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Cassandra in a Time of War: A Reading of Marcial Gala's *Llámenme Casandra* and Igiaba Scego's *Cassandra a Mogadiscio*

Abstract This article focuses on Marcial Gala's 2019 novel *Llámenme Casandra* and Igiaba Scego's 2023 novel *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* demonstrating how both texts feature the mythological prophetess Cassandra in order to thematize conflict and social stigma in relation to colonial/postcolonial contexts and intersectional identities. More in general, my argument contributes to mapping the growing relevance of Cassandra in world literature and the arts as a key character for problematizing issues of social marginalization.

My argument is divided into three sections. Section one provides an overview of the contemporary reception of Cassandra's myth aimed at showing that the two traits associated with this character (prophetic voice related to wars and social marginality) are the core elements driving such reception. Sections two and three focus on Scego's and Gala's novels. Gala's novel features a male soldier who identifies himself as a reincarnation of Cassandra fighting during the Cuban Intervention in Angola (1970s), while in *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* the author herself identifies as Cassandra in narrating her family's experiences during the Somali Civil War (1990s) and the migration to Italy.

By examining these texts through the methodological lenses provided by Classical Reception Studies, Queer Studies and Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, I demonstrate how the two novels work as key sites for the exploration of the processes behind the construction of social identities.

Keywords Classical Reception, Classical Mythology, Intersectionality, Postcolonial Literature, Critical Race Studies

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INTRODUCTION

In Greco-Latin literature, Cassandra – daughter of king Priam and queen Hecuba – is often mentioned in relation to her prophecies about the Trojan War, which are systematically ignored despite being true.[1] As Cassandra herself recounts in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* the god Apollo gifted her with prophetical abilities; since she refused to lie with him, however, he cursed her with the inability to ever be believed.[2]

Cassandra's identity is defined by two essential traits. The first is related to war, as pointed out by Véronique Léonard-Roques and Philippe Mesnard in their introduction to the essay collection *Cassandre. Figure du temoignage*:

> Car, dès l'Antiquité, la guerre de Troie offre un matériau symbolique pour penser les désastres guerriers, ancrer la réflexion politique et historique du present. À ce conflit, l'Occident confère encore le statut symbolique de guerre à valeur originelle. Dans cet ensemble, Cassandre opère comme une figure privilégiée pour dire et interroger la destruction et le deuil.[3]

As a result, in the long "chain of receptions" theorized by Hans Robert Jauss[4], many authors have referenced Cassandra to highlight or denounce a number of

1 Cassandra's prophecies mainly revolve around Paris and, as a result, around the fate of the city of Troy. The exploration of this theme begins with the epic cycle (in the *Iliad,* Cassandra is not described as a prophetess), moves on to Attic tragedy and lyric poetry and concludes with Latin literature (the Virgilian *Aeneid* in particular). Cassandra's prophecies outline the tragic outcomes resulting from Paris' return to Troy (after his recognition as the son of the king and queen of Troy), his journey to Sparta and, lastly, the introduction of the wooden horse into Troy.

2 Cf. Aischyl. Ag. 1202–1212. Further evidence of this version of the myth can be found in Lycoph. *Alex.* 1454–57; Apollod. 3, 12, 5; Quint. Smyrn. 12, 526–28; Orph. *Lith.* 764–66; school. Eur. *Andr.* 296; Serv. *Aen.* 2, 247.

3 Léonard-Roques and Mesnard (2015) 13. "Since Antiquity, the Trojan War has provided symbolic material for reflecting on the catastrophes of war and for anchoring political and historical reflection in the present. In the West, this conflict still has the symbolic status of a war of primordial value. In this context, Cassandra functions as a privileged figure who speaks and questions destruction and mourning" (my translation).

4 Jauss (1982) 20. This article draws on the approach to the study of Classical Reception proposed by Carlà and Berti (2015): "the reception of antiquity never constitutes a one-to-

aspects related to conflicts and wars that often do not find the right space for representation.

Cassandra's second trait can be identified by looking at the classical texts, where Cassandra always finds herself in a somewhat marginal or marginalized position, in that she never manages to adapt her identity to any standard gendered norms, be they social or religious. On the one hand, by refusing Apollo's sexual demands, Cassandra does not conform to the norms that define the relationship between a prophetess and a god. As a result of Apollo's punishment, she will never be an "ordinary" prophetess like Pythia, whose prophecies are always believed. Cassandra is even considered insane because of her prophecies.

On the other hand, while women in the ancient Greek world are expected to become wives and mothers, Cassandra never[5] succeeds in getting married or in establishing any long-lasting and socially approved relationship with a man.[6] Most of her interactions with men take the form of rape, as in the case of Agamemnon or Ajax.[7] This leaves Cassandra in a marginalized position; she becomes neither a fully-fledged prophetess nor a wife-mother.[8] Thus, in consid-

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one relationship between a "model" and a "recipient", but an unbroken chain of translations, adaptions and influences" (1).

5 This is true for virtually all versions of the myth, with the sole exception of Pausanias (Paus. 2.16.6). In his *Description of Greece,* Pausanias briefly mentions Teledamus and Pelops as Cassandra's twin sons. It is, however, a case that has almost no relevance in the long history of Cassandra's reception.

6 In the *Iliad,* Cassandra is compared to the goddess Aphrodite for her beauty. By virtue of her beauty, which makes her superior to her sisters (Hom. *Il.* 13, 365), Cassandra is sought after for marriage. Her father Priam arranges her to be married in exchange for alliances and gifts which would prove useful in the Trojan War. Her husband-to-be, Othryoneus, however, is killed by the Greek warrior Idomeneus (Hom. *Il.* 13, 263). In other literary sources, the name of her future husband is Corebus (cf. Mikra Ilias fr. 15 Bernabé ap. Paus. 10, 27, 1; Verg. *Aen.* 2, 341, 426) or Euripilus (cf. Dict. 4, 14).

7 In relation to Agamemnon, Cassandra is either taken as a concubine (Eur. *Tro.* 251) or enslaved (Aesch. *Ag.* 1035). As for Ajax, several sources narrate that, during the sack of Troy, Cassandra sought refuge as a supplicant in the temple of Athena, where she was pursued, seized, and raped by Ajax Oileus. This episode appears in the *Ilioupersis* attributed to Arctinus of Miletus (Il. Pers. I, 89, 15–18 Bernabé); in Alceus (fr. 298 Voigt); in Stesichorus' *Ilioupersis* (fr. 205 Davies); in Sophocles' *Ajax* (fr. 10 c Radt); in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Eur. *Tro.* 69–71) and in Lycophron's *Alexandra* (Lycoph. *Alex.* 1089).

8 Léonard-Roques and Mesnard (2015) define Cassandra's identity as marked by a "féminité discordante" (12); Sabina Mazzoldi (2001) states that "Cassandra donna si trova […], per

ering Cassandra's history in the classical world, it could be argued that she lives in a condition of double marginality. In Aeschylus' Agamemnon, there is even a third form of marginalisation, since Cassandra is portrayed as a prophetess from a foreign land whose voice is defined as "barbaric".[9] This makes her an ideal character for representing and problematizing issues of social marginalization in modern and contemporary receptions.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that these two traits of Cassandra's character (prophetic voice related to wars and social marginality) which are deeply interrelated since ancient literature, are still very much relevant and active today. More specifically, I would argue that they are particularly effective in thematizing conflict and social stigma in relation to colonial/postcolonial contexts and intersectional identities as exemplified by Marcial Gala's 2019 novel *Llámenme Casandra* and Igiaba Scego's 2023 novel *Cassandra a Mogadiscio.*

This article is divided into three sections. Section one provides an overview of the modern and contemporary reception of Cassandra's myth aimed at showing that the two traits mentioned above are the core elements driving such reception. Sections two and three focus on Gala's and Scego's novels, respectively, demonstrating how both texts feature the mythological prophetess Cassandra in order to articulate meanings and identities around gender and social marginalization in a time of war. I will pay particular attention to the study of how both novels represent Cassandra as the point of intersection between multiple planes of marginality. This, in turn, becomes the starting point for the critical deconstruction of the notion of marginality itself. By highlighting the mechanisms of control and repression at the heart of marginalization practices, both novels work as key sites for the exploration of the processes behind the construction of social identities.

certi aspetti, ad essere una non-donna" (30). "Cassandra, a woman, finds herself to be [...], in some respects, a non-woman" (my translation)

9 Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1051, 1062.

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL-LITERARY PREMISES

Before analyzing how Cassandra's marginality has been portrayed in modern and contemporary receptions, it is necessary to define the concept of "marginality" itself. Drawing on the works of American sociologist Harvey Sacks and the concept of gender performance theorized by queer studies, social marginality can be described as a consequence of non-compliance with prescriptive social norms.

Harvey Sacks argues that society is divided into categories based on characteristics such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, and profession. For the purpose of this analysis, it is important to highlight two fundamental characteristics that Sacks attributes to the categories. Firstly, they are hierarchically organized: "man" is at a higher level than "woman"; "white woman" is higher than "black woman"; "heterosexual man" is higher than "homosexual man" and so on.[10]

Secondly, each category is closely linked to specific activities, which Sacks calls "category-bound activities".[11] The most important category is that of "Member", defined in opposition to a series of "boundary categories".[12] Boundary categories include individuals who do not perform the activities on which their categories depend; therefore, they are not considered full-fledged Members (with a capital M) of a social group. This results, in turn, in marginalization or even exclusion from said group.

Sacks's work suggests that identities are non-ontological, a concept that would later be developed in queer theory (particularly by Butler and Sedgwick) through the idea of performance.[13] Queer Theory conceives of gender as arising from the repetition of a series of codified acts. In the words of Butler:

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10 Sacks (1992) cites as an example of "positioned categories" the categories of "child, adolescent and adult" (I, 586–587), while Dell'Aversano (2018) points out that the fact that "the male/female categories in our culture are ordered in a rigid hierarchy is evident (at least…) from the absence of phrases like *'he has ovaries' or *'be a woman'" (57).

11 Cf. Sacks (1992): "Let's introduce a term, which I'm going to call "category-bound activities". What I mean by that is, there are a great many activities which Members take it are done by some particular category of persons, or several categories of persons […]" (I, 241).

12 Cf. Sacks (1992) I, 71.

13 Judith Butler (2006) acknowledges the central role of the idea of performance in her and other queer theorists' work (xiv). Moreover, in one of her early articles, she cites Goffman (cf.

> In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated.* This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. [...] There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame – an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject.[14]

This methodological framework allows us to re-read ancient Greco-Latin works in a different key, thus a deeper understanding of Cassandra's reception. It can be argued that Cassandra's double marginality results from the incorrect or incomplete performance of *multiple* gendered social norms. As a consequence, Cassandra has become an ideal character for thematizing *intersectional* forms of social marginalization.

Mary Romero (2003) defines intersectionality (a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to define a critical approach aimed at uncovering interrelated systems of discrimination) as a "methodology [that] requires examining the dynamics of individual and group identities as they intersect within the axes of power that comprise a structural level of analysis" (6). In order to provide a critical analysis of Cassandra's marginality and its reception, it is crucial to combine the methods provided by Sacks, Queer Theory, and studies in intersectionality.

Given this methodological framework, it is necessary to frame the two novels by Scego and Gala from a historical-literary perspective. French Renaissance tragedies such as Nicolas Filleul's *Achille* (1563) already depict Cassandra in the context of the civil disasters and religious conflicts that occurred in France between 1562 and 1598. During the Enlightenment, Cassandra is once again as-

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Butler 1988, 528). See also Dell'Aversano (2018): "if the definition of "queer" I proposed above is accepted, and if queer is accepted to have (as any other descriptive term in the humanities and social sciences) both a historical and theoretical meaning, then Sacks's work on categorization processes is the first known instance of queer theory. Of course, given the complete lack of contact, up to this moment, between Sacks's theory of social categories and queer theory, the import of my claim is not genealogical or historical but exclusively chronological" (46). Dell'Aversano (2018) highlights the link between Sacks's and Butler's work, not only in terms of identity performance but also in understanding the operation of categories and the potential to de-ontologize them.

14 Butler (2006) 191.

sociated with political discourse. Louis-Népomucène Lamercier, who shared revolutionary ideals but was hostile to the Terror, features Cassandra and the Trojan War in his play *Agamemnon* (1797) as a means to describe and understand his time. In Ugo Foscolo's poem *Dei Sepolcri* (1807), Cassandra is once again associated with a civil issue, namely the French occupation of Italian territories. In the poem, Cassandra's voice leads her young compatriots in front of the tombs of fallen warriors. This symbolizes the importance of preserving cultural identity and memory beyond historical and political divisions. The poem *À Cassandre,* dedicated by Osip Mandelstam to Anna Akhmatova, evokes Cassandra in the context of the political tensions in Russia during the winter of 1917–1918. Similarly, in two of Giraudoux's works (*La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu,* 1935 and *Électre,* 1937), Cassandra is employed as a means to warn against the dangers of fascism.

Besides featuring war themes, many contemporary retellings of the Cassandra myth also focus on her social marginalization. For instance, in Christa Wolf's works, such as the novel *Kassandra* (1983) and the essay *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung. Kassandra* (1983), the author uses Cassandra to both condemn the arms race of the 1980s and give voice to feminist claims. Wolf's writings portray Cassandra as having a strong sense of agency and speaking for herself, unlike other women who are subject to patriarchal law. According to Véronique Léonard-Roques (2015), Cassandra is an ideal character for reflecting on women's marginality in a patriarchal society because she is "une figure discordante en termes de genre (gender)".[15] Inspired by Christa Wolf's *Cassandra,* the Indian artist Nalini Malani, portrays Cassandra not only as a prophetess criticizing the consequences of India's partition into two nations (India and Pakistan), but also as a symbol of the marginal role of women in a patriarchal society.[16] The play *Kassandra,* written by French-Uruguayan Sergio Blanco in 2015, portrays the

15 Véronique Léonard-Roques (2015) 204: "an ambiguous figure with regard to gender" (my translation).

16 The importance that the character of Cassandra has for this artist is clearly shown by *The Rebellion of the Dead* (2018–2019), the second part of a retrospective organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris and Rivoli Castle in Italy. In fact, in the second part of the retrospective in Italy, Cassandra is the main character that drives the narrative. In the very first pages of the catalog of this retrospective, there is a text in which Malani herself explains what the character of Cassandra represents for her: "Cassandra also implies what has been denied to women. Her insights are ignored and considered heretical. She symbolises the unfinished business of the women's revolution – a woman's thoughts and premonitions are not under-

mythological prophetess as a reporter of the war atrocities during the repressive Uruguayan military regime of 1973–1985. The play also problematizes multiple levels of marginalization, as the protagonist Kassandra is stigmatized for being a woman, a migrant, a sex worker, and a transgender person.[17]

With this brief overview, it is easy to see the growing relevance of Cassandra in world literature and the arts as a key character for articulating meanings and identities around social marginalization in a time of war.

Two contemporary novels that fit perfectly into this framework are the 2019 novel by Marcial Gala, *Llámenme Casandra,* and the 2023 novel by Igiaba Scego, *Cassandra a Mogadiscio.*

As the title of both novels already makes clear, Cassandra is the true semiotic centre of these narratives. Gala's novel features a male soldier who identifies himself as a reincarnation of Cassandra. He fights during the Cuban intervention in Angola in the 1970s and recounts his experience as a soldier from his focalized point of view. *Cassandra a Mogadiscio,* on the other hand, is a non-fictional account of Scego's (who strongly identifies with Cassandra) and her family's experiences during the Somali civil war in the 1990s and their subsequent migration to Italy.

WAR AND MARGINALISATION IN IGIABA SCEGO'S *CASSANDRA A MOGADISCIO*

Cassandra as war witness

Igiaba Scego, the first Italian Afro-descendant nominated for Italy's prestigious Strega Prize, wrote *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* (2023) as a memoir addressed to her niece Soraya. Throughout the novel, the references to Cassandra are both nu-

stood and taken cognisance of. That is what Cassandra teaches us [...]. It is the moment to consider this myth because it works on two levels. On the one hand denying truths, on the other hand not giving women their rightful position" (Beccaria 2018).

17 For an in-depth exploration of these works, see the essays collected in Léonard-Roques and Mesnard (2015), with particular attention to Karsenti (2015) 69–90; Giboux (2015) 70–91; Racine (2015) 121–142; Aucouturier (2015) 167–178; Besnard (2015) 179–194; Urdician (2015) 299–320.

merous and a powerful source of meaning. The book begins and ends with a reference to the Trojan prophetess: there is a quotation from Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* in the exergue[18] and Cassandra is thanked in the acknowledgments section that closes the volume: "E naturalmente ringrazio Cassandra, figlia di Ecuba e Priamo. Che aveva ragione. Su tutto. Queste pagine sono anche per lei: perché la storia può toglierci la casa, ma non la voce; può accecare i nostri occhi, ma mai, mai la nostra memoria[19]" (364). Furthermore, Scego establishes a strong connection with Euripides's *Trojan Women,* as Cassandra a Mogadiscio contains many direct quotes (in Italian) from the tragedy.

Cassandra a Mogadiscio recounts the history of Somalia, with a particular focus on the city of Mogadiscio, from the early 1900s. The book also follows the experiences of Scego's family, whose experiences have been heavily influenced by post-traumatic stress disorder, to which Scego refers using the Somali word "jirro", which literally means "illness".[20] Scego's family history spans multiple wars and colonial domains, tracing back to the Italian colonialism in Somalia from 1909 to 1945. During this time, Scego's grandfather, Omar, worked for General Rodolfo Graziani.[21] Many Somalis were also forced to take up arms and were used as 'black cannon fodder' (my translation)[22] during the war against Ethiopia declared by Mussolini. If Scego's grandfather lived and worked under

18 "Tutto questo, la Troia della mia infanzia, esiste ancora nella mia testa soltanto. Qui dentro, finché ho tempo, la voglio riedificare, non voglio dimenticare nessuna pietra, nessuna lama di luce, nessuna risata, nessun grido. Anche se per breve tempo; voglio custodirla in me fedelmente. Ora posso vedere quello che non c'è, con quanta fatica l'ho imparato" (5–6). "All this, the Troy of my childhood, still exists only in my mind. In here, while I still have time, I want to rebuild it, I don't want to forget a single stone, a single blade of light, a single laugh, a single cry. Even if only for a short time, I want to keep it faithfully in me. Now I can see what is not there; how hard was it to understand!" (my translation)

19 "And of course I thank Cassandra, daughter of Hecuba and Priam. Who was right. About everything. These pages are for her, too: because history can take away our home, but not our voice; it can blind our eyes, but never, never our memory" (my translation)

20 There are accounts of the illnesses of various family members, including vomiting/bulimia that affects Scego's body during conflicts when her mother is away from home, as well as numerous cases of cancer among family members.

21 Rodolfo Graziani was an Italian general who was appointed governor of Somalia when fascist Italy decided to attack Ethiopia in 1935.

22 "carne ne(g)ra da cannone" (84)

Italian colonial rule, her father, Ali Omar Scego, experienced the transition to British rule. The British took over at the end of the Second World War and remained in control until November '49, when the United Nations declared that Somalia should be led to democracy by the whites and placed it under Italian trusteeship until 1960. In Somalia, changes in rulers and colonizers also led to changes in language. Scego's grandfather was Graziani's interpreter, while her father taught himself English using an abandoned book. This enabled him to secure employment under the British and gradually build a successful career. Eventually, he became the first governor of Mogadishu, as well as an ambassador and minister of finance after Somalia's independence in 1960.

In 1970, the story of Scego's family shifted from Somalia to Italy. Her parents were expelled by dictator Siad Barre and migrated to Rome, leaving their children in Somalia with their maternal aunt. Igiaba, their only child born outside of the African continent, was born in Rome in 1974. Scego's family history became entangled with wars and clashes in Somalia once again when the charges against her mother (and only her mother) were dropped and she decided to travel to Mogadishu. On 31 December 1990, Scego and her father were alone in their Roman home when the television announced clashes in Mogadishu[23]. This marked the beginning of a prolonged period of conflict, and as a consequence all contacts with Scego's mother were lost for two years.

Throughout the narrative, Scego's family is consistently portrayed as a 'Cassandra family'. However, whereas the mythological Cassandra is not trusted by the members of her community, in the case of Scego the family members themselves do not believe their own (correct) predictions, which usually take the form of "visions" of catastrophes. This ultimately leads them to not believe their own eyes once their predictions are realized: "Come se la realtà, troppo brutale, ci rendesse improvvisamente ciechi" (141).[24] Most of the visions experienced by Scego's family are connected to war and the Somali civil war that began in 1991 following Siad Barre's overthrow is central to the narrative. Scego suggests that not only herself, her father, and her entire family can be considered Cassandra, but also anyone who, foretelling conflict and catastrophe, tries to warn her/his

23 The conflicts that erupted in Somalia between late 1990 and 1991 were linked to the desire to remove, from the Somali political scene, Siad Barre, who had seized power in Somalia on 21 October 1969. However, after Siad Barre's ousting, internal struggles emerged in Somalia among various tribal groups vying for power and control over the resource-rich territory.

24 "As if reality, too brutal, suddenly made us blind" (my translation).

people to no avail.[25] Therefore, it would be appropriate to adopt the plural form and speak of "Cassandra*s*" in Mogadishu.

The novel draws a parallel between Scego's father and Cassandra twice. Firstly, Scego writes that when the war broke out in Somalia in 1990, her father understood that the city of Mogadishu where he grew up was destined to be reduced to rubble; however, like Cassandra, he did not want to believe this (95). In a later section of the novel, the author recounts her father's visit to West Germany in the mid-1960s as part of a Somali delegation. The delegation's visit to the Berlin Wall is documented in a video available on YouTube. In the video, Scego notes her father's uneasy expression. She interprets her father's expression as a sign that he is predicting a future of wars and bloodshed for Somalia, much like Cassandra's war-related prophetic visions in Greco-Roman literature.[26]

After comparing her father in the video to Cassandra, Scego questions whether it is actually herself and not her father who is afraid and should be compared to the mythological Cassandra, punished by Apollo and condemned to see without being heard: "E io? Da chi sono stata punita e maledetta? Come mai? E aabo?" (336)[27] (n.b. "aabo" is the Somali term for father). Scego had asked a similar question earlier in the novel: "La vedo seduta [Mogadiscio] accanto a una Troia sanguinante, mentre Cassandra, la figlia di Ecuba e Priamo, ne osserva le cicatrici. E le sue lacrime diventano polvere. E se quella Cassandra fossi io, Soraya? Una Cassandra che vede il Jirro sovrastare i continenti. Non più figlia di Ecuba e Priamo, ma di Chadigia e Ali. Una Cassandra a Mogadiscio" (119–120).[28] In other parts of the novel, the parallelism between Scego and Cassandra becomes even

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25 "Cassandra, *perché c'è sempre una Cassandra in ogni luogo,* aveva avvertito il popolo somalo della tragedia incombente. […] Ma nessuno voleva credere a Cassandra" (104). "Cassandra, *because there is always a Cassandra everywhere,* warned the Somali people of the impending tragedy. […] But no one wanted to believe Cassandra" (my translation).

26 A few pages later, the author reinforces the parallelism between her father and Cassandra: "Come Cassandra aabo avrebbe voluto avvertire noi abitanti del futuro e anche la delegazione politica con cui condivideva quel viaggio. Ma chi gli avrebbe mai creduto? Chi crederebbe a Cassandra?" (336). "Like Cassandra, Aabo would have wanted to warn us inhabitants of the future, and also the political delegation with whom he shared that journey. But who would have believed him? Who would believe Cassandra?" (my translation).

27 "And me? By whom was I punished and cursed? How come? And aabo?" (my translation).

28 "I see her [Mogadishu] sitting next to a bleeding Troy while Cassandra, the daughter of Hecuba and Priam, looks at her scars. And her tears turn to dust. What if that Cassandra were me, Soraya? A Cassandra who sees Jirro towering over the continents. No longer the

more pronounced. Scego refers to herself as a child, as a "piccola Cassandra confusa che frequentava ancora le medie" (239).[29]She also describes how her body shudders upon hearing news of the 1990s clashes in Somalia on television, much like Cassandra who sensed the approaching disaster in front of the wooden horse.[30] These expressions of distress cease abruptly upon her mother's return to Rome after surviving two years of conflict in Somalia.[31]

Scego feels a strong sense of urgency to write this novel in order to tell the story of Somalia and draw attention to the issue, because Somalia has been largely ignored in Italy[32], and the war destroyed all the archives in Somalia. For this reason, passing along an oral memory, in this case that of Scego's mother, is invaluable (362) and the reference to the mythological figure of Cassandra should also be read in the light of the testimonial value of memory, a theme already strong in Wolf's *Kassandra*[33]. It is also important to note that this narrative is specifi-

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daughter of Hecuba and Priam, but of Chadigia and Ali. A Cassandra in Mogadishu" (my translation).

29 "a confused little Cassandra still in secondary school" (my translation).

30 "Cosa stava succedendo nel mio paese di origine? Il mio corpo era percorso da brividi. Mi sentivo come Cassandra, la figlia di Priamo, quando vide il maledetto cavallo di legno davanti alle mura della sua città. Il cavallo con dentro gli Achei che avrebbero distrutto Troia e la sua famiglia. Cassandra vedeva la sciagura approssimarsi. E anch'io vedevo la sciagura mentre roteavo la testa con Stevie Wonder che da uno stereo mi dettava il ritmo" (29). "What was happening in my home country? My body was shivering. I felt like Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, when she saw the damned wooden horse in front of the walls of her city. The horse with the Achaeans inside who would destroy Troy and her family. Cassandra saw doom approaching. And I too saw doom as I swivelled my head with Stevie Wonder setting the rhytm from a stereo" (my translation).

31 "Non più visioni. Non più divinazioni. Non più pianti che nessuno ascolta" (351). "No more visions. No more divinations. No more cries that no one listens to" (my translation).

32 "Di solito la televisione non si occupava di noi. Un po' come adesso. Anche adesso non si occupa di noi" (24). "Television was uninterested in us. A bit like now. Even now it doesn't care about us" (my translation). Moreover, in the novel, Scego recounts that when her parents went to talk to her teachers, they were surprised by the teachers' lack of knowledge about Somalia's colonial history. The teachers, on the other hand, were impressed by her parents' knowledge of Italian, demonstrating a shocking lack of knowledge about Somalia's history. For a more in-depth exploration of this topic, see Scego and Ziolkowski (2023): "In our books for middle-schoolers and teenagers in Italy, no one speaks about colonialism" (387).

33 Cf. Véronique Léonard-Roques (2015): "La Cassandre de Wolf, promue au rang d'héroïne éponyme et de narratrice dans la fiction, est caractérisée par son obsession de la transmis-

cally addressed to Soraya, Scego's niece, creating an all-female triangle between Scego's mother as the oral witness, Soraya as the addressee, and Scego as the translator (19). Scego, who is childless and unmarried (like the mythological Cassandra), is described by her mother, in the novel, as being "married to literature" (my translation).[34] This makes her the perfect intermediary between a grandmother and granddaughter who belong to a diasporic family scattered across three continents due to wars, and who do not share a common language (133).

War and conflict are not, however, the only elements that lead Scego to identify with Cassandra. In the next section, I will explore how the presence of the Trojan prophetess in *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* also transmits meaning related to social marginality.

Cassandra's marginality in Scego's novel

The first form of marginality thematized in *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* through the figure of the Trojan prophetess is the one experienced by women in a patriarchal society.

The many stories that Scego recounts in *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* are consistently haunted by the ghostly presence of violence against women, pervasive yet socially invisible. Moreover, the violence of war is so closely linked to the violence on women's bodies that Italian, the language of the colonizers, becomes for Scego (my translation) "the language of rules and savagery. Language of violated vaginas and denied education" (178).[35] Given the centrality of women's issues in the architecture of the novel, the choice of the niece as the recipient of the novel/memoir seems anything but accidental. Unsurprisingly, Scego cites Bell Hooks (the pen name of Gloria Jean Watkins) as a source of inspiration in

sion" (202). "Wolf's Cassandra, elevated to the rank of eponymous heroine and narrator, is characterised by her obsession with transmission" (my translation).

34 "sposata con le lettere e le parole" (144).

35 "Lingua di regole e ferocia. Lingua di vagine violate e scolarizzazione negata" (178). "Language of rules and cruelty. Language of violated vaginas and denied education" (my translation). In the novel there is also mention of "Kurkurei" and "Shermutte", Somali women who sold their bodies to the Italian colonialists who wanted, according to Scego, to "colonizzare vagine con la forza del denaro e del potere" (179). "colonise vaginas with the force of money and power" (my translation).

the novel, stating that it was probably Bell Hooks' reflections on the political role of women's bodies that prompted her to write to her niece.[36]

In Scego's narrative, patriarchy takes not only the form of domestic violence and lack of female education, but also that of infibulation. This is an issue that somehow links the grandmother and the granddaughter. The former experienced it on her own body, while the latter (Soraya Omar-Scego) found herself representing the practice on the big screen, as an actress in the film *Desert Flower* (2009), which tells the story of Waris Dirie, a naturalized Somali model from Austria, who is determined to defeat the practice of female genital mutilation. As Scego notes, she and Soraya are women liberated from the specific form of patriarchy that subjects women to infibulation.[37] Scego's mother, on the other hand, not only endured Somali patriarchy and its infibulation, but also experienced a medicalized form of patriarchal racism when giving birth to Igiaba in Italy: she found herself in a hospital room full of male doctors looking at her slit vagina and pointing at her missing clitoris.

The second marginalization thematized in the novel is directly dependent upon the category of "race" as described by Harvey Sacks (see above). Scego writes that the women of her family were often hit "like a bullet" by the "n-word" ("n" stands for "nero", Italian word for "black")[38] and insulted through a myriad of expressions: "Cioccolatino; Negrettina; Faccetta nera; Moretta; Cacao Meravigliao" (257). But racism also entered Scego's life in ways that went far beyond words. Because of her skin color, Scego was told that it would be difficult to treat her eyes (she suffers from low pressure glaucoma), because doctors were unable to accurately examine the eyes of a black woman. She was also discouraged

36 "Sorella, la nostra intimità è politica. Sorella, la nostra intimità è rivoluzione. Sorella, la nostra intimità è la vita che il Jirro non avrà mai. Forse inconsciamente è stata proprio Bell Hooks a spingermi a scriverti, nipote mia. Siamo donne. Io sono una donna matura che si affaccia al lato nascosto della luna. Tu sei una giovane donna che quella luna l'ha appena calpestata. Insieme siamo la Via Lattea" (37). "Sister, our intimacy is politics. Sister, our intimacy is revolution. Sister, our intimacy is the life that Jirro will never have. Perhaps unconsciously it was Bell Hooks who prompted me to write to you, my niece. We are women. I am a mature woman facing the hidden side of the moon. You are a young woman who has just walked on that moon. Together, we are the Milky Way" (my translation).

37 "donne liberate dal patriarcato che ha divorato le clitoridi delle donne" (42).

38 "È la parola con la N che non smette di tormentarla. Le è successo tante volte di essere colpita da quella parola come una pallottola" (257).

to attempt a career in Academia, being told by university professionals that her knowledge and skin would never find a place there (259).[39]

This colonial system of strict separation between whites and blacks was experienced not only by Scego in Italy, but also by her father in Somalia under both the Italians and the British, as the invading Europeans regarded Somalis as subordinate bodies to be marginalized and exploited, so much so that her father and other Somalis were subjected to insults such as (my translation) 'savages; barbarians; monkeys'.[40] Reclaiming Bell Hooks' intersectional approach to feminism, Scego connects the two boundary categories of "woman" and "black person"; while it is true that patriarchy oppresses women's bodies, it is also true that it oppresses black women's bodies with double force. For example, Scego mentions a podcast by Omisade Burney-Scott, an Afro-descendant woman from North Carolina, which addresses the issue of the female body approaching the end of fertility. The podcast explains that "for Afro-descendants, the symptomology of premenopause/menopause is likely to last longer because of the stress of being a black body among white people" (my translation).[41]

The third marginal category represented in Scego's novel concerns her Muslim religion. She writes that she never told her classmates that her religion included five prayers a day and foot-washing, because they were all either Christians or atheists. She was ashamed to tell her classmates that she washed her feet in the sink at home because she knew they would think it was "unhygienic".[42] She also discusses how the word "normal" has been a burden to her over the years, particularly as a student. On the one hand, she wanted to be seen as a "normal" girl who liked white boys (345). On the other hand, she became infatuated with a boy with a darker complexion than her other classmates, precisely because she was looking for a difference to add to her own, so as not to feel like an exception: "Per

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39 In the interview with Ziolowsky, Scego states that "Society is more open [...] The problem is in the intelligentsia, publishers, and the media system, we have a lack of representation. It is quite difficult to find literature published by different people, Black, brown, or by people with other origins, say Chinese, instead it is all white. Our environment is all white" (Scego & Ziolkowski 2023, 389).

40 "selvaggi; barbari; scimmie" (331).

41 "per le afrodiscendenti la sintomatologia della premenopausa/menopausa rischia di durare di più a causa dello stress di essere un corpo nero tra bianchi" (249).

42 "antigienico. Forestiero. Pericoloso. Indecoroso. Primitivo" (835) "Unhygienic. Foreign. Dangerous. Unseemly. Primitive" (my translation).

non sentirmi la solita eccezione. L'unica. La nera. La musulmana. La testa crespa. Madawga kaliya ee ku nool aduunka. Inseguivo così ogni diversità" (27).[43] All of these interconnected levels of marginality are made explicit by Scego herself in the interview conducted by Saskia Ziolkowski and published in *The Palgrave Handbook of European Migration in Literature and Culture*:

> The problem is not only our skin or our religion but also our class. You have these interconnections of race and class. I am a daughter of a refugee. My father and mother were rich in Somalia, but they lost all their money, possessions, and connections as refugees. […] As a refugee, everything disappears. When I was a child and teenager I was so poor. When I say poor, I mean for real. My mom and I went to Caritas, a charity, to find something to eat, pasta, or clothes. I remember that was quite hard. Then it changed a little bit. The only thing that I had was public school.[44]

Moreover, in the same interview, when she defines herself as straddling two worlds (Europe and Africa), she specifies that she is not simply an Afro-European, that is, an African descendant in Europe, but an Afro-European *woman*: "My experience is being Black, being Muslim, being a woman in a patriarchal, mostly white society. This is what being an Afro-European woman means. Europe is a difficult concept" (391).[45]

The next section will discuss Gala's novel, in which the character of Cassandra both resembles and differs from how it is portrayed in Scego's novel.

43 "Not to feel like the usual exception. The only one. The black one. The Muslim. The frizzy one. Madawga kaliya ee ku nool aduunka. I chased all diversity" (my translation).

44 Scego and Ziolkowski (2023) 389.

45 Scego and Ziolkowski (2023) 391.

A MARGINAL WAR AND THE WAR ON MARGINALITY IN MARCIAL GALA'S *LLÁMENME CASANDRA*[46]

While Scego's novel is a non-fictional biographical account, Gala's novel is set in a supernatural context, where the gods of Greco-Latin and African mythology often appear in the form of visions in the protagonist's world. The novel's protagonist and narrator is Raúl Iriarte, a boy from Cienfuegos (Cuba), who claims to be a reincarnation of the mythological prophetess Cassandra and, as the novel's title implies, asks to be called Cassandra.[47]

As in *Cassandra a Mogadiscio,* the identity of Gala's Cassandra is determined by experiencing, witnessing to, and denouncing war atrocities. Unlike the mythological prophethess, Raùl-Cassandra participates in the war not as a member of the besieged community, but as a besieger, dying in Angola as a soldier in the "Operacíon Carlota", to which I will get back in the next section. The narrative takes the form of a retrospective account of Raúl's experience, with the narrator-protagonist speaking from the grave by order of Zeus himself.[48] Whereas in Scego's *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* the text that connects the author to the mythological universe to which Cassandra belongs is Euripides's *Trojan Women,* in Gala's novel this "connective" function is taken by the *Iliad.* When Raúl was ten, Athena appeared to him, telling him that he was Cassandra and inviting him to buy the *Iliad,* which had just been published in Cuban translation.[49] The novel makes numerous references to the *Iliad,* with Raúl also recounting its con-

46 I quote from the 2022 American edition *Call me Cassandra* in this article.

47 See the following conversation between Raúl and the god Apollo: "'Do you know who you are?' 'I'm Cassandra,' I replied. 'Or rather, I was Cassandra, and now I am just Raúl Iriarte.' 'You don't stop being who you are just because you have died,' Apollo replied, and I knew I was going to write a poem, unprompted, that I was an oracle" (637).

48 "Zeus, you've come into the hole where I [Raul] lie, the tomb I dug so the captain could bury our secret, and under the assumed form of a welcome breeze cooling off my dead forehead, you've asked me to tell what I lived while I was a little tin soldier they called Marilyn Monroe. 'Tell it,' you said to me, and I obey you, my Zeus, how could I refuse? I'm weaving together my memories. I let them flow through my head that is nothing more than a bit of dust in the African earth" (1608–1611).

49 "'I'm Athena, and I was born dancing a warrior's dance…' 'Athena?' 'Take a good look at me, oh, Cassandra, don't you remember?' 'I'm Raúl.' 'No, you are Cassandra, lucid in divinations, go and tell your mother to buy The Iliad for you and you will understand and know who I am, and above all, you will know who you are'" (385–390).

tents to his fellow soldiers in Angola. After reading the *Iliad,* Raúl comes to the realization that he is indeed the reincarnation of Cassandra. This aspect is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel, with Raul explicitly stating a number of times that he is Cassandra[50] and mentioning visions in which gods and creatures from Greco-Latin or African mythology address him as such. However, Gala's Cassandra is somewhat different from the one described in the *Iliad.* His novel mentions Apollo, Ajax, and Agamemnon, and includes mythological episodes that connect these characters to Cassandra (none of which are present in the *Iliad*), thus demonstrating that Gala draws more widely from Greek mythology in general. Raul shares with the mythological Cassandra the ability to make prophecies, as well as her being considered mad as a result of this very ability ("I [Raul] will again be Cassandra the mad" 1380), which is comparable to Euripides's description of Cassandra as a frenzied maenad in *The Trojan Women.*[51] Throughout the novel, Raul makes numerous prophecies, some of which are reminiscent of the mythological Cassandra. At one point, for example, he predicts the mythological destruction of the city of Troy caused by the wooden horse, and his Sergeant dismisses him as a "madman" (583). Other prophecies relate to Raul's personal life, including his own death and those of his father, brother, as well as the fates of various soldiers in Angola. On a number of occasions, Raul does not share his prophecies, as he is perfectly aware that no one would believe him. However, they all come to the realization, thus demonstrating that no one can escape destiny and that Raúl-Cassandra's prediction do not possess the power to change the course of events.[52]

50 "'I'm Cassandra,' I once told them. 'Cassandra, reborn after five thousand years, when both Ilios and ancient Greece no longer exist. Cassandra, born on an island in the middle of the tropics, that's me. Cassandra, forever condemned to know the future and never be believed'" (130–138). "'I don't want to be Raúl, I always knew that, ever since I was a child, I knew. I am not Raúl because I am Cassandra and Priam's blood runs through my veins. The gods told me so'" (270–271).

51 Cf. Mazzoldi (2001) 219–244.

52 "I know what's going to happen today but I can't avoid it, I'm Cassandra and if I tell anyone, they wouldn't believe me" (179–180).

Raúl-Cassandra and the war in Angola

In 1975, after gaining independence from Portugal, a civil war erupted in Angola between different factions. The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), led by the pro-communist Agostinho Neto, fought against The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FLNA), which was inspired by conservatism and allied with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which was supported, in turn, by the Republic of South Africa. In response to the conflict's expansion and the South African army's southern offensive, Neto asked Cuba for help in the form of military intervention. Cuba accepted, motivating its intervention in Angola with the historical links existing between Cuba and Africa since the time of the slave trade and the belief that a connection to Africa was an essential element of Cuban nationality.[53] Furthermore, Cuba's involvement in Angola was motivated as a crucial contribution to the battle against apartheid. According to Cuba, if South Africa had succeeded in defeating the movement led by Agostino Neto, it would have imposed its apartheid regime throughout Africa.[54] Therefore, this action was theoretically in line with the principles of the Cuban Revolution; in Gala's novel, a Cuban captain states: "We came here [to Angola] to sow Marxism-Leninism and to end colonial exploitation" (257).

However, *Llámenme Casandra* also uncovers the dark side of Cuba's intervention in Angola, showing how racism was still very much present behind all the theory and the proclamations. Cuban characters often talk about black people with contempt, and Raúl recounts that his maternal grandmother was disinherited after falling in love with "a white-passing mulatto named Eduardo Fonseca Escobar", who will become Raúl's grandfather (119). Due to the presence of a mulatto (her father Eduardo) in her family tree, one day Raúl's mother tells her husband, a white Cuban: "'I don't know how you caught my eye. I have never liked short men, but you tricked me, you were the only white man who knew how to dance like a Black one. I wanted to improve my genes, but not to marry some

53 Magdalena López (2018) recalls that in a speech in 1975, Fidel Castro affirmed that Cuba was not only a Latin American country, but also a Latin African one (2).

54 Magdalena López (2018) notes that "[d]esde sus inicios, la Revolucion Cubana puso en marcha varias politicas dirigidas a reducir la desigualdad racial considerada, en aquel entonces, una remora del pasado neocolonial" (1) "Since its inception, the Cuban Revolution implemented several policies aimed at reducing racial inequality, which at the time was considered a remnant of the neo-colonial past" (my translation).

Spaniard with two left feet'" (2141–2142). Raúl's mother's views are also held by his father, who does not like being ordered around by a black man at work, even if the latter is an engineer while the former is a simple mechanic (466–467). When Raúl's brother José's girlfriend recounts being kicked out of the Cuban National Ballet because of her race, Raúl's mother agrees with the director's decision: "'She was right,' my mother says from the kitchen. 'Who's ever seen a Black Giselle?'" (686). Raúl observes racism in Cienfuegos and later, as a soldier, in Angola; this is paradoxical, since most Cuban soldiers fighting in Angola are black. Sergeant Carlos, for example, is black, but this does not prevent him from making the following statement about Angolan women: "those Black women didn't have to be raped, just be given it good and hard, because they were horny as could be thanks to the monkey meat they ate" (992–993). Raúl's captain, a white man, refers to historical figures such as Hannibal, Scipio Africanus, and Julius Caesar as "tamers of Blacks" (191), despite the fact that many men in his unit are black or people of color. More in general, Cuban soldiers refer to the Angolans as "those fucking Blacks" (226) or "The Blacks". Additionally, there is a belief among Cuban soldiers that they are disliked by Angolans: "The Angolans don't like us although they say they do and smile and say that Cuba and Angola are one sole nation and one sole people and Fidel and Agostinho Neto lift their joined hands. They hate us, the captain thinks" (152–153).

Based on these examples, the novel represents the ideological justifications for the Cuban intervention in Angola as completely unfounded. From this perspective, *Llámenme Casandra* is part of a wider set of works that offer a critical view of the military expedition to Angola. According to Lopez (2008), this set also includes texts by Angel Santiesteban, Norberto Fuentes, and Emilio Comas Paret (2). Such works strongly thematize that most Cuban fighters in Angola were black and POC (people of color), sent there as cannon fodder. Additionally, they suggest that Cuban soldiers held a disphoric view of Africans, who were considered cannibals and, in wider terms, very different from the "civilized" Cubans.[55] Given this framework, the novel *Llámenme Casandra* presents further criticism of the Cuban expedition to Angola; Gala affirmed in an interview that

> [t]he majority of the Cuban soldiers being sent to Angola were not professionals. They were poorly trained and very young recruits, often 16 or 17 years old. The experience for the Cuban veterans was terrible. [...] They received no homecoming,

55 Cf. Lopez (2008) 2.

> no pensions, no psychological treatment, nothing. You couldn't say you weren't willing to go, because then you were subject to these acts of repudiation.[56]

In Gala's novel, the very fact that Raúl was recruited perfectly exemplifies how the Cuban army selected the soldiers for the Angolan intervention: young, inexperienced, and physically weak, Raúl is not in any way suited for war. Raúl's unsuitability is recognized by Sergeant Carlos[57] and by Raúl himself, who states at one point: "They take me to Angola, I'm just another tin soldier, I'm cannon fodder" (346). *Llámenme Casandra* also mentions a significant episode concerning one of the "acts of repudiation" to which Gala refers in his interview. The headmistress of the school that Raúl attended as a child refers to Roberto (Raúl's fellow student and best friend), and his family as "scum" because they don't show appreciation for the Revolution and the country; she also encourages the students to throw eggs at the house of Roberto's father.

While Raúl-Cassandra's account of the expedition to Angola enables us to deconstruct and criticize many aspects of the Angolan expedition that have often been concealed and withheld, the social interactions of the novel's protagonist allow (as it will be demonstrated in the subsequent section) for a broader reflection and critique not only of the Angolan expedition, but also of the entire ideological apparatus behind the figure of the "good" socialist revolutionary, epitomized by the so-called "internationalist soldier" and the *hombre nuevo.*

The counter-revolutionary marginality of Raúl-Cassandra

Although the previous section discussed the significance of Raúl-Cassandra's voice during times of war, this section will demonstrate that Gala's Cassandra (just like Scego's) not only serves as a means of conveying the voice of a witness that denounces the atrocities of war, but also embodies various forms of social marginality. Through the representation of marginalities, as well as of the social mechanisms that control and repress them, *Llámenme Cassandra* offers a powerful deconstruction of the very notion of authoritarian political power.

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56 Cf. Goldstein (2022).

57 "'This one [Raul] doesn't know how to fight,' Carlos says. 'These Blacks are going to put a rocket up his ass when they get him, they're gonna use him as their bitch'" (537–538).

As Patricia Valladares-Ruiz points out in her article *Transgenerismo y denuncia social en* Llámenme Casandra, *de Marcial Gala*: "En esta novela, el/la protagonista transgénero (Raúl/Casandra) vehicula una crítica del llamado "hombre nuevo" y denuncia la persistencia del racismo, sexismo, homofobia y transfobia en la sociedad cubana" through the representation of "mecanismos sociales e institucionales de vigilancia que reclaman la corrección de cualquier posible infracción del modelo hipermasculino e hiperheterosexual del buen revolucionario".[58] Raúl-Cassandra possesses physical characteristics and attitudes that place him in marginal categories (Sacks's "boundary categories"), preventing him from achieving full membership as the New Socialist Man who embodies all the ideals of the "good revolutionary". A prime example of the New Man is Sergeant Carlos, described in the novel as the ideal "internationalist soldier" (1372) and New Man, because "everything he does is for the benefit of the fatherland" (1990). Marvin Leiner explains the connection between the "New Man" and *macho* rhetoric in 1960s-70s' Cuba as follows:

> the "new man" was to be not only a person of high morals but a strong and virile revolutionary, in contrast to the "weak" homosexual. It appears that at no time did social scientists or educators consider homosexuality as anything other than "feminine" behavior by males, in accordance with the common cultural stereotype. […] [H]omophobia and the oppression of gays in Cuba and elsewhere is closely tied to the devaluation of women. For if the country's strength is tied to masculine virility […] and homosexuals are identified with women, the logical conclusion founded on this devaluation of women is that male homosexuals are seen as subversive.[59]

Raúl does not conform to the stereotypes of *machismo*. He has an androgynous body and can convincingly pass as a woman when dressed accordingly; he has had a passion for women's clothing since childhood and recalls enjoying going into his aunt Nancy's room (who was blond and blue-eyed like him) and trying on her clothes and make-up. Raúl's lack of virility is first pinpointed by his

58 Valladares-Ruiz (2022), 328–329. "In this novel, the transgender protagonist (Raúl/Casandra) critiques the so-called 'new man' and denounces the 'persistence of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia in Cuban society' by depicting 'social and institutional mechanisms of surveillance that demand the correction of any possible violation of the hypermasculine and hyperheterosexual model of the good revolutionary'" (my translation)

59 Leiner (2019), 34.

teachers, who ask to speak to his mother: "'You have to take him to a psychologist,' [...] 'He's very effeminate and a crybaby. If he goes on like this, he'll have a lot of problems'" (398). Interestingly, Raul's mother rebuts by invoking the figure of the *macho* revolutionary: "'You don't know what you're talking about,' my mother yells at her [the teacher]. 'My son is very macho, yes, ma'am, make no mistake, his father's brothers are martyrs who fought in the Sierra Maestra and his father was a national gymnastics champion'" (400). During Raúl's days in Angola, his fellow soldiers often refer to him as Marilyn Monroe and dress him up as a woman. His captain sexually abuses him and dresses him in expensive women's clothing, thus further acknowledging Raúl's femininity: "'You're so small, so fragile, how did they let you in?' he [the captain] says. 'You look like a young girl'" (750). Before penetrating Raúl, the captain often orders him to dress up and apply make-up to resemble his wife. At other times, he asks Raúl to sing like *Grease*'s star Olivia Newton John. Given Raúl's connection to Cassandra, it might be interesting to note at this point that the two characters have strikingly similar experiences with (and attitudes towards) sex. Cassandra is assaulted and abused by Ajax, and Raúl is assaulted and abused by his captain. Not dissimilarly from his mythological counterpart, Raúl is portrayed as sexually passive, that is, as a body deprived of agency and abused by others. Even more importantly (and, perhaps, not surprisingly) Raúl does not feel any sexual desire: "I didn't feel anything, I've never felt anything. I don't know what sexual desire is" (851–852).

Due to his manifested femininity, Raúl is also often identified as a homosexual. His mother and brother, first, and the Captain and Sergeant Carlos later refer to him as a "fag" or "fairy".[60] Raúl is painfully aware that being a homosexual in 1970s Cuba is not only incompatible with the figure of the "good" revolutionary and soldier, but can also led to dramatic consequences. As a schoolboy, he is harassed by his Spanish teacher, who lends him forbidden books and overtly confesses his homosexuality: "He [the Spanish teacher] told me all of this before putting his hand on my thigh and looking into my eyes and confessing he went 'the other way': 'This is the first time I've told anyone, and it's very dangerous. If you tell anyone else, Rauli, you could get me into a lot of trouble. I could get thrown out of the party and of school'" (890–897). In the end, Raúl dies as a result of someone else being exposed as a homosexual and accused of sodomy.

60 Cf. Gala (2022) 463, 169–170, 1817.

When the captain's sexual violence against Raúl is discovered, the captain kills Raúl in an attempt to protect his own reputation.[61]

In the macho-revolutionary culture in which Raúl was raised, homosexuality is not only connected to femininity, but also to intellectualism. Lillian Guerra (2010) notes that spokespersons of the Young Communist League (the youth organization of the Communist Party of Cuba) "identified a spectrum of anti-social behavior they related to homosexuality, including intellectualism, discussionism, egoism, autonomism, trotskyism and reunionism [the habit of holding repeated meetings in order to talk about state goals rather than act on them]" (283). Guerra also highlights that "professor of anthropology and long-time Communist, Samuel Feijo, published an editorial in *El Mundo* that soon became an indispensable reference point for discerning the relationship between sexual and intellectual dissidence" (281).

It may be worth noting, in conclusion, that the complex, intersectional web of the marginal position that Raúl embodies (not *macho,* effeminate, perceived as homosexual, and sceptical about revolutionary ideologies) emerges in all its subversive potential with his relationship to literature. As a schoolboy, he is accused of being "a counterrevolutionary" by his classmates, who tell his teacher that he "was reading a forbidden book" (1388). When participating in a literature workshop, Raúl reads a poem he has written and receives the following comment from his professor: "'That poem isn't realistic, it's metaphysical and decadent. It reminds me of Cavafy. Where did you copy it from?'" (658–659). The poem is radically different from those of Raúl's comrades, as it is not dedicated to their parents nor to the socialist homeland. As a result, the professor brings Raul to the principal, who advises caution: "be careful with what you copy, Raulín. I have enough problems at this school without falling into ideological diversionism" (671–672). At the age of 15, a similar incident occurs when he uses the term "angel" in one of his poems: "when the chemistry teacher read that, they took me straight to the principal's office and the principal said, 'Ideological diversionism.' 'He's suffering from ideological diversionism,' they tell my father. 'Be careful, this could ruin the future of such an intelligent young man'" (1827–1829).

61 To gain a better understanding of the persecution of homosexuality, it is important to explore the role of the Cuban UMAPS Camps (Military Units to Aid Production). One of the reasons homosexuality was persecuted is that, as Leiner (2019) states: "In general, homosexuality was understood as a remnant of capitalist society because of its association with pre-revolutionary criminal activity, especially gambling, prostitution, and drug addiction" (37).

These examples show how *Llámenme Casandra* has the power to create a meta-reflexive web that ultimately connects Raúl-Cassandra, his/her account and testimony from the grave, his/her prophetic voice, and literature itself.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to demonstrate that it is not by coincidence that the protagonists of both Gala's and Scego's novels are defined through a strong relation with Cassandra, rather than with any other mythical figure, as this allows both narratives to recover two specific characteristics of the mythical Cassandra in her new postcolonial-intersectional embodiments. The first characteristic concerns the ability to make predictions and the importance assumed in this context by the prophetess's voice, which acquires a fundamental testimonial value.[62] The second trait pertains to the intersectional marginality that defines the mythological Cassandra in the face of her social group.[63]

To ensure the clarity of my argument, these two traits have been analysed separately. However, it is crucial to remember that they are strongly interrelated.

I have argued that adopting a methodology that sits at the crossroads of Classical Adaptation Studies, Queer Theory and Sociology offers two major advantages. Firstly, it allows to re-read Greco-Latin works in a different key, showing that the practices of marginalisation and (sexual) violence to which Cassandra is subjected are an inherent part of this character's identity since ancient literature and not just an innovation brought about by contemporary receptions. At the same time, the aesthetic effects generated by contemporary receptions of Cassandra prove to be particularly powerful when they tap into the identity conflicts and contradictions that were already present in Cassandra's ancient representations. Secondly, this interdisciplinary methodology allows to critically deconstruct the very notion of marginality.

In conclusion, I hope to have demonstrated that such a hermeneutic stance could be fruitfully applied beyond the two case studies presented here in order to explore more contemporary reworkings of Cassandra's myth. This would

62 See above, section 2, on the role played by the prophetic voice in Christa Wolf.

63 See above, section 2, for a discussion of marginality from the perspective of Harvey Sacks's sociology.

highlight not only their aesthetic and cultural value but also their ability to reveal the mechanisms of control and repression at the heart of every marginalisation practice.

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