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## “LET THEM DREAM OF LIFE ETERNAL, WE SHALL LIVE IT”: GEORGE R. R. MARTIN’S FEVRE DREAM, SLAVERY AND VAMPIRES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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**Resumo:** *Fevre Dream* é um romance de horror histórico publicado por George R.R. Martin em 1982.

Apesar de ser frequentemente ignorado pelo estudos acadêmicos da obra de Martin, trata-se de um romance importante não apenas porque é nele que o autor definitivamente abraça a *darkfantasy*, mas também porque nele o vampirismo é usado como instrumento de forte crítica social. Este artigo analisa como o sistema escravagista é descrito em *Fevre Dream* em associação com memórias de escravidão e o vampirismo, e vem estruturado em quatro seções que enfocam, respectivamente, as memórias de escravidão produzidas nos EUA depois do século XIX; Abner Marsh, o protagonista; a dicotomia entre as forças vampíricas opostas representadas por Joshua York e Damon Julian; e o status dos personagens negros no romance.

**Palavras-chave:** George R.R. Martin; *Fevre Dream*; Vampiros; Escravidão.

**Abstract:** *Fevre Dream* is a historical horror novel published by George R.R. Martin in 1982. Despite being frequently overlooked by scholarship on Martin's oeuvre, it is an important novel not only because in it the author definitely embraces dark fantasy, but also because it uses vampirism as a tool for strong social criticism. This article describes how the slavery system is depicted in *Fevre Dream* in association with memories of slavery and vampirism, and it is structured in four sections: slavery memories produced in the United States after the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Abner Marsh, the protagonist; the dichotomy between the opposite vampiric forces represented by Joshua York and Damon Julian; and the status of the black characters in the novel.

**Keywords:** George R.R. Martin; *Fevre Dream*; Vampires; Slavery.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

American author George R. R. Martin is internationally recognized for his *tour de force* *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which has been the object of comprehensive academic studies for the past decades. While this is beneficial to both his readership/fandom and for academia itself – the complex richness one encounters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is not only unquestionable, but also an invitation for reflection and academic discussion – studies pertaining to Martin's work tend to be limited to this particular series. Martin has been a professional writer since 1970, circulating in genres such as science fiction and horror, and this article intends to increase scholarship on his oeuvre by focusing on *Fevre Dream*, a 1982 historical horror novel set in nineteenth-century United States of America. Scholarly readings of *Fevre Dream* are not just important because they shed light on the novel itself, but also in the sense that in *Fevre Dream* Martin embraces dark fantasy, thus laying the groundwork for his *magnum opus*, particularly its first novel, *A Game of Thrones*. (HOWE, 2017, p.81)

The context that serves as backbone for the novel is characterized by the presence of slavery as a central theme of public debate and the source of a domestic disagreement, seeing that while Southern states relied heavily on slavery as a work/domination system, the north was the setting of significant industrial growth and did not allow slavery. Broadly speaking, Martin denounces the horrors of the Civil War (1861-1865) and violence in his novel, and in this article we shall describe how the slavery system is depicted in *Fevre Dream* in association with both memories of slavery and vampirism.

The plot presents the story of Abner Marsh, a steamboat captain gone bankrupt who receives a proposal to establish a partnership with Joshua York, a rich gentleman of weird habits. Joshua pays for Abner's golden dream, namely, a ship called *Fevre Dream* that is supposed to be the fastest ship on the Mississippi river. Despite York's financing, Abner still sees his partner with suspicion due to his strange manners and nocturnal habits. The conflict between the two is established when Abner discovers in York's room newspaper clippings about numerous deaths surrounded by mystery. Upon such discovery, York feels compelled to reveal to Marsh that he is a vampire whose objective is to reconcile the race of vampires and humankind through the adoption of a potion York had invented that quenches the vampires' thirst for blood without the need of killing humans. York is the bloodmaster, or leader, of a group of vampires who have agreed to give up preying of human beings.

In parallel to the Marsh-York plot, the reader is introduced to Damon Julian, an ancient vampire who is the bloodmaster in a vampire farm, and Billy Tipton, the foreman in Julian's farm. Julian is a predatory sort of vampire whose cruelty becomes blatant from the very beginning of the novel: in his first appearance he orders Billy to buy a slave girl so that he and his friends may feast on her by draining her blood until her death. Despite not having been converted, Billy is as cruel as his master, and his greatest desire is to become a vampire, which allows the educated vampire-story reader to identify in Julian and Damon a similar dynamic to that between Count Dracula and Renfield in Bram Stoker's 1897 classic vampire novel.

As the plot of *Fevre Dream* unfolds, Joshua and Julian are presented as two completely opposite vampiric forces – whereas

the former is diplomatic and tries to spare both humans and vampires, the latter is essentially predatory and evil, and it is the clash between their two visions that enables the plot to unfold. The analysis of the novel presented here is divided into four sections: one focusing on slavery memories produced in the United States after the nineteenth century, another one emphasizing the lead character Abner Marsh, a third section on the dichotomy between Joshua York and Damon Julian, and the last one on the status of the black characters in the novel.

## 2. MEMORIES OF SLAVERY

Before plunging into Martin's novel, it is important to present some relevant aspects in the discussion of the memory of the confederates, as well as the place of slavery in the confederate frame of mind. The American Civil War (1861 – 1865) was, among other things, a war fought because of African slavery in the USA, and “[a]ll other justifications come down to political differences, reflecting the social and cultural gulf between the free and slave states that might have been bridged if not for the deeply divisive issue of slavery.” (DAVIS, 1996, p.xix-xx) As a result, the Southern states, whose workforce in plantations was essentially slave, formed the Confederation and refused to accept the election of Abraham Lincoln, whose agenda was anti-slavery. That does not necessarily mean Lincoln and his supporters were abolitionists; instead, they intended to prevent slavery from expanding, which would eventually cause its natural end (ÁVILA, 2010, p.64), and that was the main reason for the conflict, which culminated in the Union victory, and the (supposedly) definitive end of slavery. It is

noteworthy that the association between the horrors of vampirism and those of slavery that *Fevre Dream* posits is strengthened in the horror mash-up fad from the early 2010s through *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (Seth Grahame-Smith, 2010), which depicts Lincoln as a double epitome of the pursuit of freedom.

In the years that followed the south's defeat, there was a gradual building of a pro-confederate memory, which identified the antebellum Southern life with a romantic ideal featuring a society in which hierarchy was respected and that ultimately suffered Northern intrusion in Southern matters. Those notions made slavery virtually invisible in a context in which Southern slaveholders rejected the rebuilding of the south in the Northern model promoted by the Congress, and that rebuilding included some civil rights to black people.

This ideology, which sees the Civil War as an "aggression" towards the south, is known as *The Lost Cause*, and is largely present in many cultural manifestations, especially until the 1960s, a time during which the Jim Crow laws were in force. In practical terms, the Jim Crow system was based on segregation, and it determined that "[i]n every aspect of life—eating, sleeping, traveling, learning—black Americans were treated as second-class citizens in a country that had gone to war over their fate." (DAVIS, 1996, p.451) The Lost Cause imagery is characterized by the presentation of the south as an idyllic place, where slaves appear either as loyal to their masters, who always treated them with respect, or as vengeful subversive rebels undeserving of the kindness they had received from their owners. Onscreen fiction has contributed towards the perpetuation of this imagery through movies such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and *Cold Mountain* (2003), to mention a few (FERREIRA, 2010).

The idea of the Civil War as a moment when brothers turned out on each other because of radicalism, thus dragging the nation into dark times, is reinforced by the cultural industry, the building of statues of Southern generals as a form of tribute, homages to the Confederate flag, and its uses as a symbol of support to the Southern cause (ÁVILA, 2010). Even though such manifestations have decreased since the 1960s, they happen still today and contribute to the building of the *Confederate memory*, that is, the set of ideas and perceptions in North American history that emerged after the Civil War marked by the idealization of the Southern way of life and the depletion of the role of slavery in both the maintenance of such way of life and the beginning of the Civil War.

### 3. ABNER MARSH, THE PROTAGONIST

It is through Abner Marsh's eyes or thought that the reader is introduced to some representations of slavery in *Fevre Dream*. Firstly, it is important to highlight that Abner occupies a heroic position in the story. The character is built as someone who is morally good within the circumstances, which makes him an overall likable character. In his first conversation with York we see the following dialogue,

"You need my money, Captain," York said. "Why are you telling me this? Aren't you afraid I will find another partner?"

"I don't work that way," Marsh said. "Been on the river thirty years, York. Rafted down to New Orleans when I was just a boy, and worked flatboats and keelboats both before steamers. I been a pilot and a mate and a striker, even a mud clerk. Been everything there is to be in this business, but one thing I never been, and that's a sharper."

“An honest man” (...) (MARTIN, 2012, p.12)

From the very beginning, Abner Marsh is portrayed as a man of noble character, albeit not necessarily perfect. He is malicious enough to survive in his area of business and to maintain his involvement with slavery-related issues to a bare minimum. This is important, inasmuch as he will later on establish a relationship with black characters that will ultimately affect his views on slavery itself. Furthermore, his nobility of character will be enhanced when juxtaposed to the vampiric monstrosity Julian poses.

It is now time to look at Abner’s interactions with black characters. After a first appearance of some black waiters whom he completely ignores (MARTIN, 2012, p.2), the Captain thinks about his position regarding the abolitionist movement, with a direct reference to a historical character:

But York’s eyes had drained him of his bluster. The man was a fanatic, Marsh decided. He had seen eyes like that before, in madmen and hell-raising preachers and once in the face of a man called John Brown, down in Bleeding Kansas. Marsh wanted nothing to do with fanatics, with preachers and abolitionists and temperance people (MARTIN, 2012, p.4)

John Brown was a North American abolitionist who lived between 1800 and 1859. After his first contact with a slave – a boy about his own age who was “badly clothed, poorly fed...& beaten.... With Iron Shovels or any other thing that came first to hand” (DAVIS, 1996, p.131), Brown swore eternal war with Slavery. Years later, he went to Kansas – one of the slavery epicenters in the south – formed a militia that aimed at releasing slaves, and



he quickly gained the reputation of a ruthless leader capable of murdering if needed. Brown intended to gather the released slaves and form with them a black nation in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, and to do so he believed he needed the arsenal held in the small town of Harpers Ferry, Kansas. The break-in led him to hold hostages, and when Brown was surrounded by enemies he did not have the support the thought he would (despite his oratory talents, which Abner Marsh attests to in the previous passage). Eventually Brown was arrested, convicted and executed, and the whole episode became known as *Bleeding Kansas*. He died in 1859, two years before the Civil War.

The appropriation of John Brown in Martin's novel is a tool to help us understand Abner Marsh's initial views on slavery. The comparison between an abolitionist and religious fanatics reinforces in Abner's mind that one should not get involved with abolitionist ideas, particularly if one is a decent man. Despite Abner's early lack of engagement and enthusiasm, he is aware of the hardships black people must endure, and is indeed surrounded by some of them, such as Toby Lanyard, a member of the Fevre Dream's crew who eventually becomes a recurrent character and is introduced to the reader as follows: "The cook was a free colored man named Toby Lanyard, who had been with Marsh fourteen years, ever since Marsh tasted his cooking down in Natchez, bought him and gave him his freedom" (MARTIN, 2012, p.40).

Even though he is acting within the slave logic and does not challenge the system – as opposed to the "radicals" he dislikes – Abner buys a slave only to free him. Of course, the reasons for that may be beyond mere benevolence or even the bending of a

protagonist's morals before the eyes of the contemporary reader. Although different explanations are possible, Abner's sympathy towards Toby is a textually-supported hypothesis, as the next sections will show.

When the *Fevre Dream* is in New Orleans, descriptions of slavery intensify. In one of them, the black presence in the city is emphasized, including in the productive sectors. This sort of comment had been absent in the novel up to this point. There are also recurrent descriptions of the brutality slaves are treated with, and when Abner is the one who vocalizes them (in this case, a comparison between slaves and cattle regarding their transportation on ships), we are reminded that Abner is an actor of his own time and context, so his criticism to racism is limited:

"I don't like it none," Marsh complained to Jonathon Jeffer. "It ain't clean. And I tell you, I won't have none of it on the *Fevre Dream*. Nobody is goin' to stink up my boat with that kind of stuff, you hear?"

Jeffers gave him a worry look of appraisal. "Why, Cap'n, if we don't traffic in slaves, we stand to lose a pile of money. You're sounding like an abolitionist."

"I ain't no damned abolitionist," Marsh said hotly, "but I mean what I said. If a gentleman wants to bring a slave of two along, servants and such, that's fine. I'll take 'em cabin passage or deck passage, don't matter none to me. But we ain't going to take 'em as freight, all chained up by some goddamned trader." (MARTIN, 2012, p.157)

To the contemporary critical reader, the passage above may pose a contradiction. Right after admitting that people could be transported in the *Fevre Dream* as slaves, Marsh is accused by

Jeffers of sounding like an abolitionist. However, this apparent contradiction evidences the limit of the nineteenth-century abolitionism when it comes to racism. Marsh is not accused of being an abolitionist because he said that black people and white people deserved to be treated equally, but only to oppose the extreme violence. A symptom of that is the fact that Abner quickly denies his friend's accusation and resorts to an element from the "lost cause" memory, as if transporting slaves "cabin passage or deck passage" would make the overall situation softer, less violent and dehumanizing. Therefore, he wouldn't be bothered by slaves aboard his ship, provided that they retain a domestic quality. This flagrant moral flaw in the protagonist and the hero of the story is neither irrelevant nor accidental, considering that Marsh's encounter with York – a "sympathetic vampire" (HOWE, 2017) – and his involvement with the vampire plot will alter his perception of human relations, and that naturally includes slavery. Marsh represents the trope of the *gray character*, which, as Martin himself explains, fascinates him and is recurrent in his oeuvre,

I'm attracted to 'gray' characters, characters who are not what they seem, characters who change. I think that's the most interesting part of fiction, and a lot of fantasy doesn't have that. Too many characters are black and white, and everybody's fighting a Dark Lord. I just wasn't interested in writing that kind of thing. Having multiple viewpoints is crucial to the grayness of the characters. You have to be able to see the struggle from both sides because real human beings in a war have all these processes of self-justification, telling ourselves why what we're doing is the right thing. Nobody except in a cartoon says, 'I'm the

Dark Lord, and now I'm going out to do Evil Things.' We are the Gray Lords! And of course, you see that in real-world struggles throughout history. George Bush thinks he's right, Osama bin Laden thinks he's right, and they each think the other side is the bad guy. So you need a multiplicity of viewpoints to present any conflict that's going to be more than a cartoon one.(MARTIN, 2005)

Marsh's racism serves a purpose here, namely, to make the reader question his morals and qualities. Thus, slavery becomes more of a social disease capable of affecting even the most decent and likable characters, which would make them gray, rather than black or white. This argument will be revisited in the following section, in the discussion of the differences between the vampires, Joshua York and Damon Julian.

Despite the efforts to make Abner Marsh a man of his own time, the novel does not corroborate any memory that defames abolitionism or lightens slavery. It becomes clear right after the first half of the book when Abner embraces for once a radical position against slavery. This is important because it is when the character has just gone through a striking experience: his friend/business associate Joshua York revealed himself as a vampire and tells him that humans are called "cattle" by his folk. After that revelation, Abner can tell how it feels like to be seen as inferior and having his humanity taken from him. Immediately after that conversation with York he tells Toby Lanyard:

- You know I never held much with slavery, even if I never done much against it neither. I would of, but those damned abolitionists were such Bible-thumpers. Only I been thinkin', and it seems to

me maybe they was right after all. You can't just go... usin' another kind of people, like they wasn't people at all. Know what I mean? Got to end, sooner or later. Better if it ends peaceful, but it's got to end even if it has to be with fire and blood, you see? Maybe that's what them abolitionists been sayin' all along. You try to be reasonable, that's only right, but if it don't work, you got to be ready. Some things is just wrong. They got to be ended. (MARTIN, 2012, p.239)

Despite being arguably a lot more decent than most of the Southern folk he was surrounded by, Abner Marsh was initially oblivious, narrow-minded and distant regarding a coesocial matter. His previous views were altered after the existence of vampires is brought to his attention; the threat to his existence as a human being provides him with the chance to develop empathy, which becomes clearer in his comment about his participation in the Civil War:

It took away a great deal of blood, Marsh reflected afterward, bitterly. He seldom spoke about the war, or his experiences in it, and had little patience with those who fought the battles over and over again. "There was a war", he would say loudly. "We won. Now, it's done with, and I don't see why we got to yammer about it endlessly like it was something to be proud of. Only good thing come out of it was endin' slavery. The rest I got no use for. (MARTIN, 2012, p.396)

#### 4. A CLASH OF VAMPIRES: JOSHUA YORK AND DAMON JULIAN

As far the vampire spectrum is concerned, Joshua York and Damon Julian are diametrically opposed. They both represent interesting vampire tropes – the former is the *sympathetic*

vampire, such as Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows*, Louis in Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire* and Edward Cullen in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, whereas the latter stands for the predatory epitome of evil whose most important example is Count Dracula. Nonetheless, another layer of understanding to this dichotomy is possible, one that transcends literary tropes and that is directly related to different views on racial prejudice: on the one hand, York symbolizes everything the Civil Rights Movement had been trying to achieve – equality, mutual respect and a way to deal with cultural and historical differences; on the other hand, Julian's predatory, blood-thirsty vampirism symbolizes the defense of segregation and the notion that one race is superior to another.

Damon Julian is not only a supremacist, but he also does not have any concerns with human suffering. The house where he lives in the beginning of the novel used to belong to a slave master who was fooled by Damon; not only does the vampire kill his entire family, but he also reclaims ownership to the property, including the slaves. Julian also allows foreman Billy Tipton to treat the slaves violently, which is graphically represented by a cruel punishment scene of two runaway slaves. In addition, Damon is a supporter of the notion of the “night people” superiority, as vampires call themselves. One of his speeches can be seen as a clear metaphor for the racist ideas of the United States in the context in which the novel's action happens. He says:

“Ah, poor Joshua,” He said. He sipped his brandy. “Let the cattle create-life, beauty, what you Will. And we shall take their creations, use them, destroy them if we choose. That is the way of it. We are the masters. Masters do not labor. Let them make

the suits. We shall wear them. Let them build the steamboats. We shall ride upon them. Let them dream of life eternal. We shall live it, and drink their lives, and savor the blood. We are the lords of this earth, and that's our heritage. Our destiny, if you will, dear Joshua. Exult in your nature, Joshua, do not seek to change it. Those cattle who truly know us envy us. Any of them would be as we are, given the choice." Julian smiled maliciously. "Have you ever wondered why this Jesus Christ of theirs bid his followers to drink his blood if they would live forever?" He chuckled. "They burn to be like us, just as the darkies dream of being white. You see how far they go. To play at being masters, they even enslave their own kind."(MARTIN, 2012, p.247)

The above mentioned quote reveals that Julian is simultaneously cruel and a racist. Both Julian and Marsh reflect upon the racial issues human beings deal with, but while the captain indicates in the beginning that he does not necessarily believe in the supremacy of a given race, Julian rationalizes the whole situation and still considers himself superior, utilizing allegedly legitimate arguments to which he sadly finds social support. This is reinforced by his remarks on the social conflicts caused by slavery: "You see? Even your abolitionists admit the dark races are inferior. They would have no patience with a slave trying to pretend to being white, and they would be disgusted if a white man should drink a potion in order to turn black. (...)" (MARTIN, 2012, p.346).

Once again, there is a comparison between conflicts – humans and vampires, white people and black people, this time from Julian's racist perception. Interestingly, once again the abolitionist movement has its flaws and limits pointed, and Julian's argument

somehow echoes that of British historian Robin Blackburn. According to him, the majority of the abolitionists were so because of their views about the country's development, but they did not oppose to slavery outside the USA (BLACKBURN, 1988).

A foil to Damon Julian, Joshua York adopts a reconciling attitude by defending that humans and vampires may coexist harmoniously, thus suggesting a level of equality between humans and vampires. He is also a critic of slavery – not only extreme violent acts, but also the mere notion that one human being may be objectified and become another human being's property. This is exemplified by his explanation for his dislike of New Orleans:

"I have a bad feeling, Abner. This city – the heat, the bright colors, the smells, the slaves – it is very alive, this New Orleans, but inside, I think it is rotten with sickness. (...) You wander through the St. Louis and cast your eyes upon all that marble and that delightful dome with the light pouring through it down onto the rotunda, and then you learn it is a famous slave mart where humans are sold like cattle."(MARTIN, 2012, p.158)

Selling slaves is core within the slavery system. People are property, therefore they may be bought or sold. There is no logical way in which Joshua could be against the selling of human beings without criticizing the whole system. Even though he is not an advocate of equal human rights (his reclusion and status as a vampire are hindrances in that sense), he surely displays an abolitionist's mind. York subsequently makes himself more explicit, which enhances his status as a sympathetic vampire and allows Abner Marsh to reconsider his positions. Here are York's words:



and here in New Orleans I have witnessed the way you enslave your own kind, whip them and sell them like animals simply because of the darkness of their skin. The black people are closer to you, more kin, than ever my kind can be. You can even get children of their women, while no such interbreeding is possible between night and day. (MARTIN, 2012, p.2010)

From the moment he explains his origins and motivations, Joshua York can be seen as an antagonist of the slave system and also of the alleged superiority of the night people in relation to humans. The analogy makes itself each time clearer: those that refuse the enslaving of humanity as a whole will also refuse to enslave a part of it.

## 5. BLACK CHARACTERS

Even though *Fevre Dream* displays a sophisticated, metaphorical criticism to the slave system, it lacks the perspective of those who are, in the context of the novel, liable to objectification and enslavement. The reader has access to how Abner Marsh, Joshua York and Damon Julian feel about the issue, but there are very few passages that reveal how black characters feel about their condition.

The only recurrent black character is Toby Lanyard, but a few more make shorter appearances: slaves Emily, Sam, and Lily appear as named individuals, while numerous nameless black people represent different collectivities, such as a group of shoremen who live in the Gray farm. Firstly, let us discuss Emily, Sam, and Lily, for they share many characteristics.

Emily is a slave who appears in the second chapter of the novel, the first one narrated from Billy Tipton's perspective. She is bought

by Julian's foreman in a public sale and taken to the vampire's farm. This is the first time we see the vampires in action, culminating in the death of Emily, who serves as their prey. Emily is depicted as a scared girl in pain, and she mostly does not react to the things that happen around her, be it when she is being sold, be it at Julian's farm.

Sam and Lily appear in the sixth chapter, the second narrated by Billy Tipton. Both are slaves who had escaped from Julian's farm two years before and who have now been brought back by slave hunters. After they are returned, they witness their captors being murdered by vampires and go back to being captives, probably to be devoured in the following days. They merely disappear, but Emily's destiny is a sufficient hint to what may have happened to them. Therefore, the three slaves are present in only a few scenes and they eventually fall prey to villainous characters who are not only lethal and cruel, but also supporters of the slave system. The three slaves are represented as yielding, fearful and they ultimately fail to survive.

Toby Lanyard's is a different case, though. The cook is bought and freed by Marsh and becomes a recurrent character. Three of Toby's passages deserve an analysis. The first is a dialogue between Marsh and Toby, in which the latter points out the former is talking about abolitionism, and how dangerous that might be.

"You know I never held much with slavery, even if I never done much against it neither. I would of, but those damned abolitionists were such Bible-thumpers. Only I been thinkin', and it seems to me maybe they was right after all. You can't just go... usin' another kind of people, like they wasn't people at all. Know what I mean? Got to end, sooner

or later. Better if it ends peaceful, but it's got to end even if it has to be with fire and blood, you see? Maybe that's what them abolitionists been sayin' all along. You try to be reasonable, that's only right, but if it don't work, you got to be ready. Some things is just wrong. They got to be ended."

Toby was looking at him queerly, still absent-mindedly wiping his hands across the front of his apron, back and forth, back and forth. "Cap'n," he said softly, "you istalkin' abolition. This here is slave country, Cap'n. You could git kilt fo' sech talk."

"Maybe I could, Toby, but right is right, that's what I say."

"You done good by ol' Toby, Cap'n Marsh, givin' me my freedom and all so's I could cook fo' you. That you did."(MARTIN, 2012, p.239)

The second chosen passage starts with York and Marsh's decision to take Fevre Dream to Julian's old farm. Toby then feels the need to approach the Captain, considering that the farm was famous among black people for the violent deaths slaves invariably had there. Toby says:

"You done give me my freedom and all, jest fercookin' fer you. But some of them other niggers, the stokers and sech, they won't lissen to Jeb and me here 'bout what a fine man you is. They's scared, and likely to run off. The boy at supper tonight, he heard you and Cap'n York a-talkin' about goin' down to this Cypress place, and now all the niggers istalkin'."

"What?" Marsh said. "You never been down here before, neither of you. What's Cypress Landing to you?"

"Nuthin' a-tall," Jeb said. "But some of these other niggers heard of it. There's stories 'bout this place,

Cap'n. Bad stories. All the niggers run off from that place, cause of things went on there. Terrible things, Cap'n, jest terrible." (MARTIN, 2012, p.162)

Right afterwards Marsh decides to take the situation to Joshua York, who receives Toby and Jeb. The latter says:

They think you's one of them," Jeb put in. "You and you friends, lurin' us down there to the others, like it were. Them stories say those folks there don't come out by day, and you's the same, Cap'n, jest the same. Course, me and Toby knows better, but not them others."(MARTIN, 2012, p.163)

The manipulation of identities is noteworthy here. Both characters are black and free men. Because they are somehow close to the captain, they become spokesmen on behalf of all the black members of the crew. Nonetheless, they distance themselves from their fellow black crew members, for both Toby and Jeb "know better". Such distance is a suggestion of the irrational (and fully justifiable, as the reader knows) character of these people's fears. If neither Jeb nor Toby is really worried about going to Cypress Landing, why bring the matter to the captain's attention?

In the third passage, Abner meets Toby again after many years. During that time, the *Fevre Dream* was taken by Damon Julian, and while Toby helped Marsh escape, he could not help himself to do so. In this next quote, Marsh is trying to free Toby from Julian and Billy Tipton tries to stop them:

Sour Billy Tipton stopped too, staring. "What the hell you doing up here, nigger?" he snapped.

Toby didn't look at him. He stood there in a frayed brown suit, his hands clasped behind his back,

head bowed, scuffing one boot nervously against the deck.

“I said, what the hell you doing here, nigger?” Sour Billy said dangerously. “Why ain’t you chained up in the kitchen? You gimme an answer now, or you’re goin’ to be one sorry nigger.”

“Chained!” Marsh roared.

At that Toby Lanyard finally raised his head, and nodded. “Mister Billy says I is a slave again, never mind I got no freedom papers. He chains us all up when we ain’tworkin.(MARTIN, 2012, p.352)

At this point the novel presents one of the major problems freedmen have to undergo during slavery times: re-enslavement. Tipton’s treatment towards Toby reinforces the systematic violence and constant insecurity that haunted black people at that time, even if they had been freed and had their freedom papers to prove. Despite all hardships, Toby seems to have a happy ending, for after eventually escaping the ship he finds a job and moves north two years before the beginning of the Civil War. Toby is simply not mentioned in the novel after this.

As mentioned previously, black people appear as collectivities in *Fevre Dream*. The plot unfolds from 1859 to 1870, which means that the final years of the antebellum period are covered, and so are the war years and the official ending of slavery in the USA. The beginning of the novel is predominantly set in Southern states, and the descriptions of places and cities are pervaded by the presence of non-individualized black people who undergo overwhelming violence, as well as physical and verbal abuse.

When Toby and Jeb bring to the captain their concern about going to Cypress Landing, they use the phrase “the black people”.

Every character in this scene has the vision that black people are superstitious, even though Toby and Jeb try to present themselves differently. They think they believe in unreliable monster stories, and that they are letting themselves be led by irrational fear. But if Toby and Jeb claim to “know better”, the reader knows even better than the two of them – indeed, they have good reason to be afraid, for all the stories about the farm are true. Consequently, these individuals, who endure terrible social conditions and disbelief about their overall capabilities, are still wiser than more articulate and educated people from supposedly different classes.

This atavistic fear is justified when we analyze the final section of the novel, the one that focuses on the postwar years. The following passage describes Abner Marsh observing freed black men at work in the year 1868:

He stood with his arms folded against his chest, looking gruff and stern in his severe black coat, and he watched the roustabouts load her up. The roustabouts were black, every man among them. That was another change. All the roustabouts on the river were blacks now. The immigrants who'd worked as roustabouts and stokers and deckers before the war were gone, Marsh didn't know where, and the freedmen had taken their places.

As they worked, the roustabouts sung. Their song was a low, melancholy chant. The night is dark, the day is long, it went. And we are far from home. Weep, my brothers, weep. Marsh knew the chant. There was another verse, one that went, The night is past, the long day done, And we are going home. Shout, my brothers, shout. But they were not singing that verse. (MARTIN, 2012, p.398-399)

It is clear that even though abolition had occurred a few years before, the destiny awaiting many black people is not social ascension or any form of atonement. They still have tough jobs, live in poor conditions and remain suffering. With the exception of Toby Lanyard (whose ending is open, after all), the black characters in *Fevre Dream* are not entitled to a happy ending, just like the majority of the former slaves.

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Fevre Dream* delivers a critique of the notion that slavery was a soft exploration of labor, or that there was any kind of parental relationship between masters and slaves. The subject is treated very emphatically, and the main tool for criticism employed in the novel is the vampire: despite their supernatural characters, Joshua York and Damon Julian represent human stances about slavery, racial bigotry and social prejudice. In doing so, they display their moral character in general. Abner Marsh, the heroic protagonist, undertakes a path of recognizing the harm caused by slavery and ends up changing his attitude towards it – in that sense, *Fevre Dream* might even be considered a *Bildungsroman*, and Marsh, the character whose journey we follow and whose psychological changes we witness.

In his novel, Martin employs vampires as a means to deliver a social critique that works both for the distant past, when the story takes place and an institution such as slavery was somehow accepted in social or legal spheres, and the present, when the color of a person's skin sadly is a factor that may determine a lower salary or an increase in one's chance of being incarcerated. Despite being

supernatural and inhuman in essence, York and Julian become representatives of essentially human reactions.

Even though both perspective and individuality are lacking in the novel, black characters are crucial in *Fevre Dream*, not only because this is a novel about the American Civil war, but also because the conclusion the novel leads us to is that a black person will invariably suffer by undergoing objectification, either by becoming a slave to a human being, or by becoming a vampire's meal.

Finally, a close reading of *Fevre Dream* allows us to identify the genesis of one of the many issues George R. R. Martin approaches in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. When ascending to the power in cities that are held up by the trade of slaves, Daenerys Targaryen ends slavery and frees all captives. Perhaps what Martin wants to tell us through characters such as Abner Marsh, Joshua York, Toby Lanyard and Daenerys Targaryen is that there is something inherently human – even in vampires – that allows us to have some hope for the future.

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