sense is there to make of that?" (Santos, 2019). Plunged into a maelstrom of recollections, which also include her, this voice brings to the fore a sense of place marked by what Werner Sollors refers to as the "ancestral footstep," but in this particular instance, of the Portuguese (1981). This voice recollects such pivotal moments as those when "Together we had breakfast on Ferry, first at one bakery then moving the weekly ritual to a newer place" or when "We watched the shoppers. The families and the loners with their bags and newspapers while we sipped galões, that most Portuguese named coffees. Sometimes we bought sardines, even before she liked them" (Santos, 2019). Or her motherly concern with when her daughter would become a teenager and start to think about having a boyfriend, rehearsing in her mind what she'd tell her, mindful of her motherly duties of protection towards her: "One day I will warn her about boyfriends and what they really mean when they say they want you" (Santos, 2019).

At the age of nine, the narrator in the story "Avô" is reminiscing about his grandfather who was in pain. Nothing worked, not even the "home-remedy" "sooth[ed] the pain" (Santos, 2019). He kept his "flawless routine," which consisted in setting the "tea pot" to a "whistle," followed by "the slow pour: the towel draped over his head: his face over the bowl: the steam-emanating" (Santos, 2019). Unfortunately, during the night, he screamed with pain and often awakened the grandson. Awake, he often

remembered his tales at the athletic club in downtown Lisbon where we went to shower before we had our own tub at home. Past the Greco-Roman wrestlers grappling on mats, beyond a boxing ring I was too small to peer over, posters of champions past and present. He'd point to the wall at the faded papers with the crumpled corners. *Neno won the title in '41. I was his sparring partner. Another one, In '32 I beat Amaden. He was champion in '36.* A life in memories he'd forgotten, mostly, except for the highlights." (Santos, 2019)

In this story, the athletic career of this grandfather figure and the stories the grandson often heard from him were, in essence, some of the materials from which the writer drew to write some of his stories. As Fred L. Gardaphé has shown, both grandparent figures are at the heart of ethnic writing (1996). For the ethnic writer the grandparent figure and his/her grasp of the ancestral culture and memories are the modern-day equivalent of the muses of classical antiquity.

Gradually, we learn, "remembering was hard. He searched for dates. Backtracked, corrected himself" (Santos, 2019). His grandfather died in pain. In the end, the grandson realizes that "the punch doesn't always hurt in the moment," but rather leaves scars and bruises which damage the entire body.

This story ends with the grandson's realization that his grandmother "in bed next to him all those years" and even "her devotion" were "not enough to heal him" (Santos, 2019). Upon revisiting Portugal, his ancestral country, the grandson finds out where his grandfather was buried: "A few summers later, when I returned home for a family visit, my uncle drove on a highway outside Lisbon, pointed right and up at a hillside cemetery in the distance. *Your grandfather is buried there*" (Santos, 2019).

The entries in "Diary" begin on October 7th and end on the 31st, totaling twelve. In the first entry, we read about a teenager who writes regularly in her diary in an ungrammatical, colloquial English, and with several spelling mistakes. In addition to this diary, the owner also has a fake one because she is afraid Joc might read the real one and learn about the owner's secrets. Joc shows up at odd hours at home and it is not clear what she is up to, whether she works or, instead, is involved in some illegal activity. The narrator of the story cannot consult or write anything in her journal when Joc is at home.

On October 15th, Joc came home completely bloody, in pain, and in need of help. The narrator helps him take an ice bath, rubs his back, and then his sore muscles. Unable to fall asleep, she reads Joc a bedtime story, but Joc sends her away, telling her to shut up. Afterwards, Joc gives her a phone number, Teresa's, that is, Joc's mother, whom she thinks is a nurse. She is more concerned about where she sleeps, if in the same bed with Joc, than with Joc's wellbeing. Eventually, she suggests that he go to the hospital, but Joc is afraid of being caught and arrested since he is leading a very strange life.

On the 17th of October, we learn that Teresa suspects that there is something going on between the narrator and Joc. She "talk about I got to sleep on the couch or find nother bed like excuse me that I cannot sleep there with Joc" (Santos, 2019). Moreover, both Teresa and Joc are afraid of people finding out about their true identity. Unexpectedly, on the 22nd, Joc asks the narrator to go buy him a steak at the nearby supermarket. For unknown reasons, Joc was afraid of letting her go outdoors alone. At the supermarket, she bumps into Anthony, a former classmate, who was working there, mopping the floor. Anthony recognizes her and walks "right up to me ask if I was Roxie and I said yes of course thats my name dont wear it out" (Santos, 2019). In the meantime, both start talking for a while. Judging from their conversation, Anthony learns that Roxie has a "home relationship and Joc really need me right now cause he sick" (Santos, 2019).

Two days later, Joc found Roxie's fake diary, but, fortunately, he knows nothing about the real one. While Joc is out on a walk, Roxie decides to stay home to do some cleaning and the laundry. She ends up finding a box with old letters and pictures of Joc with some woman and a baby. Unexpectedly, Joc returns home and catches Roxie with one of his letters, which makes him feel upset and uncomfortable. Had she read any? On the 25th, Teresa shows up and locks herself up with Joc in the bedroom. They end up arguing about the letters, so Joc burns them up in the kitchen sink. The day ends with Roxie and Joc trying to understand all the confusion created by Teresa. Joc reasserts his love for Roxie and both end the evening having sex.

On the 30th, while Joc was at work, the doorbell rang six times. It was Anthony, from the supermarket, who came to tell Roxie "he love me said it's a declaration and I said to him that its really not a good idea to be talking like that cause I have someone in my life thank you" (Santos, 2019). She tells Anthony to leave her alone and never again ring her doorbell. In the last entry in the diary, written on October 31st, we learn that Joc was upset because he found out that someone had been at their place. She tells him about Anthony, her former classmate, and that nothing had happened. Feeling suspicious and jealous, Joc goes for a walk while Roxie stays home to put a few things away. In the closet, she sees a dress and puts it on. This story ends with Roxie staring at the mirror, imagining she and Joc are in some movie with music playing, "Joc hold[ing] my hand and we in love [...] my head dizzy but ok I still fine music I spin again dance as well and then one more time and it feel like I dancing like I was some body else some body in some other life just spinning (sic) in front of a mirror and think that life can be like as me oh well" (Santos, 2019). Roxie ends by way of stating she hopes

this is “not too crazy I think it is but I think I can trust you I write again soon I promess” (sic; Santos, 2019). Even if misspelled, one wonders if she actually means that his life is some kind of “mess.”

The “wisdom” of waiting is perhaps what the reader senses in between the lines in the eponymous story with this title. Or is it, instead, madness for two men, one older and the other much younger, to wait several years for a woman and keep her hanging on with the money both send sporadically? This is what both men discuss while they are plowing a field with a mule. Are both men immigrants in the United States? Unfortunately, we do not know much about their lives, or where they are from, but we do learn that the older man has been working at this farm for six years and that he has traveled once back to his own place and that the “trip is expensive and dangerous, and the job doesn’t wait so to return home is to lose the small steps that have already been taken and to leave again is to restart from scratch” (Santos, 2019). The overall mood in this story seems to be frustration, especially because it seems they will never finish this job or all the work that awaits them, that this is a rather solitary way of life and that it is back-breaking: “They bend at the waist again, their joints aching of a nameless thirst” (Santos, 2019). Clearly, for both, the “nameless thirst” might be their need for the companionship of a woman, intimacy, starting a family, and having a life with a purpose since they view themselves as outcasts, doomed to toil, and live the life of a lonely immigrant.

The longest story in *Then, There*, “The Ambit of Your On-Court Persona” delves into the contemporary competitive atmosphere in most American high schools (and even colleges), where playing sports is synonymous with pressure, fulfilling scholastic expectations, aiming for excellence, fighting for the reputation of a particular institution, and keeping a scholarship. This is a story about JV, the narrator, and how he manages to dethrone Ray, the school basketball star. It is a modern-day story about the pressure student athletes feel when attempting to maintain their excellence both in the classroom and on the field. The story begins with the school basketball team and the coach waiting to board a bus, which will take them to the opponent’s field. Along with the coach, the players are discussing which tactics they should use against the other team.

JV was a transfer student at this school and had only been there for a few months. Sensing the competitive atmosphere there, he secretly tells himself he must excel in order to “survive” at this place. JV soon realized he must work very hard because Ray “was so fundamentally sound. His dribbling: never off-balance. His feet steady as pillars under his weight. His jump-shot was an artist’s rendering. A symmetry of angles, from his elbow to the alignment of his hips to the direction of his shoulders. Precise, is what he was” (Santos, 2019). Guided by his staunch American instinct, that is, Emersonian self-reliance and Franklinian resoluteness, JV was intent on working his way up to excellence through hard work and a lot of sweat, and, hopefully, smashing the star through fair play, honesty, and determination. In this story, the Franklinian maxims of hard work are conveyed through a few “precepts” uttered by the coach, who says “things like: Broaden the ambit of your on-court persona. And: You are chimes, allow the wind to speak through you. Also: Let the emotion of the moment stir the sail of your soul” (Santos, 2019).

Imbued with this spirit, JV realized “Some great evolution is taking place within me, in real time. I’m changing. Be a leader, I challenge myself. Be a leader, I repeat” (Santos, 2019). Shortly, Ray’s Colombian girlfriend, Sharon, sensed this fierce competition and Ray feared losing her, eventually showing up in situations such as the one where Sharon and JV had a history project to research and present to the class. “I deliver a phenomenal presentation in History. Mr. Freese commends me and Sharon looks thrilled” (Santos, 2019). JV had it all: he was an excellent athlete and an outstanding student, hence undermining stereotypical representations of students who are up for grabs by high schools and prominent colleges solely on the basis of their athletic performance. Moreover, JV knew Ray had taken a beating and even caught him breaking down when Ray was practicing all by himself, unaware of JV eavesdropping on him: “Then I hear sobs. He’s wiping at his face and I realize it’s not sweat he’s wiping. I don’t know why I do it, I don’t know that I’m going to do it, – surprise, maybe?

– but I laugh. I laugh loud. Ray hears me. Hides his face even as he shouts, Who’s there?” (Santos, 2019).

The coach thinks JV should leave the team while Mrs. Ronson and Mr. Spencer try to clarify what is wrong with Ray. After being told to not “address Ray in any way,” he is “moved to a different lunch and history class” (100). Afterwards, JV takes a look at the notes he wrote down while he was eavesdropping on Ray and attempts to understand the pressure these student athletes often have to cope with and the ensuing psychological consequences of being under the spotlight:

I remember Ray’s sobbing that day. Why would he have been sobbing? And then I’m sad, for the first time, because Ray is probably someone who is in deep pain and no one knows. Ray isn’t getting the help he needs even though everyone thinks he has the city in the palm of his hand: a four-year scholarship to a D1 program, the fame that comes with being a star athlete, the adoration – Ray has all that people pray for when they pray for their wishes to come true. (Santos, 2019)

The story ends with JV resuming his practice at the St. Charles court without anybody knowing. While he is practicing, he imagines he is playing against Ray and in his mind cursing him out, saying things like “You’re going to fall apart without me, Ray, because you know you need me” and “I fucking hate you, Ray” (Santos, 2019). Suddenly, when he dribbles one last time before finishing, JV comes to the realization that

Someone not imagined is watching by the gate. He is real. I don’t know how long he’s been there or that he’s heard me say, but I recognize him in those black track pants and a hoodie, hands in his pockets. I wonder why he has come to see me when he has a game to play. I wonder what excuse he has used to escape the expectations. And I wonder what versions of a tomorrow are unraveling for him now that he has traveled so far to find me on this court, of all places. (Santos, 2019)

As in most stories in this collection, there is not much description or references to the locales where dos Santos’ stories take place. Were it not for a few names of streets mentioned within this story, readers would not know exactly the real setting of this story, for example. The reference to the “coffee shop across from the high school on New York Ave” lets readers know that this is East Side High School, in the Ironbound section of Newark, on the East Ward; or the “corner of Lafayette where I knew Sharon would turn left to go home”; and the “Portuguese bakery”, these are the very few “ethnic signs” which refer to an immigrant, multicultural community where the Portuguese became the dominant ethnic group since the late 1960s until recently (Santos, 2019). Allusions to ethnicity are either vague or very scarce in this collection and it is not always clear why dos Santos – compared to other contemporary Portuguese American writers who were born and raised in Newark such as Marina Carreira and Paula Neves – seems to gloss over his ethnic background or how it has been celebrated there for a few decades. In an article published in *Luso-Americano* titled “Writing the Luso-American Experience: Hugo Dos Santos,” alluded to earlier, Carreira notes that “Although his fiction and poetry do not directly address his Portuguese identity, Dos Santos writes largely about Newark, and the Ironbound, specifically” (2014). Spurred to elaborate on why this is so, dos Santos notes that “My relationship with Newark is very intimate, complex, and one that continues to shape me. When I was younger and told people that I grew up in Newark, I had the same reaction all of us from Newark get, and was initially ashamed of where I came from. As the years have passed, the fact that I am from Newark has instead become a badge of honor. My work directly transmits that aspect of my cultural upbringing more than anything else” (2014). For this reader, at least, this “fuzziness”

inherent in the “ethnic signs” on display in *Then, There* works as an additional challenge when reminiscing about the Ironbound, especially names of streets, for example. To this reader, “Lafayette” and the corner of Polk Street clearly bring back childhood memories, where playing football, baseball, snowball fights, building clubhouses out of big cardboard boxes and riding a bike in the summer were unforgettable moments of living there.

“Robin Moved In” is a fifteen-line story about Robin and her cat living in an apartment, which both share with the narrator. While she paid the rent, the cable, and the gas, he paid the electricity bills and did the dishes. “The few job interviews” the narrator had “weren’t calling back” and the narrator “was nervous without letting her know” (Santos, 2019). Somehow, they stayed together for a lifetime even if readers never find out if the narrator actually managed to get a job. “Now,” we learn, “she’s bedridden and doesn’t know her own name, and I drag my stubborn feet when I walk, but we had a good life in between then and now” (Santos, 2019). “All is well when it ends well” might be the leitmotif for this story – especially if this life was lived in Newark, a city that up to the 1990s was often unpredictable and ridden with crime, theft, and carjacking. Historically, the Ironbound has been an immigrant community, but after living there for a few decades, most of its inhabitants usually relocate to its suburbs. This has been the story of “Down Neck,” or the Ironbound section of Newark (or the entire city itself) in the past two centuries, a port of entry where the Irish, Jews, Germans, Polish, Italians, Portuguese, and other ethnic minorities have settled in and later left.

“Still Life” is a fitting title for the story illustrating the lifestyle of an old woman who has been a widow for the past ten years. While she no longer has a sharp recollection of the past, we, as readers, are also at a loss to imagine what her married life was like or the whereabouts of her two sons. What we do know, for sure, is that

There was happiness, she knows.

Happiness she knows. Days made up of entire years and how she treasured those. How faintly they escaped. What Christmas cookies were those she recalls now? She moved into the apartment in 1983. The neighborhood quite different then. Did she take the cookies to which neighbors? Moats separate those realities. All existed and that much is clear. The order is the problem. Confusion. That other language.

Life is what happened while she was doing things numerous. Her husband dead ten years and still she feels his orbit. (Santos, 2019)

Before going to bed, she would always keep her “ritual” of finding “the picture of the four. She is one. The others already told. Considered. Absent now. Maybe for good. Peace is an absence, too” (Santos, 2019). And before falling asleep, “one last memory: of praying for safe-keeping. A nameless angel to watch over a girl. So she was raised” (Santos, 2019). Presumably raised as a Catholic, she prays to the Guardian Angel for those who are no longer with her, but also for herself, since she has no one else to look after her.

“The Day My Father Decided to Die” is a story composed of fourteen lines and it tells us about a father figure whose breakfast for the past thirty-five years was a shot of Port wine and smoking a cigarette. We are left in the dark about his name and we do not know about any of his additional traits. Moreover, we do not know if this story ends with this man’s death or if he had killed a little bit of himself every day by keeping up with this habit.

“Outside In” is the last story in *Then, There*. The opening of this story takes place at a jail that exists right at the edge of the city. It begins with two men meeting each other in a rundown section of a city, where trash is decomposing on the side of the road, followed by warehouses and abandoned factories,

at first, then truck repair shops and depots, and finally homes and better neighborhoods. While riding together, one of these men eventually starts to see “the city as a different version of a place he remembers” (Santos, 2019). But when he “turns back over his shoulder to look at the unemployment office buildings on Broad,” he sees “a line that snaketails out of the door and around the front and side of the building” (Santos, 2019). In this snapshot of Broad Street, in downtown Newark, we are introduced to two antagonistic images of this city, known in the past few decades as the Renaissance city, and the recurrent social and economic problems in times of depression and unemployment.

Among many cities in the USA during the Civil Rights movement, Newark was clearly one of the most violent in the entire nation, as we read in Philip Roth’s *An American Pastoral* (1997), a novel about Newark and its suburbs: in essence, Roth’s place of birth. In this work, Roth brings to life these tumultuous years in the 1960s, especially July 14th and 15th, 1967, as the two most violent days in the city, often known as the Newark riots, where sections burned down completely, as he notes in his work through the journalistic accounts published at the time in the city’s newspaper, *The Star-Ledger*. Since then, the “Renaissance city” has been struggling for a rebirth from these historical scars and ashes. One of the men in “Outside In” had been incarcerated for a few years for some serious misdemeanor, but will be counseled by the other one, that is, “the man in denim,” who is “a cop, or a former cop” (Santos, 2019). Moreover, this “man in denim [is] running this experimental parole program” and wants the convict on parole to think of him as “an ordained social worker” (Santos, 2019). He will be checking on him regularly and supervising his progress. During the ride, the convict on parole observes the city he knew quite well, yearning to return to it as a free man, even if it has a dismal, dirty look about it:

Outside the passenger side window the city is dirty and gritty in a way that feels more real than the bleached and sterilized spaces he’s known for the last seven years. He spots crushed coffee cups and crumpled paper ditched along the sidewalk and while at a stop something that looks like a used condom leans against the curb. [...] He can’t explain why, but he wants to pick up with his hands all of the trash on the sidewalks, all of the city’s discarded wrappers and used condoms and half-dried dog turds. He wants to pull it all close, to his chest, to be near it again. Alive. [but] He thinks maybe a shower would be better. Wash away the remnants of life inside. Clean his skin. Start fresh. A mercy. (Santos, 2019)

The story ends with him meeting Carlos, a graduate of the social worker’s program, and a ride through the Ironbound, where they pull “up to a small grocery store on West Kinney” to pick up a “small bag that looks like it’s holding a sandwich” (Santos, 2019). In fact, they stop at six places, with the intent to pick up donations for the social worker’s church. In actuality, the donations are bags of money, being collected to support the less-than-legal business being run by the man in denim. These are not donations so much as dues owed. As they ride through the Ironbound, the man in denim says that someone “got shot on Walnut this morning” while Carlos notes that it might have been some “Kids, is my guess” (Santos, 2019). Meanwhile, the last scene in this story focuses on the convict, who, after much insistence, is persuaded by the other two men to walk into a go-go bar and pick up the donation there. Afraid of the “unknown” and what might happen, he passes the test even if he felt awkward, nervous, and unsure of himself. Afterwards, he ends up placing the “paper bag in the seat between himself and the man in denim” with a feeling of relief. “Yeah, the man in denim laughs and nods, you gonna make it work just fine” (Santos, 2019).

Set in a city nicknamed the carjacking capital of the USA, *Then, There* clearly ends on a positive, hopeful, and uplifting keynote. This collection of stories seems to suggest that there is a brighter future for Newark, as it had in the past, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, when, in Newark, like any other major American city, people gravitated toward Main Street. In “The Spaces People Share: The

Changing Social Geography of American Life,” Sandra Opdycke notes that the “typical Main Street in the 1940s” looked quite cosmopolitan:

In those days, whether one lived in a town or a city, downtown was truly the hub of the community. Besides going to shop or see a movie, one might also go to transact business at City Hall, serve on a jury, visit a museum, eat in a restaurant, get a book at the public library, watch a parade, see a lawyer or accountant or dentist, get a haircut, go to church, pay an electric bill, mail a package, or catch a train. And, of course, one might go downtown to work in any of the establishments where these activities took place. (2007)

This is what downtown Newark looked like in those times and we do not see that in this work or any other after World War II, when the GI Bill enhanced life in the suburbs, with whites moving out of cities as African Americans and Latinos remained or moved in to occupy these places. “Meanwhile,” writes Opdycke, “suburban housing discrimination helped ensure that African Americans and Latinos would be among the ones who remained in the cities” (2007). In this sense, *Then, There* might be regarded as a panegyric to Newark, a Renaissance City which is being rebuilt, changing, and modernizing – uplifting itself from all the riots, rubble, and social problems it has experienced in the past decades or more than a half century.

While remaining faithful to its urban history, Hugo dos Santos attempts to tap from this style of writing so as to publicly praise Newark, somehow “deliver an oration or eulogy in praise of some person or achievement; a formal or elaborate encomium; a laudatory discourse” (“Definitions for panegyric,” n.d.), knowing, nonetheless, that it still takes a lot more to revive Newark and bring back its former splendor and cosmopolitan ambiance. In between the lines – even if shyly or obliquely – we can read that the Portuguese settlement and passage through the Ironbound has been a watershed, historical moment and ethnic attempt to gentrify and bring improvements to this city – especially after the eruption of the Capelinhos volcano in the Azores (Faial) in the late-nineteen-fifties and in the mid-nineteen-sixties, when Salazar’s fascist dictatorship loosened its grip on the Portuguese and the Continentals started to flock to the industrially-based Middle Atlantic region, with Newark becoming its prime place for huddling.

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