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The (Fictional) Autobiographical Subject in *Push*, by Sapphire – Investigating Precious's Narrating *I* and Narrated *I*'s: an Outsider's or an Insider's Life Story?

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SUMMARY: The present essay aims at analyzing the autobiographical subject conceived by the American writer Sapphire in her novel *Push*. It is taken into consideration here the fact that, in an autobiographical text, whether or not it is fictional, the subject who talks about himself is a kaleidoscopical being. It then means that the individual who writes is not, under any circumstance, the one who is written about. Therefore, it is the purpose of this paper to investigate not only the subject who weaves his life narrative, but also the objects of the narrative: the many stages of the narrator/character depicted in her *bildungsroman*. Making use of a deliberately misspelled text, Sapphire engenders the fictional autobiography of a girl who fights to acquire literacy and sees in education her only chance to get rid of an oppressive domestic environment. By putting a pen in Precious's hand, Sapphire is granting her narrator/character the right to speak not only *about* herself but also *for* herself. The real author is then providing the fictional one with the prerogative of representing herself. In short, this paper focuses on revealing the Precious who narrates and the other Precious who are narrated and, in doing so, verify the gap there is between the narrator/character and those who are rescued from the past by memory and textually reconstructed. In order to do so, critical works by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Susan Friedman, José Luiz Fiorin, Leigh Gilmore, among others, were used as theoretical support for the current analysis.

RESUMO: O presente trabalho tem por objetivo analisar o sujeito autobiográfico concebido pela escritora norte-americana Sapphire em seu romance *Push*. Considera-se aqui o fato de que, num texto autobiográfico, ficcional ou não, o sujeito que fala de si é um ser caleidoscópico. Significa dizer então que o indivíduo que escreve, sob nenhuma hipótese, é o objeto de quem se fala. Assim, esta pesquisa se propõe a investigar não apenas o sujeito que tece sua narrativa de vida, mas também os objetos do relato: os vários estágios da narradora/personagem retratada em seu *bildungsroman*. Utilizando-se de um texto deliberadamente escrito com erros de ortografia, Sapphire elabora a autobiografia ficcional de uma menina que luta para se alfabetizar e vê na educação sua única chance de se libertar de um ambiente doméstico opressivo. Ao colocar a caneta na mão de Precious, Sapphire concede à sua narradora/personagem o direito não só *de* falar de si, mas também o de falar *por* si. A autora verdadeira então provê a autora ficcional da prerrogativa de se autorrepresentar. Em suma, a presente pesquisa tem por intenção revelar a Precious que narra e as outras Precious que são narradas e, ao fazer isso, verificar a lacuna que existe entre a personagem/narradora e as que são resgatadas do passado pela memória e textualmente reconstruídas. Para tanto, artigos críticos de autoria de Sidonie Smith e Julia Watson, Susan Friedman, José Luiz Fiorin, Leigh Gilmore, dentre outros, foram utilizados como aporte teórico para esta análise.

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"I wanted to show this girl is locked out through literacy. She's locked out by her physical appearance. She's locked out by her class, and she's locked out by her color (…)"

Sapphire during a radio interview to Michele Norris

During this radio interview to Michele Norris on November 6th 2009, Sapphire interestingly defines Precious, the narrator/character of her novel *Push*, as a "locked out" girl, that is, a female child who despite her tender age has already had a history of suffering, abuse and exclusion. Starting form the premise that Precious is the fictional author of Sapphire's novel, this paper aims at outlining the narrating *I*, that is, the producer of the fictional autobiographical piece of writing engendered by its real author. In order to do so, some of the questions proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in "A Tool Kit", the ninth chapter of their book *Reading Autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) were used as the guidelines for this essay. Smith and Watson suggest investigating among other aspects how the narrating I can be described (what kind of individual she embodies), what kind of portrait she makes of herself (how she/he presents herself to the reader) and whether or not there is any gap between the narrating and the narrated *I*'s (does the life experience described in the narrative affect its object and to what extent?).

Before investigating the aspects suggested in the title, it seems advisable to approach first some theoretical considerations about autobiographical writing made by critics such as Smith and Watson, Susan Friedman and Susannah Radstone. The first point to be considered here is the category of autobiographical narrative *Push* belongs to. The mainstream concept of autobiography was developed by French theorist Philippe Lejeune and is still considered by many as definitive. According to Lejeune, autobiography is defined as a piece of writing in which the author reproduces on paper the sequence of past events the center figure of which is himself/herself. Lejeune's idea of autobiography then leads us to conclude that the author of an autobiographical work is necessarily a living person who has the real (factual) world as his/her reference. Therefore, *Push* seems not to fit Lejeune's concept of autobiography, as Precious, its narrator/character, is a fictional element created by Sapphire, the real (factual) author of the text. Nevertheless, Smith and Watson classify this fictional kind of life writing as "faction" or "autofiction" (Smith; Watson, 2010, p.10). In spite of acknowledging the difficulty of establishing limits between fiction and autobiography, Smith and Watson state

that an autobiographical text offers a "narrative [which] [is] a transparent, truthful view of th[e] world" woven by "a person living in the experimental world, not [by] a fictional character" (Smith; Watson, 2010, p. 260). So, based on the concept of "faction"/ "autofiction" developed by Smith and Watson, the autobiographical *I* this paper aims to examine is not one existing in real life but one engendered by fiction.

After having discussed *Push* as autobiographical work, some considerations about autobiography as a genre need to be made here. At first, autobiography appears to be the simplest type of text to be analysed: after all, nothing is more of our own knowledge than our life experience, as observed Smith and Watson (Smith; Watson, 2010, p.1). However, many more implications involve the act of writing about oneself, because nothing else may be more biased and imprecise than self-description and/or self-assessment: anything said in a self-referential text is not exempt from partiality and uncertainty. Moreover, it is capital to say here that the element who observes and writes is, to some extent, the same who is observed and written about. Autobiographical elements are the same to some extent, because there might be (and there normally are) gaps of several natures – temporal, intellectual, emotional, to mentions some, factors that will be commented on later - which set apart narrator and character(s). Due to the fact that autobiographical narratives take the risk of being partial and imprecise, as they need to rely on memory, it seems proper to affirm that life writing is not a monolithic genre which holds the truth about the author who is also the persona, but rather it is a multifaceted literary mode that deserves and requires a cautious analysis. In this respect, Smith and Watson say:

> "[…] the act of people representing […] their own lives […] is anything but simple, for the teller of his or her own story becomes, in the act of narration both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation. We might best approach life narrative, then, as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in emerging the past, reflect on identity in the present". (Smith; Watson, 2010, p.1).

Smith and Watson then focus on the factors which are drawn into play in self-referential texts. Although it is known that the observing subject and the object of investigation are the same – regardless of how discussable this sameness might be - there are aspects involved that make them different in many ways. Depending on the transformations that character goes through along the passing time, it might even be possible to state that autobiographer and (auto)biographed are not from any perspective the same individual. Unlike what it may seem,

self-referential texts rarely work as a mirror, that is, they almost never embody a self-reflective surface on which narrator and character are the two sides of the same coin. Constantly, this coin changes in size, appearance and value, that is, the individual, seen from a postmodern perspective, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, has "no fixed, essential or permanent identity" (Hall, 2007, p. 598). This is because she/he is defined by history, and not biology, and is always in ongoing transformation according to the cultural system that surrounds her/him.

Approaching this provisional subject who writes about herself/himself, Susannah Radstone in her article "Autobiographical Times" states that the autobiographical subject is constituted by language and discourse. Radstone affirms that it is not the autobiographical subject who "builds" the text, but rather " […] it is autobiography itself which produces the subject: the subject […] is textually constituted and that textual constitution has a history." (Radstone, 2000, p. 203). Bearing in mind that the autobiographer, like any other individual, is an element in an ongoing process of changing, self-referential texts reflect many images which are not made of lines but have words and language as their raw material. Instead of portraying a unique image, autobiography offers the reader a conflict of positions in which narrator and character(s) occupy distinct places. Over her/his lifetime, mainly when it is marked by trauma, the producer of an autobiographical writing takes over different positionalities, that is, distinct vantage points and attitudes that provide the reader a chameleonic narrative element generated by a kaleidoscopic textual realm.

Referring and recurring to the ideas developed by Jacques Lacan, Émile Benveniste and Catherine Belsey as to the narrating I, Radstone argues that the narrating and the spoken about *I*'s do not reflect each other but rather establish between them a contradictory relationship (Radstone, 2000, p.202). The many gaps which separate the two entities, among them those of temporal and psychological nature, will leave indelible marks in the weaver of the autobiographical text, marks which make her/him look at herself/himself from different viewpoints. Radstone then alludes to another theorist, Louis Renza, who defines autobiography as a "suicide genre", as it shows the author, may it be fictional or real, with an "empty or discursive 'self' – an *I* never h[er] own because it makes present what remains past to h[er] (Renza 1977:9)" (Radstone, 2000, p. 203). These two kinds of intervals are undeniably present in *Push*: the Precious who crafts the autobiographical text is trying to

show the reader the Precious(’s) she was in the past and what made her become what she is in the present. These portraits, however, are made of words and have the (fictional) author’s memory as their main source of information. Borrowing Louis Renza’s words, it seems correct to state that Precious as a fictional autobiographer is “making present” the Precious who “remains from the past”: that Precious who spent her childhood being abused and excluded is a stage of the narrator’s personality that she rescues from the past through language by means of textual production. In Precious’s case, her bringing herself from the past was only possible thanks to her achieving her main goal: learning how to read and write. Literacy acquisition then is a real watershed in Precious’s life and works as a key to freedom, the only way for her to leave her history of suffering and oppression behind, as Precious herself says in the following passage from *Push*.

“[…] like in the book I read – I’m on threshold of stepping out into my new life, an apartment for me, Abdul, and maybe Little Mongo, we see on that one, mo’ education, new friends. I done left Mama. Daddy Ms Lichenstein, I.S, 146 behind […]” (Precious in *Push*, Sapphire, 1997, p. 84).

The autobiographical narrative in *Push* holds a particularity as to Precious’s life story which seems quite meaningful to outline her narrating *I*: the story Precious shares with the reader is an account of trauma, for all the horrible situations she is subjected to. Focusing on the racial aspect, the narrating (and also the narrated) Precious is, as Sapphire herself labels, “locked out by her color”. In this respect, Leigh Gilmore in her book *Limits of Autobiography*: *Trauma and Testimony* confers an historical value to the prejudice Precious suffers. According to Gilmore, racial prejudice is a cultural and social heritage left by slavery in the United States: over a century after it was abolished, “[…] the wound it represents has not healed” (Gilmore, 2001, p.27), and this “open wound applies to Precious. The position of inferiority imposed on black people by dominant oppressing white does not limit itself to the economic and social spheres. In a country where the WASP aesthetic model still prevails, a black obese girl definitely does not have any chance of being desired.

The traumatic feature of Precious’s life story, however, goes beyond racial prejudice. If, in accordance with Sapphire’s words, Precious is “locked out by her color”, she seems to be “locked in” a violent and abusive family environment. The traumatic experience Precious narrates is not another story of rape, similar to those which can be found in the police statistical records. What Precious, reluctantly at first, puts down in words in the journal at

Each One Teach One is, along with her rejection from her classmates at her first school, her incestuous relationship with her father and also her mother. This is then the most harrowing part of her testimony, as it tells about a type of sexual abuse which is particularly meaningful: it was perpetrated by those who were supposed to love and protect the victim. Precious is then a teenager who had her first child when she was only a twelve-year-old girl and the second when she was still underage. Being a hostage of an exploitative mother and of a father who only shows up at home with the unique objective of raping her, Precious uses her narrative as "the boat carry you to the other side" (Precious reporting Miss Rain's advice in *Push*, Sapphire, 1997, p. 97). In face of the facts previously exposed, and also considering the accuser and the accused, it seems advisable to wonder whether the story told here deserves to be credited, that is, whether the storyteller has the right to claim authority as to the facts she narrates.

In chapter one of her book, Leigh Gilmore also gives a brief history of trauma and memory. Historically, stories of trauma and memory credited as true, legitimate and thus authoritative, were usually told by male national heroes, most of them survivors of war. From the 1980's on, however, child sexual abuse gained another dimension and importance in psychology studies due to the number of cases registers. Gilmore then recurs to Janice Haaken's theory as to the writing of trauma: "[…] for Haaken, declaring oneself a survivor of incest tells a kind of truth, though not necessarily a literal one" (Gilmore, 2001, p. 26). So, according to Haaken's words, Precious's declaring herself a survivor of incest legitimates, that is, authorizes her (fictional) autobiographical writing and works as a "warranty certificate".

The question of authenticity, approached in the previous paragraph, is then strictly connected to the idea of autobiographical truth. At the beginning of the novel, Precious as a narrator shows her concern about being faithful to the events she narrates. Making use of her peculiarly simple text, Precious reflects over the act of writing she is carrying out and informs the reader that there is no use writing about oneself and not telling the truth.

> Sure you can do anything when you talking or writing, it's not like living when you can only do what you doing. Some people tell a story 'n it don't make sense or be true. But I'm gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what's the […] use? Ain't enough lies […] out there? (Precious in *Push*, Sapphire, 1997, p. 3-4).

In the excerpt above, Precious makes it clear that she is going **to try** to tell the truth, as she intuits that, in a story occurred in the past, events, people, feelings, ideas might be betrayed

by memory. However, she commits herself to offer her readers a true testimony and to make her account as trustworthy as possible; after all, as Precious herself questions "ain't enough lies out there"?

After the theoretical considerations about the autobiographical genre, helpful to understand the nature of the text produced by the narrator/fictional author in *Push*, it is time to return to the epigraph and reflect over the term "locked out" used by Sapphire to refer to Precious. Whose description does it suit better: Precious the narrator, Precious the character, or maybe both? Who is the locked out element, that is, the outsider as it is suggested in the title of this paper? Is Precious still an outsider at the moment of writing? In order to answer these questions, which complement those posed in the first paragraph, it is necessary to analyse how distant the narrator is from the version(s) of herself she presents to the reader. It is then requisite to identify what theorist James Phelan calls **questions of distance** (Smith; Watson, 2010, p. 80), which means to check out how many voices were produced by some of the gaps which set apart the narrator and the character(s), the narrating *I* and the narrated *I*('s), the (fictional) autobiographer and her/his self-referential persona(e). Phelan then recommends observing whether there are voids of any sort such as temporal, intellectual and emotional/psychological. In Precious's case, all of these fissures are crucial to understand the process of transformation she as a character goes through over the novel. Her traumatic experience, which lasted all her childhood and most of her adolescence, has shaped this peculiar narrator whose text reveals so much of her soul and perspective(s) towards the world.

When it comes to the chronological gap, Precious's act of writing takes place in 1989, after her second child/sibling's birth, when she is living in a shelter. It is known that Precious's self-referential text starts being written in Each One Teach One, the alternative school she is advised to join. It is not evident, however, whether the narrative in *Push* is the transcription of her journal or it is the retelling of its content, since it does not hold the conventional format of a diary. However, from her second child's birth on she starts exchanging messages with her teacher in which she shows her literacy process. This takes place during a period which precedes the writing of the journal (Sapphire, 2010, p. 70-121). In a passage, at the beginning of the novel, Precious gives the reader a temporal reference "[…] it's Thursday, September twenty-four 1987 […]" (Sapphire, 2010, p. 4); she then complements the sentence by saying "and I'm walking down the hall". As it would be unlikely that she was writing and walking

simultaneously, it is possible to infer that all events are told by the use of narrated monolog (or free indirect discourse) with Precious's memories as the only source of information. It is not possible to affirm Precious's intention as to the use of the simple present and the present continuous tenses in the passage previously quoted. Nevertheless, it may be attributed to her desire of providing the reader with immediacy, as if that moment were being relived at the moment of writing. Taking into consideration the supposedly therapeutic intention on the part of Ms Rain while suggesting the journal, it seems correct to affirm that, while recalling past events, Precious as a narrator revives them and takes over the voice of the Precious she once was. Besides, considering that the fictional autobiographer in *Push* is not a refined writer and thus not really conscious of narrative strategies, it is more probable that the use of those verb tenses is due to her simple, almost naïve, text production.

In relation to intellectuality – and it would be advisable to include education/literature here - at that time of writing, the narrating Precious is already a prize-winner writer, an achievement that was only possible after her acquiring literacy. It is this relatively accomplished individual who constructs the discourse through which the character is portrayed. Taking into consideration that the individual who tells the story is the one who is in the process of overcoming her problems, it seems legitimate to affirm that it is the character(s) rather than the narrator who can be regarded as an outsider. According to the entry found in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, outsider is defined as "someone who is not accepted as a member of a particular social group. It is this excluded element - rejected, mistreated and abused inside her own family circle and at school, the two social groups in relation to which she was supposed to have a sense of belonging - that the narrative in *Push* focuses on.

After being accepted by the Each One Teach One community, the alternative school she is transferred to, Precious starts to overcome the emotional problems which prevented her from learning how to read and write. Once able to decode texts and learn their contents, Precious becomes skillful enough to have a more mature understanding of what is going on with her by establishing connections between the texts she reads and the traumatic events she experienced. These connections are an example of the effects that literacy and education are having on Precious. Further transported to her text, these associations are what the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin calls **dialogism** (Fiorin, 2006, p. 19). Precious then starts promoting **dialogs** between the literary discourse the access to which literacy could provide her with and

her own life experience. An example of this interaction is the way she calls the shelter she moves to after her second child's birth: a ½ way house, a term she borrowed from a book she read about abused women. Precious informs the reader the origin of the fractional number which works as qualifier in the phrase: "They tell her, You is ½ way between the life you had and the life you want to have" (Precious in *Push*, Sapphire, 1997, p. 83-84). In that passage, the narrating *I* offers the reader the exact description of the moment the narrated *I* is passing through: she was at the beginning of a new and important development stage. After this turning point in her life, encouraged by Miss Rain, Precious as a narrator could look back on her recent past and outline a written portray of Precious as a character.

In terms of autobiographical writing theory, there are two important points to be considered here: Miss Rain, the teacher who acts as the vector of Precious's writing and the meaning of autobiography for someone who seeks her place in the world. Smith and Watson refer to what comes to be a *coaxer*, a term created by sociologist Ken Plummer to designate "any person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicits or provokes people to tell their stories" (Smith; Watson, 2010, p. 64). In *Push*, Miss Rain appears to fit Plummer's concept: working as a reading and writing teacher at an alternative school designed to help students with cognitive/emotional problems, she makes her class – wholly composed of women teenagers - use the paper as a space to tell and/or recreate their life stories. The activity Rain proposes has not only a didactic purpose: she intends to make her students use autobiography as a sort of therapy and, in doing so, inscribe their personal mark in the world. In this respect, theorist Susan Friedman, in her article "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", referring to George Gusdorf's concept of autobiography, states that autobiographical writing is a powerful tool for the individual to leave her/his imprint in the world and stand out in the collectivity she/he belongs to, thus gaining authority.

> Autobiography is the literary consequence of the rise of individualism as an ideology, according to Gusdorf. As genre, it also represents the expression of individual authority in the realm of language. The 'sign' to which Gusdorf refers is, literally and literarily, the 'mark' or 'imprint' of man's power: his linguistic, psychological, and institutional presence in the world of letters and things. (Friedman, 1998, p. 72)

Keeping in mind that, according to Susannah Radstone (2000, p. 203), autobiographical selves are built by means of discourse, we will also discuss here the emotional gap between the autobiographical elements in *Push* through the perspective of

voice, that is, the fissure between Precious as a narrator and Precious as a character will bee seen then through the voices which are heard throughout the novel. In an article posted on London Evening Standard site, British journalist David Cohen talks about this interview with Sapphire. He mentions the American novelist and professor Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, former Sapphire's college mentor, who classified *Push* as a unique voice narrative. Despite Schaeffer's classification, it seems appropriate to state that in Sapphire's text there is more than one voice as Precious the narrator provides the reader with two self-images: the one before and the other after Each One Teach One. The first character Precious embodies is a girl who suffers for being rejected at school, sexually abused at home and, mainly, for nor being able to read and write. Precious is aware that she can put an end to her history of suffering only if she acquires literacy. The second narrated Precious is the one who is experiencing a process of development at the alternative school, the one who manages to learn how to read and write and finally gets the courage to leave home. The second narrated I is the one who at last succeeds in achieving the first narrated *I*'s target by means of literacy and education. In short, the second narrated *I* in Push acquires the **agency** sought by the first one thanks to literacy acquisition.

From an emotional perspective then, there are three autobiographical elements in *Push*: the one who narrates - no matter how detached (or not) she may be from the events narrated and personae portrayed - and those who are the object of her narrative. Precious as a narrator then takes over the role of the storyteller who unfolds the development process Precious as a character undergoes over the novel. Precious's function as narrator seems to suit Smith and Watson's opinion about self-referential life writing: "In our view of autobiographical narration (…) the narrating *I*'s voice is in fact the vocalization of the narrated *I*'s story as an oral presence" (Smith; Watson, 2010, p. 76). Based on Smith and Watson's viewpoint, Precious as a narrator plays the role of a spokesperson of the version(s) of Precious she once was. The apparent monovocal characteristic of the text in *Push* may be attributed to its blurred boundaries between past and present and between narrator and character(s). The emotional involvement on the part of the narrating "I" while recalling past events and portraying the narrated *I*'s seems to have applied to the narrative in Sapphire's novel an indistinct voice marked by the use of present and also the narrated monolog.

If, on the one hand, Each One Teach One can be regarded as a watershed in Precious's education, on the other, her finding herself HIV positive seems to provoke a serious emotional unbalance in the second character, which clearly reflects on her text production. Even bearing spelling problems, Precious manages to keep some sort of regularity while writing her text. This evenness, however, is broken when she is informed that her father died of AIDS and infers that she might be HIV positive. The threat of death and of Abdul's, her younger child, being also infected causes Precious emotional instability, which is manifested in her text. Just when she shows her concern towards spelling correction, while crossing out words misspelled (Sapphire: 2010, p.98), this sense of finitude triggers a momentary setback in her writing progress and in her textual coherence. Not being a case of poetic license, as the (fictional) author does not have any intention to write that way, in the following excerpt from the journal, Precious spots a different self after HIV, making unequivocal the fissure previously referred to:

For
A monf it bin like this. I feel daze.
Ms Rain see it
Say you not same girl kno.
is tru. I am difren
persn
anybuddy wood de don't u think?
don't
u
think. (Precious in *Push*, by Sapphire: 2010, p. 99)

Note that, in a sort of stream of consciousness, unlike the rest of her piece of writing, Precious seems to be letting go her feelings, her anguish, her awareness that a different Precious arises from another traumatic experience.

Closing the present paper, it is now time to answer the question raised in the title: is the narrative in *Push* an outsider's or an insider's life story? First, it seems appropriate to remember that Precious is a three-fold narrative element: on the one hand, there is the now-Precious who produces the autobiographical text (the narrating *I*) and on the other, the two-then Precious's who are told about (the narrated *I*'s). These have the alternative school Each One Teach One as a watershed: before joining the alternative school, Precious is submissive

and abused at home; after becoming an Each One Teach One student, however, she acquires not only literacy but also self-confidence, which makes her bold enough to leave home (her major target). It seems clear that the term **outsider** suits perfectly the first character Precious embodies, while the second is the one in process of transformation, the one who is struggling to change her *status quo*, the one who is "on the threshold of stepping out into [a] new life" (Precious in *Push*, Sapphire, 1997, p.84). The second narrated Precious is thus in the process of becoming an **insider**. However, would it be correct to affirm that Precious as a narrator, even after winning a literary prize, can be regarded as an **insider**? Can she be really considered as "an accepted member of a group"? In which groups is she welcomed? In *Push*, Precious is accepted by Each One Teach One community, as she could get in touch with other girls whose stories were similar to hers. In real life, however, someone like Precious – a black obese woman, poor, with a history of incest and also HIV positive – has to face (and win) a daily battle. Taking into consideration that Precious's victory is significant but only partial, her fight against abuse and exclusion is not definitely won. The poetic end of *Push* perfectly illustrates this aspect, when the narrator/character observes the sunlight reflecting on her son's head. The imagery of hope created by Abdul's head being lit by the sunlight works as a reminder that, in spite of her condition, there is life ahead her. Despite her history of violence and prejudice, Precious somehow hopes to remain alive to carry on studying and taking care of Abdul and, if possible, of Little Mongo. As the title of the novel suggests, Precious must keep on **pushing** through all the adversities life might impose on her. Precious, as a partial outsider and a partial insider, must follow Ms Rain's advice: "'[…] you can't stop now Precious, you gotta push'. And I do." (Miss Rain to Precious in *Push*, Sapphire, p. 97).

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