

## The Construction of the Notion of Identity in Stephen Crane's a Dark Brown Dog: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

The present paper aims at providing a multi-dimensional discussion to the way the notion of identity is being constructed in Crane's short story, "A Dark Brown Dog". To reach an in-depth critique of the issue, the paper seeks to formulate a workable definition of the term and to establish a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework that is adequate to trace how the evolution of the narrative serves in the construction of the characters' identity. The story under focus is written at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1893, during the Jim Crow era that stretches from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aiming to study how the identity of the white character and the identity of the black character are being linguistically constructed in this story, a simple method of data collection and analysis will be used. This method is summarized in three steps: a) the collection of textual data that reflect the characters' identities; b) the analysis of the collected data; and c) the interpretation of the findings of the analysis. The application of this method has led to the formulation of several conclusions. First, it is proved that the characters' identities are monitored by their mental conception of the social context in which they live. Second, the characters' social identities, as black or white, are determined by the social ideology that divides the American society in two racial groups and set clear the relations of power between them. However, the characters' personal identities are determined by their ways of interacting along the text. Third, the social identity of both whites and blacks evolves from one generation to another leading to a change at the level of the black/white relations. Finally, these conclusions show that the notion of identity is a mental construct, which varies in function of many variables such as context.

**Keywords:** *White, Black, Identity, Social ideology, American society, and multi-disciplinarily.*

### Introduction

The question of identity is what matters most for us as humans since long time ago. We always ask several logical questions that we think their answers could determine 'who we are'. For instance, questions like – "who are we?", "to which social group do we belong?" and "how should we behave to preserve our identities?"-are necessary among others in order to understand how identity is linguistically constructed in text and talk. Thus, the establishment of any effective theoretical framework to decode how people's identities are structured through the analysis of a given discourse entails taking into consideration questions of this kind.

People can be identified in terms of various sorts of identities such as racial identity, religious identity, gender identity, ethnic identity, etc. Once being identified by their races, religions, ethnicities and other collective characteristics, people are characterized in terms of their group

belonging. This means that their identities are determined with reference to the characteristics that characterize the group to which they belong. However, the moment people are described in terms of their individual characteristics, they reflect their self identity. They reflect who they are as individuals. Thus, the study of a given person's identity should be dealt with from two different but complementary perspectives of analysis: what determines a person's social identity and what determines his/her personal identity.

Both self identity and social identity can manifest themselves at various levels of peoples' lives. For instance, they can be detected at the level of people's ways of thinking and acting, people's speeches, their styles of living, their relations with others, etc. This means that any trial to determine "who we are?" entails underpinning a reciprocal process that starts from the

collection and analysis of these features to draw the identity of the people we are interested to. However, the application of this reciprocal process differs from one area of research to another as well as from one topic to another.

Thus, the selection of the method to be used and the establishment of the basis of the research framework required for the determination of how identity is constructed in the case under focus require taking into consideration its distinctive features. These features encompass the area of specialty (literature, politics, media, etc.), the objectives of the study, the sort of identity we are interested in, etc.

In the present paper, for instance, racial identity is targeted through the critical study of how the notion of identity is constructed in Crane's *A Dark Brown Dog*. The focus of this study will be on how the identity of both the black character and the white character are structured. This trial to the determination of the way racial identity is constructed will be based on the adoption of the social ideology that divides society into two racial groups: blacks vs. whites.

Indeed, this sort of division is associated with a whole social system of thinking about as well as of treating the in-group and the out-group individuals. Within the frame of this race-based division, the construction of one's identity will be determined based on the way one think about and treat the other and the way one is being thought about and being treated by the other. Thus, inter-group relations become of significant importance to determine one's social and personal identity. These inter-group relations – between blacks and whites – were central for debate in the American literature.

Literary discourse plays an important role in bringing what happened in our societies to the area of debate through creating an artistic scene of our social realities. These social realities in their turn represent a valuable material for researchers who seek to understand how social ideologies and social relations of power affect people's positions and status in their societies. In other words, the critique of how the dominant social ideology operates to maintain control and social order becomes of crucial significance to determine the characteristics of each social

group. Thus, to determine the identity of each of these two groups: the dominant group and the dominated one. Then, the identity of the individual will be determined within the spectrum of what characterizes the identity of the group he/she belongs to with the emergence of some distinctive features that distinguish one individual from another.

In reality, the construction of whiteness (what characterizes the white character) and the construction of blackness (what characterizes the black character) are central for modern research [1-2]. The present study is contextualized within this core of literature through being interested in the study of the construction of the notion of identity in Crane's short story, *A Dark Brown Dog*. Aiming to determine how the identity of the black character and the identity of the white character are structured in the text of this short story, the paper seeks to answer two major research questions.

- How is the identity of the black character constructed in Crane's story?
- What determines the characteristics of the white character in this story?

To provide detailed answers to these two questions we need to provide a workable definition of the concept of identity and to establish a well-framed theoretical approach to the study of the construction of the white and the black identities. This frame will be established in the light of the existing literature with the consideration of the features that distinguish the present study from the works to be reviewed in the literature review section.

### Literature Review

This section of the paper seeks to review data concerning the key concepts and the theoretical approaches required for the study of how identity is being constructed in the story under focus. First, it aims to review the literature necessary for the formulation of a workable definition of the notation of identity in general and the notion of racial identity in particular. Second, it consists in reviewing the data required for the establishment of a well-framed theoretical approach that is adequate for the determination of how the identity of the black character and the identity of the white character are constructed in this short story.

## Definition of Identity

The notion of identity is highly problematic. This sort of problematisation gets its roots in the dynamic nature of the concept. In reality, this concept is said to be dynamic in that it is not static and it varies in terms of many factors such as context. This means that the determination of “who are we?” varies from one context to another [3] based on the measuring features [4] that we use to draw our identity at the level of the different social situations that we pass through in our lives. Thus, to determine “who are we?” we need to be aware about the social context in which we are situated as well as the different features we could use to create a recognizable picture of our identity as individuals or social groups.

The Oxford English Dictionary [5] offers three brief definitions for the notion of identity: a) identity refers to “who or what somebody/something is”; b) it denotes the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from each others; and c) it refers to the state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody or something.

What is remarkable at the level of these three definitions is that the outline of the features necessary to determine “who are we?” offered by the first definition (a) is supported by the emphasis on the need to clarify difference and similarity outlined by the second and the third definition (b and c). Here, the determination of both difference and similarity is necessary to emphasize what distinguish people from each others as well as to understand who we are by knowing who the other is. Indeed, the features these definitions determined for the outline of difference and similarity are feelings and beliefs.

In the case of my study, both the notion of ‘feeling’ and the notion of ‘belief’ are of crucial significance in that the study of the way racial identity is constructed in this short story entails: that we need to reach a holistic understanding of the social beliefs monitoring the division of the American society into two racial groups (whites vs. blacks) on the one hand. And on the other hand, we are required to build a detailed critique of how people’s feelings towards each other could determine “who they are” and “who the other is”. So, the notion of identity

is closely related to that of belief and feeling where the determination of ‘who we are’ and ‘who the other is’ gets its basis rooted in the revelation of both difference and similarity.

Oyserman et al. [6] argue that identities refer to the “traits, characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group membership that determine who one is”. The different components the authors claim that they form one’s identity highlight that the notion of identity is very difficult to define.

According to Golubović [7], this difficulty gets its roots in the complexity of the meaning of the term itself arguing that one-dimensional interpretations are often incomplete. Thus, a holistic interpretation of the complex meaning of the concept of identity requires a multi-dimensional perspective for the determination of ‘who one is’. The multi-dimensional nature of the meaning of identity reflects that our identities should be measured with the different components which are required to draw the image of ‘who we are’ in relation to the broader social context of interaction. Briefly, any trial to study the way identity is structured in text and talk requires determining the different components constituting the meaning of identity in that discourse.

Buckingham [3] states that identity is “what distinguishes us from others”. Here, the notion of identity gets broader in scope to encompass all components, characteristics, and variables that distinguish us from others. This means that our identity is determined by the unique characteristics we have to be who we are. Burke and Stets [8] argue that identity is “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person”.

This definition highlights that part of one’s identity could be traced at the level of one’s claims. Here, the characteristics that identify people’s identity are supposed to be articulated through their discursive practices of language in use. Howard [9] defines identity as the cognitive schema, the abstract and the organized packages of information that constitute the cognitive version of identity. This cognitive mapping of the self determines who we are based on our

estimation of the characteristics that we associate with ourselves. Briefly, identity could be defined in terms of the different characteristics that could determine who one's. These characteristics vary in function of time from one era to another, what leads some researchers to make distinction between traditional and modern understanding of identity [7].

This change highlights the strong connection between the notion of identity and the notion of generation that we are interested to in the present study.

To sum up, the above discussion shows that the definition of the notion of identity stretches in scope to reach all variables that could help us determine who one is. However, the type of these variables and their presence differ from one situation to another.

This means that at each single moment people are taking part in a given social interaction they activate different sorts of characteristics that reflect who they are.

Thus, the determination of their identity entails the collection and the analysis of the variables they activated at that moment. For instance, our study of how the identity of the black character and the identity of the white character are structured in this short story entails gathering all textual details that could shape the real image of each of these literary characters.

These details represent, in fact, the different variables the characters activated through the roles they played along the text of the story. However, the study of these variables requires the foundation of a workable theory of identity, which is the focus of the following part of the literature review section.

### **A Multi-Disciplinary Theory of Identity**

Taking into consideration the assumption that identity is a multi-faceted concept [10] the study of how identity is being linguistically constructed at the level of Crane's short story should be carried within the frame of a multi-disciplinary theory of identity. In reality, multi-disciplinarity is required at the theoretical level because it will help us build a holistic view of the speaking characters' identity through covering the different aspects of identity they

activated while interacting and performing various roles.

The establishment of this multi-dimensional perspective to the study of identity will start from the existing literature in the field to reach a theoretical model that is adequate to answer the problematics of the present paper.

The examination of the existing literature on the study of identity shows that researchers used various theoretical perspectives. Among these perspectives are: identity theory [11-12-13] Anthropology [7-14] sociology [15-16-17-18], social identity theory [19-20-21-22-23], psychology [24-25-26-27] and discursive psychology [28-29-30-31].

These theoretical perspectives are fundamental in the debate concerning what constitutes one's identity: what constitutes one's personal identity? And what constitutes one's social identity? However, they represent one-dimensional frameworks, which means that neither of them will be fruitful for the critical investigation of the way identity is being linguistically structured in Crane's short story, *A Dark Brown Dog*.

Thus, we need the formulation of a theoretical approach that should take into consideration these entire theoretical bases to build a multi-disciplinary theory of identity that is adequate to enable us reach a detailed comprehension of the issue under focus.

The brief review of how each of these theories is used to study the construction of the notion of identity will be accompanied with brief justifications that will explain their utility in this study.

### **Identity Theory**

Stets [32] argues that, in identity theory, self-categorization is relevant in the formation of one's identity. For instance, people who are acting in a given social context can identify themselves and the others in terms of the roles they perform. This means that one's behavior could determine who one is [33].

Burke and Stets [8] claim that people have multiple identities due to the multiple roles they play arguing that identity theory seeks to clarify the meanings of the multiple identities people claim and to determine how

these identities relate to one another for one person. According to Stryker and Burke [34], identity theory generally focuses on role identity.

It is the theory that includes both the internal self-processes and the external structure of the society of which one is a member. For instance, the images people internalize about themselves and the others determine the way they behave and make them anticipate how the other should behave towards them. Thus, identity theory is fruitful to determine who one's based on the different roles he performs in his broader social context.

In reality, these theoretical bases make it required for the critical investigation of the notion of identity in Crane's novel in that the roles the characters play in different contexts along the text of the story will be explored to determine how both the black identity and white identity are constructed.

### **Social Identity Theory**

In social identity theory, one's identity is determined with regard to the social group he/she belongs to [35-36]. In other words, the characteristics of one's group represent the guiding principles that determine one's ways of behaving and thinking about the self and the other. Hogg et al. [10] argue that when people are categorized into different social groups, they became depersonalized and represent the embodiment of the prototype of the group they belong to.

Indeed, social identity theory is a theory of social psychology that is interested in the study of inter-group relations, group processes, and the social self. Based on these theoretical bases, social identity theory becomes of crucial significance for the critical investigation of how the notion of identity is constructed in Crane's short story. The necessity of this theory is justified by the nature of racial identity that is based on the division of society into different racial groups where the inter-group relations are built upon the superiority of the whites and the inferiority of the blacks.

### **Anthropology**

The notion of anthropology refers to the study that is interested in humans and their works. It deals with the study of the origins, development, characteristics, customs, and beliefs of the humans. Here, the notion of development should be emphasized in that it reflects one of the most important characteristics of the human life, which is that of change. Indeed, identity is a dynamic concept that changes across time, which means that one's identity develops throughout one's life, what makes of anthropology an important frame for the study of the dynamic nature of the concept of identity [7].

For instance, the use of anthropology is fruitful in the study of how the black identity and the white identity are constructed in Crane's story because it will help us understand how characters' racial identities determine their inter-group relations. Also, it will enable us to understand how people's history affects their ways of thinking and behaving. In other words, how people's cultural heritage intervene in the construction of their identity, especially one the characters we are dealing with represent the young generation of both the whites and Blacks in American.

### **Sociology**

The sociology of identity is interested in the study of how people's identity is being produced and reproduced through focusing on the investigation of how people's social engagements serve in the construction of who they are. For instance, People's interactions create a sense of their individual identities as well as of their social identities. In sociology, the concept of identity is closely associated with that of collective identity [37].

In this study, the collective conception of identity will be used because we assume that the characters' personal identity will be better understood within the frame of the social ideology that divides the American society into two racial groups: whites and blacks.

This means that the analysis of the characters' thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with people from the out-group is closely dependent to the comprehension of the out-group/in-group relations and the

social norms and traditions monitoring this sort of relations. However, in case we need more in-depth critique of one character's personal identity, we may resort to self-identity theory [38] and social self-representation theory [39]. So, though sociology offers us the necessary tools for a well-detailed understanding of the construction of the notion of identity in Cranes' story, the addition of theories concerned with the study of the identity of the self will help us draw a full picture of each character's personal identity.

## Psychology

The psychology of identity seeks to determine how ones' qualities, thoughts, behaviors, styles, looks, expressions, etc. shape one's identity. Indeed, the way one behaves, thinks, addresses, etc. is monitored by the mental image one has about who s/he is. Thus, one's identity is the real manifestation of one's inner mental model that operates to construct one's individuality. It is the inner model that shapes the outer image of the self.

This image is what we see to distinguish one person from another; however, the mental model monitoring it is the unknown part of the identity construction process. Though this mental model is not concrete to deal with, it could be determined through the study of the thoughts and the behaviors it monitors while being expressed to the outer world. Based on this psychological conception of identity, knowing who one is requires an in-depth analysis of one's self-image, one's self-esteem, and one's individuality.

This means that the study of how the self is being produced and reproduced at the level of the different engagements and activities one performs entails establishing a theoretical frame, where psychology is a corner stone, in order to be suitable for the critique of the inner world that monitors the way one wants to see his/her image.

For instance, the integration of the psychological conception of identity is fruitful in the study of the way the black identity and the white identity are constructed in Crane's story because it will help us understand how the mental model the characters have about them-selves, as black or white, could determine who they are. In other words, how the characters' awareness about the social

traditions of black/white relations shapes their roles in the text of the story and how this way of thinking about the self makes of them know their social positions as masters and slaves.

## Discursive Psychology

This area of discourse analysis focuses mainly on the study of the psychological themes that are expressed at the level of people's communicative practices. Having its bases rooted in the assumption that people's speeches are delivered to perform such actions, discursive psychology draws on cognitive psychology where mental states are considered as the main causes that push people to express their feelings and thoughts to the outer world [40].

In the critical study of identity formation, for instance, what people say while taking part in a given communicative interaction is supposed to determine who they are. This assumption finds its ground in the previous literature, in which discursive psychology was used as a theoretical approach in the debate that revolves around the notion of identity [30-41].

For example, the study of the construction of racial identity (black vs. white) in the present paper requires the integration of a discursive psychological approach in that what the characters say is an essential component in the determination of who they are. Indeed, people's mental states monitor what they say in the context of speaking and what they say at that context could be interpreted to draw a real portrait of who they are.

Thus, people who are the producers of discourse find themselves reproduced through what they say, discourse. This means that discourse production is monitored by one's inner conception of identity – who s/he is – and discourse analysis enables us to draw a concrete picture of who the speaker is.

The review of the theoretical foundations of the approaches used in the study of identity reveals that these are fruitful for the discussion of how the notion of identity is constructed in the story under focus. However, our examination of the theoretical requirements of this study and the problematics it seeks to answer shows that neither of them could be used to achieve the

goals of the study by its own. In contrast, it is proved that they can complete each others for a better critique of this dynamic concept. Thus, we need to construct a theoretical perspective to the study of identity that fulfills the goals of the present paper and takes into consideration all the above theoretical conceptions of identity.

This theoretical perspective should be based on the social ideology that monitors the division of the American society into two social groups: whites and blacks. Indeed, living into such an ideologically divided society makes our conceptualization of “who we are” depends on two reciprocal perspectives: how we see the others? And how we are seen by the others? This means that the way we see ourselves is deeply affected by the way people from the out-group (the other) see us; how they define us as a group.

For instance, our awareness of how the out-group people think about us and how they behave towards us represents an essential component that monitors the way we think about ourselves as well as the way we should behave towards the other. In other words, the bipolar structure of power and the binary structure of ideology monitoring the white/black relations will be fundamental in the investigation of how the notion of identity is constructed in Crane’s story. In brief, our analysis of identity will start from the analysis of the way the white characters and the black characters see themselves and the way each one is seen by the other. Then, interpretations will be undertaken based on the basis of the theoretical conceptions reviewed before.

## Methodology

This section aims at providing a brief description of the text under focus. It seeks also to give its readers a detailed idea about the method to be used in the data collection and analysis.

## About the Story

*A Dark Brown Dog* is a short story written by Stephen Crane at the end of the nineteenth century, in 1893. It is seen as an allegory about the Jim Crow laws that are employed to enforce racial segregation in the US south.

These laws were enacted by the dominant white legislature of the state. Being contextualized in this era of the US history; the story draws the grim reality of the black slaves in the US south where the character of the brown dog is the embodiment of the African Americans. The dog is the protagonist of the story. He represents the character of a black man who is newly freed from his former master to be enslaved once again by a young child.

The dog’s new experience with his new master – the young child- represents the sufferance he lived along the text of the story. The cruel life he lived at this time ended by his funeral towards the end of the story. However, the child represents the new generation of white southerners who try to treat the blacks with equality after they received the right to be equal with the whites.

Though the child seems to be friendly with his new friend, he used to treat him with humiliation and cruelty. Indeed, these two characters with other members of the family contributed to the evolution of the plot of the story where the evolution of the narration of the events served in the construction of the identity of the white character and the black character. Here, the notion of identity is being constructed through the different characteristics the characters activated about one and the other. Briefly, a detailed comprehension of the construction of the notion of identity in the present paper should be undertaken within the context in which the events of the story took place.

## Method

In the present paper, the data processing system will be based on the use of a simple method of data collection and analysis. The steps to be followed in the application of this method are summarized in three major points. First, the collection of textual indices is the step in which the different sorts of identities the characters activated along the text of the story will be collected and categorized to facilitate their procession during the analysis phase. Second, the analysis of the collected indices is the step during which the categorized data will be analyzed and discussed to formulate syntheses about the way the black identity and the white identity are being constructed.

Third, the interpretation of the findings is the step in which the findings obtained from the analysis of the collected data will be interpreted on the basis of the theoretical conceptions of identity we reviewed before to establish a multi-disciplinary theory of identity. After finishing the interpretation phase, conclusions will be drawn to summarize the major contributions of the paper.

### Findings and Discussion

While interacting along the text of the story, the characters activated different sorts of group and personal characteristics the analysis of which could determine how the identity of each of them is being discursively constructed. These characteristics are collected and analyzed in the coming paragraphs.

#### The Dog

The scrutiny of the text under focus reveals from the early beginning of the story that the little dog is a 'slave'. This sort of identity is activated through the depiction of what he wears in his neck "a short rope was dragging from his neck". However, this slave is newly freed from his master. The fact of being a free slave is determined via the description of his movement along the sidewalk of the road "... came trotting ... down the sidewalk".

Here, the dog is trotting lonely; there is no master who directs him towards the desired destination. He is walking towards the unknown; there is no clear destination. Then, the description of his gestures traced at the level of the use of the term "trotting" instead of the term "walking" highlights that the dog is moving fast as if there is a potential danger pursuing him. Indeed, the dog's hurry reflects his feelings of terror and panic. These feelings could be interpreted by his fear of being caught once again by his former master. In contrast, the dog's fear of being caught by his owner does not mean that he denies the fact of being enslaved by a new white master.

This is clear at the level of the analysis of this textual statement "... he stopped opposite the child, and the two regarded each other". Indeed, this statement highlights that the dog is eager to start a new experience with a new master. In other words, if he feared

being enslaved by a new white man once again, he would have run away instead of standing opposite to the white child. Thus, the dog's readiness to start a new experience reflects his mental conception of himself as a slave. He is aware that he is a slave and he accepted his social reality to live under the domination of white masters.

During his first contact with this new master, the dog activated different characteristics that have led to the construction of his image as a slave. For instance, the little advances he made with his little tail reflect his awareness of the social norms that govern the master/slave relation. In other words, he has a mental conception of who he is and who the child is; that is why he knows that as a slave he should greet his master and he should welcome him with soft gestures.

In addition, the dog's apology is another textual proof that emphasizes his mental conception of the inferiority of the black race and the superiority of the white race. This explanation finds its justification in the following statement: "... in an apologetic manner the dog came close". In this statement, apology is followed by a physical movement that ended by having the child close to his new master. Here, the dog's decision to join his new owner could be interpreted by his awareness that he should obey the orders of his master.

It could also be interpreted by the dog's eagerness to accept the state of being inferior and to live under the domination of a white child. So, the dog's behaviors the moment he met his new master highlight that his mental conception of who he is and who the child is represents the active variable that determines the sort of relation that relates them to each other.

This mental conception of the self and the other is deeply rooted in the dog's social knowledge about how a slave should behave towards his master; the knowledge that he might have acquired during his first experience.

While sitting for the first interview, the dog behaved in such a way that reflects his awareness of how a black slave should behave the moment he sits for the slavery test.



This means that he has knowledge about the tips required for a successful interview. He is also aware about what are the blessed behaviors that could make of him welcomed as a slave in the land of his new master. Indeed, the examination of the dog's feelings of enthusiasm "the dog became more enthusiastic with each moment of the interview" might reflect his desire to show excitement and interest towards his new master.

The desire to show these emotions emphasizes the dog's struggle to make the interview successful, which means that he was endeavoring to be accepted and to start a new slavery experience with the child. In addition, his reaction towards the punishment of his new master reveals that he is well-trained to avoid being in conflict with his owner. For instance, the statement – "he sank down in despair at the child's feet" – shows that the dog is well-trained to absorb his anger the moment he feels being threatened by his master.

In other words, he knows how to behave to reduce tension and to please his owner. This knowledge might be the result of his awareness of the inequality of power between blacks and whites, which means that he knows he cannot face his master. In brief, the dog's mental conception of 'who the black slave is' and 'who the white master is' monitors his ways of behaving during his first interview with his new owner.

On his way to his owner's house, the prayers the dog offered to his master with his ears and eyes "... with his ears and his eyes he offered a small prayer to the child" reflect his identity as a slave. According to this statement, a slave is someone who should surrender to the teachings of his master and who should reward his owner's punishment with such practices that express his forgiveness and his merci.

In other words, a slave has no right to defend him-self once being beaten by his master. Thus, the dog's surrender before the harsh beats he received from the child could be interpreted by his awareness about the social norms of slavery in the US south. This knowledge concerning how a slave should behave in reaction to the anger of his master constitutes the dog's mental conception of the nature of the black/ white relations.

Moreover, the repetitive punishment the dog received could not push him to run away and to avoid living such a painful experience, which means that he is convinced he should accept his social reality. This acceptance is emphasized by the dog's pursuit of his master after the later finished punishing him. The statement – "he struggled to his feet and started after the child" – shows that the dog sticks to his owner despite the beats he has received. Then, the gerund "following" and the noun "pursuer" activate another important characteristic of the black slave's identity. He is the follower and not the leader. He has to follow the white master.

Thus, the characteristics the dog showed though his behavior in reaction to that of his owner reflect his mental conception of who a slave is and how he should behave as well as of who the white master is, and what are his predicted behaviors.

At home, the description of what the dog felt in addition to the description of the way he behaved stimulated different characteristics of the black identity and made of them obvious to the readers of the text. For instance, the shame the dog felt while reaching the child's home with the rope dragging from his neck could be interpreted by his desire to get rid of the marks of his first experience in order to show more loyalty to his new master "he became agitated with shame ...". This means that loyalty is one of the important characteristics that constitute the identity of a good slave.

A good slave should be loyal to his master and shows him respect so that he could be admitted as a member of his home. In addition, the dog's desire to please his master shows that a slave should also have the skills to entertain his master never the less he will not be welcomed as a good worker. The statement – "... the dog greatly exerted himself to please the child ..." highlights the efforts the dog made to please his master; thus, to be seen as a good slave. However, despite his efforts to please his master and to get the quality of a good slave, the dog felt afraid and terrorized by the harsh behaviors of his master. For example, the statement – "the engrossed child grew so energetic that the dog became panic-stricken" – reflects the state of panic in which the dog lives while being threatened by his owner.

At this level, another characteristic of the slave character is stressed; a good slave must fear his master. This characteristic is required to give the way to the master to control his slaves easily. After these feelings of fear and panic, the dog was rewarded by the affection of his master reflected through the big smile he showed while sitting down next to the dog "he beamed with affection upon his new friend". These soft feelings of pity ended by having the child and his dog close friends "in a short time they became firm and abiding comrades". Here, the nouns "friend" and the noun "comrades" determine the identity of a slave from the new black generation.

They became closer to their masters than ever before. To sum up, we can say that the dog's entry to his master's house activated some features of his identity the study of which shows that they vary on the basis of the variable of context.

With the arrival of the family, we notice the start of a new phase in the dog's life as a slave in the child's house. Indeed, the way the family members behaved towards the dog reflects their ways of thinking about blacks. Their ways of treating him reflect also their mental conception of who a slave is and how he should be dealt with. For instance, the dog was depicted by the fact of being disreputable "... to introduce a disreputable dog to the family". In their negative depiction of the dog, the family members might seek to highlight the mismatch between the reputation of the family and the reputation of the dog who will be a member of it. This implicit comparison makes clear how racial stereotypes work to construct who the white master is and who the black slave is.

Moreover, the sort of examination the family members made during their first meeting with the dog, the comments they articulated, and the names they used to call him highlight that from the early beginning the dog was not welcomed. Here, the family's rejection of the dog is a literary image the author used to draw a realistic picture of the blacks' social reality. Though the black slave is an American citizen in terms of his national identity, he is marginalized, rejected, and unwanted as a member of his society. Thus, the child's family represents a sample of the American society the study of

which is used to reflect how blacks are being identified by whites in the US society.

The examination of the family members' behaviors revealed that a slave is a strange and a disreputable individual that is unwanted to be a member of the American nation that is dominated by the white race.

After claiming to accept the dog as a member of the household, the impact of the variable of generation on the construction of the white identity and the black identity becomes clear. The difference between the parents' aggressive ways of treating the dog and the child's endeavor to rescue his slave shows a significant change in the conception of 'who a black slave is'. While the dog is defined by the family members as inferior and disreputable, the child defined him as a friend.

With the rise of the new white generation, blacks become more than slaves and workers; they are friends "the child became a guardian and a friend". This fact is justified by the sufferance the dog faced while the child is not at home and the sort of comfort he felt the moment the child is there.

For instance, the difference between the way the father treated this dog (punishing him till death) and the sympathy his son showed towards him resumes all changes in thoughts and behavior when it relates to the blacks' identification by the white masters. Thus, the identity of the dog as a symbol of a black slave varies in terms of definition from the generation of the fathers to the generation of their kids.

To sum up, the study of the character of the dog shows that the progress of the narrative contributed to the construction of the black identity. With each moment of the story the author formulates a new definition of who a slave is.

This definition is built through the construction of the structure of interaction between the dog and his white master to report to the reader a detailed idea about the dog's mental conception of himself and the whites' conception of who the dog is. Here, the personal image of who the dog is gets more and more obvious with the progress of the story. Also, we, as readers, could reach

a complete image of the dog's identity the moment we finish reading the whole text.

## The Child

The examination of the child's character shows that the various characteristics he activated along the text served for the construction of the identity of the white master. With reference to the progress of the narrative, the study of the child's character could be undertaken into two different phases: before the arrival of the family and after the arrival of the family.

Before the arrival of the family, the child is described as a master. He is the one who gives order; this is clear through the analysis of this textual proof "the child put out his hand and called him".

This statement shows that from the early moments of the meeting the child appeared to be conscious about the black/white relations of power. His mental awareness of the social norms of how a white should behave while interacting with blacks is a good explanation for his decision not to cross the street to join the dog and his act of calling the dog to join him.

The analysis of the child's action and decision revealed that he is the dominant party in the new relation to be established between him and the dog. In addition, the child is also depicted as a harsh young man. He used to address his dog with a sort of cruelty manifested in his physical punishment. Indeed, being a man of power is socially required among whites in order that they can be good masters and that they can own slaves "... the child lifted his hand and struck the dog a blow upon the head".

The analysis of this statement might show that physical punishment is part of the whites' culture while they are teaching their slaves. This explanation highlights the role of the social norms and the cultural traditions the child acquired from his community in the construction of his way of thinking about blacks as well as about how he should treat them.

Moreover, the child is portrayed as a leader. The characteristic of leadership he had manifested itself through the selection of words such as: "following" and "pursuer".

A statement like "... he discovered the little dark-brown dog that was following him ..." shows that the white child walks before his brown dog at the surface level of analysis. However, at the deep level of analysis this statement might imply that privilege is given to the white man to take the initiative and to lead.

Then, the analysis of the statement "the child beat his pursuer ..." reveals that the white man is the leader of the American society and that the black one is a mere pursuer of the whites' steps. Thus, the child's mental conception of himself as a white man manifests itself at the level of his behaviors and his ways of thinking about his new slave.

After the arrival of the family, the analysis of the child's behaviors shows a remarkable change in his ways of thinking about his new companion. This change in thought and behavior served in the construction of the child's social identity to be identified as a member of the new white generation. In reality, the construction of the child's social identity is the result of the changes occurring at the level of his personal identity.

For instance, regarding his family's harsh and cruel ways of treating the dog, the child becomes the dog's guardian and friend. This change in the nature of the relation between the child and his dog is clear at the level of this statement "the child became a guardian and a friend". The analysis of this statement shows that the use of the verb 'become' reflects a change from a past situation to a current situation. While the child appeared to be a cruel master who punishes his slave repetitively during the first contact, he become more and more close to his dog after having the animal as a member of the house hold.

At this second phase, the child's relation with his dog evolved positively with the progress of the family. The child, in fact, showed feelings of affection and sympathy culminating in the act of tearing "... the child had run, protesting loudly, with tears raining down his face ..."

The analysis of this statement highlights the sense of humanity the child expressed through his reactions towards the cruel treatment of his dog by members of his family. These feelings, indeed, help us draw

the image of this child as a caring, a sensitive, a sympathetic, and a compassionate master who shows merci to his slave the moment the latter is being threatened.

Thus, they shape the personal identity of this young child; however, by means of implication they reflect his social identity as a member of the new generation of white masters.

In brief, both the child's social identity and his personal identity are being produced and re-produced along the text of the story benefiting from the progress of the narrative. First, the child is identified as the harsh master, the strong leader, and the dominant party when the analysis is undertaken on the basis of the social division of the US society into two racial groups: whites and blacks.

Second, the child is referred to as the caring master, the soft leader, and the friendly owner when the analysis is underpinned on the basis of the comparison we made between the child's and his family's ways of thinking about and treating the dog. At this level, the notion of generation is the variable used to determine who the child is and who the new generation of white masters is.

In reality, the child's identity we drew from the first phase of our analysis is not in opposition with the child's identity we formulated in the second phase of our analysis. Instead, both of them reflect the identity of the white master; however, the second served in highlighting the difference between the white fathers and their sons as masters and slave owners. This difference becomes clearer with the analysis of how the identity of the family members is being constructed.

### **The Family Members**

The family's identity is determined collectively. The author of the text describes the reactions and behaviors of the family members as a group rather than separated individual.

However, he gave a special interest to the character of the father and to a lesser degree to the character of the wife whose role is very limited in the story.

### **The Family as a Group**

The analysis of the collective depiction of the family shows that its members have bad connotations towards the black slaves. These feelings of rejection and hatred culminate in their reactions while seeing the dog for the first time "... they made a great raw ... scorn was leveled from all eyes".

These two statements reflect the family members' rejection of the dog as well as their refusal to have him as a guest in their home. Also, they highlight the feelings of contempt and disdain the family members expressed towards this little dog. Here, the analysis of these two statements proves that the family members did not show compassion to their guest since they first met him.

Moreover, the family members are proved to be cruel towards the dog; they were used to treat him very badly. This cruelty in thought and behavior manifests itself at the level of statements like; 1) "the folk kicked the dog and threw things on him" and 2) they used gain a certain satisfaction in underfeeding him".

These two statements show that the folks have practiced all sorts of cruelty while treating the little dog. Indeed, the family members' cruelty could be interpreted by their mental conception of who they are as well as who the black slave is. The analysis of these mental images proves that the family members are deeply affected by the racist segregationist laws.

This sort of effect makes them behave in such a cruel way. These violent and pitiless ways of dealing with the opposite race is monitored by a social ideology that is shared among whites, the core principle of which is the unequal distribution of power between blacks and whites. In other words, the family the author depicted in his story represents a sample from the generation of the Pre-Jim Crow era.

In brief, the different sorts of characteristic the family members activated while dealing with the dog served in the construction of their social identity as part of the American white community, which is responsible for the legalization of slavery.

## The Father

The examination of the character of the father reveals that he activated different sorts of characteristics the study of which could determine who he is. The collected data reflected three kinds of identities by which he could be identified.

First, he is identified as a patriarch. He is the only person who has the power to declare if the dog will be accepted as a member of the household or not. After meeting his family members, he decided to have the dog as a member of their household without taking into consideration even the opinion of his wife as the real partner who has the right to decide upon how things should be monitored at home "... when he perceived that it would amaze and anger everybody if such a dog were allowed to remain, he decided that it should be so".

The analysis of the quoted statement highlights that the father's decision was personal. Moreover, the fact of identifying the father as a patriarch manifests itself also at the level of the way he behaved towards his wife, which is detected at the level of these two statements: 1) "... the father quelled a fierce rebellion with his wife" and 2) "he came and held a carnival with cooking utensils, the furniture and his wife". While the first statement shows that the father has a great power on his family where even internal resistance is stopped and defeated, the second statement highlights that the father's mental conception of what is meant by being a patriarch materializes itself via his violent behavior towards his wife and his households. Thus, the father is personal identity as a patriarch is the embodiment of his social identity as a man who belongs to a white group where patriarchy is the dominant ideology.

Second, the father is identified as a cruel white master. He is cruel because he treats his slave without pity. This sort of pitiless behaviors manifest themselves linguistically through the selection of items like "knocked, kicked, and killed". The chronology of these verbs reflects that the rate of violence is in a continual increase. It started with a heavy coffee-pot knock and it ended by the death of the dog towards the end of the story. Under these cruel actions, the dog suffered intensely "it caused the dog to swerve".

However, despite the dog's sufferance, the father did not show any kind of sympathy and did not put an end to his cruelty. Instead, he continued his punishments till the death of the little dog. Indeed, the father's cruelty culminates in the fact of using torture as a source of getting pleasure where the domination of his desire for fun served to report to the outer world what was internalized at the level of his mind.

Thus, the ways the father treated the little brown dog in the moment of being heavily drunk served in the construction of his social identity as a member of the Pre-Jim Crow era of white masters as well as his personal identity as a slave owner. The constructed identities in their turn represent a good interpretation of the father's mental conception of who the black slave is, who the white master is, and how the white master should treat his slaves.

Third, he is depicted as a careless father. He is careless because he does not respect his children's emotions. For instance, he did not pay attention to the cries of his young child who has no power to rescue his friend except crying to make his father feel pity and stop kicking his dog "the father of the family paid no attention to these calls of the child".

The analysis of this quote shows that the father's desire towards violence dominated the scene. This strong desire towards violence made of the father's feelings of fatherhood absent. The absence of these feelings culminates in the child's fear from his father's cruel behaviors "he dived under the table, where experience has taught him was a rather safe place".

This quote implies that the father is used to be violent to the extent that his child becomes aware about where the safe place is. Here, the father's relation with his child played a significant role in the construction of his personal identity as a motionless father who is proved to treat his son in such a violent way. Briefly, the father's relation with his child could be a good interpretation of his mental conception of who the son is, who the father is, and how he should treat his children.

To sum up, the father's mental conception of who a father is, who a husband is, who a

master is, and how he should behave as a father, a husband, and a master served to shape and reshape his relation with his wife, his son, and the dog. The materialization of the father's conception of his three social roles in the form of actions he performed served in the construction of his social identity and his personal identity along the text of the story.

He is proved to be a patriarch through the analysis of his relation with his wife, a cruel master via the critique of his relation with the newly coming dog, and a careless father when his relation to his child is being questioned. These three facets of the father's personal identity complete each other to draw a complete understanding of the identity of the white American man during that era.

### The Wife

The character of the child's mother is referred to briefly. She appeared twice in the text of the story. On the first time she is referred to while depicting how the father behaved to end her fierce rebellion. At this time, she is depicted as a rebellious woman who shows resistance to the domination of a patriarch husband. She has no power to take part in the decision-making process concerning such family issues, but she did not surrender and did not show agreement to her husband's decisions.

Instead, she showed a strong resistance to his male domination. However, on the second time she appeared on the object position. At this time, she and her house furniture were the objects of the verbs the subject of which is her patriarch husband. The day the father got back home heavily drunk, she was deeply harmed by the carnival he held there. Here, the wife is depicted in the position of weakness; she has no power to protect herself and her furniture from the violence of her husband.

Thus, the description of the wife's behaviors in reaction to her husband's personal decisions and violent behaviors served for the construction of her personal identity as a male dominated woman who has a great tendency towards disobedience and rebellion. This wife's behaviors might be a good interpretation for her mental conception of who a wife is, who a husband is, and how they should behave while interacting with

each others in the social context of patriarchy.

### Conclusion

The present paper offered a multi-disciplinary discussion to the issue of identity construction in Crane's short story, *A Dark Brown Dog*. It started from the formulation of a workable definition of the term of identity as a multi-dimensional concept that is supposed to vary from one social context to another. The dynamic nature of the notion of identity is stressed in that it helps us determine the role social context plays in shaping and reshaping the characters' behaviors in their societies.

To study how these behaviors serve for the revelation of the characters' mental conception of who the self is and who the other is, the paper used a simple methodology which is based on the collection and analysis of the different variables that can determine who each character is.

These variables are defined as the different characteristics of the self and the other the characters activated while interacting along the text of the story. The analysis of the collected data led to the formulation of several conclusions.

The analysis of the text of the story shows that the notion of identity is being constructed with the progress of the narrative. With the evolution of the narrative, the characters performed different roles the examination of which determined their understanding of their identities and their relations with each others. The analysis of these roles reveals that the characters of the story activated different sorts of personal identities for each of them. However, the social identity of characters from both social groups (whites and blacks) is proved to be determined by the social and the cultural norms that monitor the white/black relations.

Thus, we can say that the characters have a static part of their identity manifests in their belonging to the white or black race and a dynamic part determined by their roles in their societies like husband, father, son, master, wife, freed slave, and new slave.

In fact, even the static part of the characters' identities as black or white is proved to vary

from one generation to another. The comparison between how the white fathers are used to think about and to treat the black slaves is quite different from how their children do. While the white fathers are described as cruel and violent masters, their children are proved to be friendly and less cruel. Moreover, the change of the characters' racial identities across generations is also detected at the level of the blacks' physical appearances marked by the change of the skin color from black to dark brown.

The change from a dark color (black) to a lighter color (dark brown) is highly symbolic to reflect the shrinking of the gap between both races: the whites and the blacks. Indeed, the symbolism of the gap reduction is socially and legislatively defended by the Jim Crow laws, which are based on the separate but equal status.

During this era, the white and the black characters are supposed to be equal as citizens of the US; however, they are separate from each other. This change at the level of race relations is concrete at the level of both behaviors and thoughts. In reality, these behaviors and thoughts are monitored by the characters' conception of the social context they live in.

As far as social context is concerned, the notion of identity is proved to vary from one setting to another. The characters' personal identities are determined by the roles they

play at each single moment of the time line of the story. However, their social identity is determined by the general context of slavery in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Thus, the characters' social identities and personal identities are determined by their mental conceptions of the social context in which they live. These mental images of the self and the other in the situation of acting are proved to be deeply rooted in the social and cultural norms that govern the white/black relations in the American south.

To sum up, the study of how the notion of identity is being constructed in Crane's story reveals that people's identity is an elastic concept that stretches in scope to encompass all variables they activated while interacting along the text to say who they are. The variables they activated are monitored by their mental conception of the social context they live in and the cultural norms and traditions that govern the black/white relations.

In other words; the characters' performance of each role in the story is determined by their conception of the social ideology that determines the rules of that role. Thus, identity is something in the mind. It is constructed at the level of the mind before being expressed in the form of thoughts or enacted in the form of behaviors. This means that to draw a full picture of 'who the character under investigation is', we need simply to undertake an in-depth critique of the character's thoughts and behaviors.

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