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INTERTEKSTUALUMAS IR TAPATYBĖ BENJAMINO ALIRĖ SÁENZO ROMANE „ARISTOTELIS IR DANTĖ ATSKLEIDŽIA VISATOS PASLAPTIS“

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INTERTEXTUALITY AND IDENTITY IN BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ'S NOVEL *ARISTOTLE AND DANTE DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE* (2012)

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SANTRAUKA

Šiame baigiamajame bakalauro darbe analizuojamos intertekstualumo formos bei jų pavyzdžiai Benjamino Alirė Sáenzo romane „Aristotelis ir Dantė atskleidžia visatos paslaptis“. Taip pat, nagrinėjamas pagrindinių veikėjų tapatybės klausimas. Benjaminas Alirė Sáenzas (g. 1954), pirmasis lotynoamerikietis autorius gavęs PEN/Faulknerio apdovanojimą. Jis yra parašęs daug literatūros kūrinių, bet labiausiai žinomas dėl savo poezijos bei knygų paaugliams. Sáenzo kūriniuose dažniausiai šmėžuoja Lotynų Amerikos kultūros, o su vėlesniais kūriniais, ir LGBT bendruomenės ypatumai.

Šio bakalaurinio darbo analizė remiasi Tracy Lemaster ir Gerardo Genetės (Gerard Genette) idėjomis apie intertekstualumą bei įvairias jo formas, funkcijas ir ypatybes. Taip pat ir tapatybės teorijomis, aptartomis Lario Samovaro, Irenos Ragaišienės, Audronės Raškauskienės, bei kitų mokslininkų. Didžioji bakalaurinio darbo dalis yra paremta šiuo teoriniu pagrindu: Lemaster „What Is ‘Intertextuality’?“ (2012), Samovaro et al. „Communication Between Cultures“ (2016), bei Ragaišienės ir Raškauskienės „Cross-Cultural Communication, a Resourse Book for Students“ (2013).

Šį darbą sudaro šeši skyriai ir keturi priedai. Pirmame skyriuje pristatomas darbo tikslas bei trumpai aptariama pagrindinė informacija apie analizuojama knyga, Benjamino Alirė Sáenzo romaną „Aristotelis ir Dantė atskleidžia visatos paslaptis“. Antrame skyriuje pateikiama teorija apie intertekstualumą, jo formas bei funkcijas. Trečiasis skyrius, suskirstytas į du poskyrius, aptaria tapatybių teoriją. Ketvirtasis skyrius yra sudarytas iš trijų poskyrių. Jame analizuojami knygoje rasti intertekstualumo pavyzdžiai bei galimos jų panaudojimo priežastys. Penktame skyriuje, kuris suskirstytas į tris poskyrius, aptariamos ryškiausiai pastebimos pagrindinių veikėjų tapatybės. Šeštasis skyrius apibendrina visą darbą, pakartojant visas pagrindines išsakytas idėjas.

Priede A šiek tiek plačiau pristatoma romano „Aristotelis ir Dantė atskleidžia visatos paslaptis“ santrauka. Priede B pavaizduotas romano „Aristotelis ir Dantė atskleidžia visatos paslaptis“ knygos viršelis. Priede C pavaizduota Benjamino Alirė Sáenzo nuotrauka. Priede D pateikiamas Benjamino Alirė Sáenzo išleistų kūrinių sąrašas. Priede E pavaizduoti paveikslai, kurie buvo minimi romane „Aristotelis ir Dantė atskleidžia visatos paslaptis“.

SUMMARY

This BA Thesis discusses forms and examples of intertextuality, and some significant identities of the main characters in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). Benjamin Alire Sáenz (b. 1954), the first Hispanic winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award, has written many literary works but is mostly known for his young adult novels and poetry. Sáenz's works predominantly focus on Hispanic and Latino American culture, and with his more recent novels, the LGBT community as well.

The analysis is based on the ideas of Tracy Lemaster and Gerard Genette who discuss various forms, functions, and features of intertextuality, as well as identity theory discussed by Larry Samovar et al., Irena Ragaišienė and Audronė Raškauskienė, and other scholars. Lemaster's *What Is 'Intertextuality'?* (2012), Samovar et al.'s *Communication Between Cultures* (2016), and Ragaišienė and Raškauskienė's *Cross-Cultural Communication : A Resource Book for Students* (2013) are the main works used as a theoretical background for this paper.

This BA Thesis is divided into six sections and has four Appendixes. Section One introduces the aim of the paper as well as the basis of the book analyzed in the thesis, Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). Section Two provides theoretical information on intertextuality and its forms and functions. Section Three discusses identity theory and is divided into two subsections. Section Four discusses examples of identities found in the novel and their potential functions or purposes; it is divided into three subsections. Section Five analyzes key identities most frequently mentioned in the novel, and it is divided into three subsections. Section Six concludes the analysis by summarizing the main ideas developed in the thesis.

Appendix A provides a more detailed plot summary of Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). Appendix B displays the cover of the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). Appendix C presents the photograph of Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Appendix D exhibits a list of Benjamin Alire Sáenz's publications. Appendix E displays paintings mentioned in the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012).

1. INTRODUCTION

The *aim* of this BA paper is to analyze examples of intertextuality, identities of the main characters and compare their acceptance of such identities between each other in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012). The protagonist Aristotle, Ari for short, narrates the story as he meets Dante, and they continue their journey towards adulthood together.

This novel belongs to the coming-of-age genre of literature. Coming-of-age, as a term, speaks of transition from childhood to adulthood, or even more specifically, "from childhood to adulthood" (Benyahia et al. 271). The works of coming-of-age literature mainly focus on the protagonist's transition to adulthood. Right away one might make a direct connection between coming of age and young adult (later referred to as YA) fiction, and both are often used interchangeably in reviews, libraries, or online. While coming-of-age is not exactly an easily distinguishable genre, it also has certain features that separate this genre from young adult fiction and other similar genres. Besides the focus on the protagonist's journey to adulthood, the longevity of such journey is also important in these works: it is usually short, "such as a summer" (Benyahia et al. 271). Another quite distinctive feature of this genre is that coming-of-age works tend to rely on dialogue and emotions or monologues, rather than action. Just as YA novels, the characters in such works are also either in their adolescent years or right on the edge of adulthood. Furthermore, in most cases, coming-of-age works are set in the past and written in a flashback style, or more specifically, the reader can assume that the protagonist currently is already grown up, matured, and is just remembering or retelling their experience (Benyahia et al. 271).

In the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), Benjamin Alire Sáenz tells a story about two fifteen-year-old boys in the time span of two summers from 1987 to 1988: how two adolescent boys meet, become best friends, and eventually fall in love with each other, meanwhile analyzing their surroundings and themselves as they are growing and maturing. The boys struggle with accepting their ethnic identities and sexualities, with Ari also having to deal with the mysteries associated with his father and brother as well. A more detailed summary of the plot is presented in Appendix A.

The analysis is based on the ideas of the following scholars: Tracy Lemaster and Gerard Genette who discuss various functions and types of intertextuality; Larry Samovar et al, Irena Ragaišienė and Audronė Raškauskienė, Jean Phinney, Fred E. Jandt and others who provided deeper theoretical information on cultural and ethnic identity; Annamarie Jagose and other scholars on queer theory and sexual identity.

The current thesis is divided into the following sections. Section One is the Introduction. Section Two is theory about intertextuality. Section Three, the theory about identity, is divided in

two: Subsection 3.1 explains cultural and ethnic identity theory, and Subsection 3.2 introduces sexual identity and queer theory. Section Four demonstrates examples of intertextuality found in the novel and it is divided into three subsections. Subsection 4.1 discusses the intertextuality of proper nouns, Subsection 4.2 focuses on literary works mentioned in the novel, and Subsection 4.3 discusses examples of pictorial art and music. Section Five analyses these identities within three subsections: Subsection 5.1 discusses family identity and how it affects Ari and Dante's personalities, Subsection 5.2 focuses on ethnic identity, and Subsection 5.3 explores the characters' sexual identities and the outward reactions to it.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERTEXTUALITY

According to Lemaster, "in literature, intertextuality is when a book refers to a second book by title, scene, character, or storyline, or when a book refers to a social 'text' such as a media, social, or cultural story" (Lemaster 70). In short, it is referring to or using a source from somewhere else, direct or indirect, in your own personal work. Lodge states that "intertextuality is the very condition of literature, that all texts are woven from the tissues of other texts, whether their authors know it or not" (Lodge 98-99). The statement seems to indicate that the concept of intertextuality is rather ambiguous. Gerard Genette defines intertextuality as: quotation, plagiarism, and allusion (Genette qtd. in Mirenayat and Soofastaei 534). Intertextuality as a *quotation* means using someone else's work within one's own by openly disclosing the source of the text and giving credit to the original author; *plagiarism* is using someone's work without disclosing the source or without getting the original author's approval, and *allusions* can be described as "a reference, typically brief, to a person, place, thing, event, or other literary work with which the reader is presumably familiar" ("*Allusion*"). While the latter term can bring confusion due to its apparent similarity to the concept of intertextuality as a whole, the difference is that in the case of intertextuality, both direct and indirect references can be considered, while allusion only works if the reader understands the reference and what information it conveys.

In literary works, Lemaster recognizes two forms of intertextuality: *book in a book* and *other "text" in a book* (Lemaster 70). The first form is rather direct in its title: it is using a reference from another literary work, and it can be as small as borrowing a character name from another book or referencing a title of some other book to something more explicit such as borrowing certain excerpts from another literary work. The second form, other "text" in a book, is related to any other media outside of literature: television shows, songs, real-life stories, etc. Here again it can vary from a single mention to a whole retelling of a story or borrowing an excerpt from the source.

Lemaster also distinguishes three functions of intertextuality: *comparison*, *dialogue*, and *destabilization.* The first function invites the reader, after they recognize the reference used in the work, to compare both works (the original, which is the work where the reference comes from, and the current work they are reading) and find similarities and differences in how and why this specific reference was used. The second function, the dialogue, discerns and establishes a conversation between the original text and the one that references it. Since the two texts interact with each other by using references of one another, this function invites the reader to consider both narratives as if it were an open discussion between both works. (Lemaster 70) The last function, destabilization, introduces the concept of using intertextuality to evoke a certain emotion or deeper understanding of what is happening in the current work. The reader might understand a scene or a character in a certain way, but once intertextuality is acknowledged, it might reveal something of great difference to the situation and might influence whatever opinion the reader might have had of the situation before, hence the name destabilizing (Lemaster 70).

Lemaster also introduces three effects of intertextuality: *transformation of the Primary Book, transformation of a Prior Text*, and *reinterpretation of both* (Lemaster 70). The transformation of the Primary Book affects the reader's opinion of the current work he or she is reading. It invites to question and analyze why a specific reference was used, how and where it was used, what purpose does it bring to the current work. The second effect, the transformation of a Prior Text, is the opposite: it affects the reader's understanding of the "original" source of the reference. It introduces the idea that no matter how much or how direct or indirect the reference is used by being referenced, the original work might change or become open to a whole new interpretation. This effect causes the reader to look more deeply at the reference itself, considering how the reference in the current work might have changed things. Finally, *reinterpretation* combines both effects together and might encourage the reader to analyze both works deeper. Lemaster explains that "this involves a back-and-forth re-reading of each text based on what their similarities and differences reveal about one another" (Lemaster 70).

To conclude this section, while Lemaster introduces several forms, functions and effects of intertextuality, the concept as whole has suffered from lack of a proper definition. Although interpretations may vary, for the purpose of this thesis, I will use it to mean the use of references of one work into another, directly or indirectly.

3. IDENTITY THEORY

To quote from Samovar et al., "identity is a multifaceted, dynamic, abstract concept that plays an integral role in daily communicative interactions" (Samovar et al. 243). To specify, identity in itself is a broad term and it can be looked at from several perspectives. Lawler states: "No one has only one identity, in the sense that everyone must, consciously or not, identify with more than one group" (Lawler 3). This suggests that a person has more than one identity, therefore this section will discuss the concept of identity and its classifications.

According to Ting-Toomey, identity is "reflective self-conception or self-image that we derive from our family, gender, cultural, ethnic and individual socialization processes" (Ting-Toomey 212). As Ting-Toomey suggests, the term identity can be used to describe a person individually and also refer to a person's role in certain social groups and/or surroundings. This once again establishes that identity as a concept and a term is dynamic, and a person has more than one identity. In relation to this thought, it is significant to remember that identity is not a single entity, and several identities work together in combination to form one's identity as a whole (Samovar et al. 245). To narrow down all the possible variations of one's identity, Stuart Hall distinguishes the following categories: personal, communal, and relational. (Hall qtd. in Samovar et al. 246) Personal category focuses on "personal uniqueness and differences from others", communal refers to "nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, political standpoint", and relational identities shows "relationships with others" (Ragaišienė and Raškauskienė 73). For example, a person can have different-colored eyes (something personal that sets them apart from the rest), can be a woman, British, a mother, a daughter, etc. – all of these are different identities that all interconnect into one whole identity of a person.

A conclusion can thus be made that one's identity consists of multiple different identities, from personal traits to certain roles in society and different surroundings. Instead of being additions to one other, all identities interact with one another, especially in specific contexts.

3.1 Cultural and Ethnic Identity

Before discussing what cultural identity means, it is important to define culture which is yet another complex and dynamic concept that can be understood subjectively. E.B. Taylor explains culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Taylor qtd. in Ragaišienė and Raškauskienė 21). A similar and narrowed down explanation is also given by Lustig and Koester: "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people" (Lustig and Koestler). The concept of culture is inevitable in one's everyday life, whether it is religious or ethnic culture involving the community in one's surroundings, or pop culture, influencing a person on what music to listen to, how to dress, what topics are popular

nowadays, etc. The opinion of Samovar et al. is that "communication and culture work in tandem" (Samovar et al. 37), meaning that the way we communicate with each other and with the world in general is influenced by the cultures we are surrounded by and vice versa.

Cultural identity then becomes another quite significant category of one's identity as a whole. Cultural identity can be described as identifying with "members who consciously identify themselves with that group" or "the identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms for conduct" (Jandt 15). This suggests that cultural identity is how one identifies themselves in various social contexts, which cultures one acknowledges that they belong to, and so on. Jandt continues to discuss an important issue when it comes to cultural identity:

> If you assume that the individual is like everyone else in that culture, you have stereotyped all the many, various people in that culture into one mold. You know that you are different from others in your culture. Other cultures are as diverse. The diversity within cultures probably exceeds the differences between cultures. So just knowing one person's cultural identity doesn't provide complete or reliable information about that person. Knowing another's cultural identity does, however, help you understand the opportunities and challenges that each individual in that culture had to deal with. (Jandt 15-16)

This is an important message that once again emphasizes that a person has multiple identities; therefore, it is unfair to stereotype people who belong to the group of the same values and/or beliefs. While cultural identity is of great significance in giving a broader perspective on a person's personality, other identities have to be considered as well.

Ethnic identity is one of the most frequently studied cultural identities (Worrell). As the term suggests, it is when a person identifies themselves with one or several ethnic groups. People from an ethnic group are usually connected by ancestors, language, traditions, etc. ("*Racial and Ethnic Identity*"). In fact, Fong observes that "culture and cultural identity in the study of intercultural relations have become umbrella terms that subsume racial and ethnic identity" (Fong 6); therefore, from now on, for the purpose of this thesis, both terms (cultural identity and ethnic identity) will be used interchangeably. For this specific identity and its development, Phinney has formulated a 3-stage model: *unexamined ethnic identity*, *examined identity search*, and *ethnic achievement*. The first stage takes place "when little consideration is given to the issue of ethnic identity", the second stage showcases "examined search for identity: self-conscious engagement with ethnicity issues", and the last stage is entered with "in-depth understanding of ethnic and cultural identity" (Phinney qtd. in Ragaišienė and Raškauskienė 74) This model brings back a previously discussed social identity concept that in order to identify oneself, one has to acknowledge that they belong to a certain group, in this case, ethnic group.

To conclude, culture is an unavoidable concept and reality in people's everyday lives, connecting groups of people through communication, shared beliefs, values, and so on. It can be as trivial as pop culture, setting trends over music, fashion, daily conversations, or it can refer to demographic factors such as ethnicity, nationality, etc. As Jandt describes, cultural identity is when a person considers themselves belonging to some cultural group; likewise, people are culturally identified by others depending on their environment, whether they self-identify strongly with their original culture or not. Simultaneous concept is ethnic identity, in fact cultural identity is considered as an umbrella term to ethnic identity, which is one of the most studied cultural identities. Phinney introduces a 3-stage model of ethnic identity development that showcases a common transformation from the lack of interest to full embrace of one's ethnicity.

3.2 Sexual Identity and Queer Theory

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe, the novel analyzed in this research paper, belongs to the coming-of-age genre. One of the topics, discussed in the novel is the main characters' journey to adulthood and their sexualities. Therefore, it is important to discuss the concept of sexual identity, which is:

> An individual's sense of self as a sexual being, including gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation and sexual self-concept. Sexual identity may also refer to the language and labels people use to define themselves. […] Development of sexual identity is a critical part of adolescence. (Konow)

With sexual identity in mind, a person acknowledges themselves as a sexual being, acknowledges their gender and who they might be romantically or sexually attracted to. Samovar et al. also bring attention to the fact that "racial, ethnic, and sexual identities are assigned at birth and are considered ascribed, or involuntary" (Samovar et al. 259) meaning that whether a person recognizes themselves as a member of a certain group or not, they do not particularly have a choice in assigning such identities to themselves.

While discussing the concept of sexual identity, it is also important to mention queer theory. Queer theory discusses sex, gender, sexuality, and all related topics, subverting the scientifically inaccurate idea of heterosexuality and cisgenderness as the only natural human traits: "Queer theory's debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities develops out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose 3). Queer theory argues that gender and sexuality are not monolithic, fixed, nor as black-and-white as they seem and invites to research and discuss all the possibilities and how it interferes with one's sense of identity. Queer theory is a scientific research branch that questions the scientific and cultural sustainability of a strictly cisgender and heterosexual identity as fit-all in society and nature. It is also important to mention that the word *queer*, after going through numeral

linguistic changes, is currently used as an umbrella term for gay, lesbian, transgender, and other members of the LGBT community ("*List of LGBTQ+ terms*").

To summarize, the concepts of sexual identity and queer theory are similar in the sense that they both refer to a person's sense of self in terms of gender and sexuality. The difference is that sexual identity is the sense of self, while queer theory is a scientific branch that researches the conditions of such sense of self. Both concepts are of key significance for the analysis of the novel, since the main characters of the book are adolescents and sexuality is an unavoidable subject of their journey to adulthood and maturity.

4. INTERTEXTUALITY IN BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ'S NOVEL *ARISTOTLE AND DANTE DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE* (2012)

4.1 Proper Nouns

What is immediately striking is the names of the characters. The names Aristotle and Dante generate cultural attachment since the names are quite culturally spread and well-known, even to those who might not have an idea who those people actually were and how they made their names known. One may even mistakenly take the book for being about these historical figures themselves. As mentioned previously in the theory about intertextuality, this example of using such well-known names can be accounted as an *allusion* – the author most probably used these famous names expecting the audience to recognize them and possibly understand the information behind them. Therefore, in order to discuss the reasons why these specific names were given to the main characters of this book, it is important to briefly discuss the men who first made these names known.

Aristotle (384 BCE-324 BCE) was an ancient Greek philosopher, considered to be "one of the greatest philosophers who ever lived and the first genuine scientist in history" (Kenny). During his life, he contributed to the scholastic foundations of many sciences and arts; biology, philosophy, and political theory, etc. and also explored relationships between these disciplines. As Kenny puts it, "his writings in ethics and political theory as well as in metaphysics and the philosophy of science continue to be studied, and his work remains a powerful current in contemporary philosophical debate." (Kenny) One of his most famous intellectual achievements was formal logic, "the abstract study of propositions, statements, or assertively used sentences and of deductive arguments" (Schagrin). It is also important to mention *Poetics*, "a treatise devoted to literary theory" (Janko ix). Janko notes: "to Aristotle belongs the credit for recognizing that literature has its own set of principles, which can be discovered by careful analysis" (Janko ix). Not only Poetics created a framework for

literary analysis, it also "through its various interpretations and applications from the Renaissance onward, has had a profound impact on Western aesthetic philosophy and artistic production" ("*Aristotle: Poetics*"). From these facts, one can conclude that Aristotle was a person of great intelligence and significance to the development of science, culture, the way of thinking, and, symbolically, literature.

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), better known as just Dante, was an Italian poet, literature theorist and philosopher. He is considered to be "the greatest Italian poet" (Quinones). He is best known for his poem *The Divine Comedy*, which is also claimed as "one of the world's most important works of literature" (Quinones). The poem has a rather philosophical tone as the protagonist, publicly assumed to be Dante himself, travels through Purgatory, Hell, and Paradise. Dante, as a literary artist, was also very significant for the development of language. His choice to use Italian as the language of his poem rather than Latin influenced the dominance of Italian language in western literature for some time (Quinones). Besides his poems, he also wrote works of moral philosophy and political theory. In conclusion, Dante Alighieri was also a remarkable man in his own right, contributing significantly to the development of literature and philosophy.

With a deeper understanding of the historical people behind these names, the names of the characters of the novel and its name—*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*—appear to be even more symbolic. When characters of such names meet and start discovering the secrets of the universe, one may expect to see a poetic and/or philosophical take on their lives and their discoveries. In a way the readers get exactly that: as the characters mature and analyze their surroundings, they eventually find the secrets of the universe in the people around them and especially in each other, which is a rather poetic and philosophical take on the characters' journey. Such symbolism also strengthens the hypothesis that the name of the novel serves as an *allusion*: the more knowledge one has about the historical figures, the more sense the name of the novel makes.

Discussing the names of the main characters of the novel, the name choice for Dante may seem more explicit. When the main characters meet and learn of each other's names, Dante explains: "My father's an English professor" (Sáenz 18). This one sentence in the book suggests that as a man who studied literature, his father most likely enjoys Dante's works and he wanted to pay homage to his love for poetry when he named his son after the poet Dante. Such assumptions are supported through several hints in the book:

> "I didn't know you liked poetry."
> "It's Dante's book. His father has poetry books all over the house." (Sáenz 99)

Dante himself likes poetry and as this quote suggests, he got this interest from his father. Knowing the fact that Dante Alighieri was mostly known as a poet, the character's interest in poetry is a clear connection to the poet he was named after. The author of the novel leads the reader to consider

Dante's intelligence: "Dante, you're an intellectual. That's who you are. Don't be ashamed of that" (Sáenz 35). The intelligence and curiosity of the character can also be seen as a connection to the real-life Dante, as the man was considered to be a man of great intelligence.

Dante, the character, also has certain feelings about having such a striking name. He explains to Aristotle:

> I used to tell people my name was Dan. I mean, you know, I just dropped two letters. But I stopped doing that. It wasn't honest. And anyways, I always got found out. And I felt like a liar and an idiot. I was ashamed of myself for being ashamed of myself. I didn't like feeling like that. (Sáenz 18)

His words suggest that there are feelings of embarrassment or shame of having such a name, yet he overcomes these feelings because he dislikes being dishonest and feels bad about lying. From his father, Dante likely knows what implications his name carries and perhaps he feels some sort of pressure of having to bear it, but, eventually, he learns to embrace it. This character development directly correlates with the importance of identity discussed previously in this thesis. As Dante matures, so does his identity, or multiple layers of identity (Samovar et al. 245) and he decides to re-appropriate his own, full name, in the name of honesty and of belonging. Such transformation of character and showcasing the maturing of a character is also typical for coming-of-age novels. (Benyahia et al.)

The choice of Aristotle's name is less evident than Dante's. In the novel, when Aristotle meets Dante, he explains his name rather simply:

> "Aristotle is the English version of my grandfather's name." And then I pronounced my grandfather's name with this really formal Mexican accent, "*Aristotiles*. And my real first name is Angel." (Sáenz 18)

From this excerpt it becomes clear that the choice to give this name to the character did not come from Aristotle the philosopher, but rather it was a name in the family that his parents decided to pass down to him. It also reveals that Aristotle is only his second name, first one being Angel, but as seen later in the book, the name is barely mentioned. "Everyone calls me Ari" (Sáenz 18), he explains to Dante, as this is the only way he feels comfortable being called.

Both the choice of his nickname and his sentiments about his name are thus made explicit. When he asks people to call him 'Ari', Aristotle seems to be even more uncomfortable with his own name than Dante once was. Later in the book, he explains:

> And then there was this whole thing with my name. Angel Aristotle Mendoza. I hated the name Angel and I'd never let anybody call me that. Every guy I knew who was named Angel was a real asshole. I didn't care for Aristotle either. And even though I know I was named after my grandfather, I also knew I had inherited the name of the world's most famous philosopher. I hated that. Everyone expected something from me. Something I just couldn't give. So I renamed myself Ari. (Sáenz 83-84)

His monologue here shows that he is very aware of the connotations his name brings. It also shows a distaste for his first name and provides an explanation why it was barely ever mentioned in the book. As for his second name, in contrast to the embarrassment that Dante seemed to feel about his, this character expresses pressure. His words suggest that he feels obligated by his name to appear a certain way therefore he avoids using the full name. Drawing from Ting-Toomey's theory, Ari's attitude towards his name continues to show contrast, compared to Dante: while Dante eventually accepts his name as part of his personal identity, although given by family, Ari does not. He defies the given family name by coming up with another name, another identity. (Ting-Toomey 212) However, later, in the same monologue he goes on saying:

> If I switched the letter, my name was Air. I thought it might be a great thing to be the air. I could be something and nothing at the same time. I could be necessary and also invisible. Everyone would need me and no one would be able to see me. (Sáenz 84)

This demonstrates that despite his worry of not matching the expectations of philosophical inclination of his namesake, he is quite philosophical himself by nature. It is important to mention that the entire book is written from Aristotle's point of view; therefore, the narrative abounds in his thoughts and feelings. As this is a coming-of-age novel, Aristotle, being the main narrator of the book, expresses a lot of thoughts and questions about his life, himself, and the people around him, as he continues growing up and maturing. His constant curiosity about his surroundings and himself as an individual shows that having the name of a famous philosopher might just suit him after all. In fact, after analyzing both characters' names, it appears that the author used comparing, another function of intertextuality, that invites the reader to compare the differences and similarities between the "original", in this case the historical figures, and the current text, or the characters. (Lemaster 70)

Another interesting choice of a name in the book has nothing to do with the people. After an accident where both of Ari's legs get broken, he receives a wheelchair to help him move: "I got to practice using a wheelchair with my legs out. I named the wheelchair Fidel" (Sáenz 137). The name Fidel evokes Fidel Castro, former leader of Cuba. Castro is a culturally significant figure in the mind of Latin-American people, since his politics were very influential in creating a flux of emigration toward the USA ("*Fidel Castro*"). Perhaps Ari named his wheelchair after the leader because of the way his movements were restricted, since under Castro's regime, some freedoms of the people were restricted as well. One can assume he does not like the politician and names this wheelchair after him for this reason. Later he mentions how he asked his dad to put the wheelchair away "so I wouldn't have to look at that stupid wheelchair ever again" (Sáenz 147). Though no explicit reason for the name choice is given, it nevertheless invites the reader to speculate about his reasons. Perhaps the author also used such name as an *allusion* since it seems to be expected from the reader to understand the meaning behind the name and the possible correlation with a wheelchair.

To conclude, the author of the book chose allusion as the main type of intertextuality for the names of the characters. This means that the names should make sense to the reader and the reader is welcome to interpret either or both in their own way. There were moments in the book where both characters showed strong reactions to their own names, whether it was embarrassment or pressure. However, while Dante eventually embraced his name, Ari did not and chose to go by a nickname instead. There is no explicitly stated information from the author regarding why he picked these specific names, but with Dante being an intelligent character with love for poetry and Aristotle being rather introspective, there are numerous hints in the book for the reader to compare the similarities and differences between the original historical figures and the characters, which is a function of intertextuality.

4.2 Poems and Other Literary Works

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Dante enjoys poetry and reads it quite often. After meeting Ari, he starts bringing books for him to read as well. Therefore, in the novel one can find frequent mentions of poems, authors, and other literary works. Each instance of this in the novel can be counted as *quotations* in terms of intertextuality theory, since the author of the book always mentions the original authors or names of the literary works he cites. Certain poems or mentions of other literary works are usually there to fuel either the action or Ari's thoughts, since he is the narrator of the story.

The first poetry book that Dante asks Ari to read is by William Carlos Williams. It was Ari's first time reading poetry. A verse from the poem "Death" is quoted in the book:

> *He's dead*
> *the dog won't have to*
> *sleep on the potatoes*
> *anymore to keep them*
> *from freezing*
>
> *he's dead*
> *the old bastard—* (Williams qtd. in Sáenz 30)

In the narrative, Dante reads it out loud for his friend. This poem, and the book of poems from whence it comes, serves several purposes in the book: for Dante, it is the excuse to use and read profanity in the security of his own room, since he is not allowed to curse in front of his family. It is a means to do something adult and forbidden in the security of his own space. As for Ari, the poems are an avenue to reflect on his world around him. As he considers how much easier it is to read poems than he thought it would be, the boy concludes: "I got to thinking that poems were like people. Some people you got right off the bat. Some people you just didn't get – and never would get" (Sáenz 29). Reading poems helps him, a teenage boy, with new realizations about life each day, understand that people are different, and some can just be difficult to understand. This poem, and as assumed, the poetry book by William Carlos Williams become symbolic in the plot sense: after that afternoon spent

reading poems together with Dante, Ari realizes that he has found a friend in the other teenager. It is a significant moment in the character's life, as Dante is his first real friend. In fact, this activity (Dante reading poems to Ari) becomes a regular part of their friendship and lasts throughout most of the story.

In the novel, literary works also serve as mechanisms to mend relationships. Ari has a very complicated relationship with his father, both of them being people who do not like to talk and therefore never properly communicate. Reading is one of the means for them to spend time together and bond:

> He tried to talk to me but it wasn't working. He pretty much just sat there.
> That made me crazy. I got this idea into my head.
> "Dante left two books," I said. "Which one do you want to read?
> I'll read the other." He choose *War and Peace*. *The Grapes of Wrath* was fine
> with me. It wasn't so bad, me and my father sitting in a hospital room. Reading. (Sáenz 135)

This excerpt shows that both Ari and his father want to connect with each other, but both being closed off characters, they are not very successful in striking a conversation. Therefore, Ari decides that a way for them to bond would be to read, since both men enjoy reading. No explanation is given as to why Dante brought this or that exact book for him but a safe assumption about Ari's father choosing *War and Peace* would be that he himself is a war veteran, and therefore, the plot is of interest for him. This may be seen as another use of the concept of allusion mentioned earlier in the theoretical part of the thesis by the author. Perhaps while the "war" part is about Jaime's veteran status and the state of the relationship, "peace" refers to what they both wish could be accomplished in the relationship. Eventually it becomes a tradition between them: "My father decided he would read everything that I read. Maybe that was our way of talking" (Sáenz 141). In short, since father and son could not find a mutual topic or just words to talk about in their daily life, literature serves as a way for them to find out what the other enjoys and what thoughts they might have.

The aforementioned works by William Carlos Williams, Leon Tolstoy, and John Steinback are serious literary works, all dealing with love, death, and other difficult topics. It could appear incongruous that fifteen-year-old boys would be reading such literature, but later in the book, when Dante reads to Ari *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway, a semblance of explanation is given:

> "It's a sad book," I said.
> "Yeah. That's why you like it."
> "Yeah," I said. "That's exactly right." (Sáenz 141)

From this excerpt one can deduce that Dante specifically picks out darker literary works for Ari, thinking he will appreciate these more because of his sad nature. Aristotle, although precocious, conserves some traits stereotypical to that of other fifteen-year-old boys in his environment. He does not have friends and is constantly troubled by thoughts about himself as an individual, about his father, whom he has difficulty connecting with, about his brother who is a secret in the family. He is highly

self-critical and in general does not seem like a happy teenager, and Dante, as his friend, recognizes this in him. From all this discussion, it may be stated that the function of intertextuality here is that of *dialogue*, since it invites the reader to see how certain mentioned poems or books interact with the characters and the storyline.

Before moving to other media, one last quotation of a literary work must be discussed. It is to be treated separately from those already mentioned because this is the only time when Sáenz does not mention either the title of the poetry book nor its author in any form. Only one quote is given from the whole poetry book:

> I read a line and tried to understand it: "from what we cannot hold the stars are made." It was a beautiful thing to say, but I didn't know what it meant. I fell asleep thinking what the line might mean. (Sáenz 74)

The quote in this excerpt is from W.S. Merwin's poem "Youth":

> Through all of youth I was looking for you
> without knowing what I was looking for
>
> or what to call you I think I did not
> even know I was looking how would I
>
> have known you when I saw you as I did
> time after time when you appeared to me
>
> as you did naked offering yourself
> entirely at that moment and you let
>
> me breathe you touch you taste you knowing
> no more than I did and only when I
>
> began to think of losing you did I
> recognize you when you were already
>
> part memory part distance remaining
> mine in the ways that I learn to miss you
>
> from what we cannot hold the stars are made. (*"'Youth' by W.S. Merwin."*)

Perhaps the choice to mention neither the author nor the poem was to drive a point in the plot that Ari was tired and sleepy, as the quote suggests. Another possible explanation, however, could be that the author intended this quote as an *allusion*, expecting that the reader would recognize the poem and the meaning of the line without any further context (*"Allusion"*); and, if it were an allusion, it then would bring forward the question of culture. Merwin is a North-American poet, and the novel is set in the USA as well. While the poem might be familiar to local population or people genuinely interested in poetry, the possible allusion is unlikely to be understood for someone of another geographical or linguistic area, or who has no interest in North-American poetry or literature. No further explanation regarding this quote is mentioned in the book, leaving the reader to speculate on its origin and

meaning based on their own culture and knowledge rather than that of the characters of the book themselves. This perhaps is a result of yet another theme of coming-of-age genre, most of it being set in the USA (Benyahia et al.).

To conclude, poetry and other literary works are very significant in this book. As mentioned before, in terms of intertextuality, the main type of it used in the text is the *quotation*, since in most cases the author mentions the works he is citing, or at least the origin of the work. The mentioned literary works also invite the reader to contemplate the way their implicit and explicit relationships affect the characters and the plotline. As for the said plot, all the literature mentioned is meant to strengthen the interpersonal relationships between the characters in the novel. The first time Ari realizes that Dante became his friend is when the boy reads poetry to him. Dante giving him books to read or reading poems to Ari becomes one of the main parts of their friendship. Literature also helps Ari and his father to find a mutual hobby and a way to get to know each other without conversation, which would otherwise prove difficult for both of them due to their personalities. These specific choices of books and poems, which are all quite serious in their themes, also invite the reader to think about how mature and rather gloomy both Aristotle and Dante are as teenagers. There is an interesting case of an uncredited poem as well, which turns out to be *"Youth"*, inviting the thought that the author meant for it to be an *allusion*, but it might find itself lost in translation for readers outside North-America or simply not that well versed in poetry.

4.3 Art and Music

Besides literature, there are other cases of intertextuality in this book. As Lodge states, "intertextuality is the very condition of literature" (Lodge 98), meaning that basically every work of literature has intertextuality in it, whether it is intentional or not. The form of intertextuality where other media, besides literature, is referenced in a work is called *other "text" in a book* (Lemaster 70). This other form of intertextuality serves some sort of purpose in the book as well.

As such, another form of media this book paid a noticeable tribute to is pictural art. Early in the story, when Dante comes to Ari's house for the first time, he brings an art book as a gift: "It was an art book filled with the work of Mexican painters" (Sáenz 32). In regard to the fact that both Ari and Dante come from Mexican families, such gift is significant in terms of their home culture. Later in the chapter, Ari's father is shuffling through the art book and shows Ari "a mural by Orozco" (Sáenz 36). Of note, Orozco is considered to be "the most important 20th-century muralist to work in fresco" (*"José Clemente Orozco"*). Again, knowing that Ari's family is Mexican, this book and the mention of this particular artist shows connectivity and pride toward their culture and its achievements. Later in the book, when Dante moves to Chicago with his family, several paintings are mentioned in his letters to Ari, since Dante once explained that he enjoyed visiting the Art Institute of Chicago. The two paintings he mentions are *Nighthawks* by Edward Hopper and *The Raft of the*

Medusa by Géricault (Sáenz 184-185). The latter, Dante claims, is his favorite painting, while the former one reminds him of Ari. Ari comtemplates the painting by Hopper and says:

> Dante was right about *Nighthawks*. It was a great painting. And it was true, what Hopper was saying. I felt as if I were looking in a mirror. But it didn't break my heart. (Sáenz 188)

These art pieces, as described in the novel, create an intertextual *dialogue*, as defined by Lemaster (70). The emotional information given about them (one reminding Dante of Ari, the other being Dante's favorite) offers the reader a broader perspective about the characters. From these works, the reader can access a visual example of how the characters see themselves and each other, or how they may be feeling. They also have a meaning in the *coming-of-age genre* sense. Dante leaves for Chicago, and for a while afterward, the reader only hears about him from the letters he sends to Ari. The fact that he gained an interest in art and shares what his favorite paintings are shows development for the character, a sign of maturing and growing up. Similarly for Ari as well, finding an art book that includes *Nighthawk* helps him reflect on his own feelings, encouraging him to think about himself as an individual.

The last form of media regularly mentioned in the novel is music. It is important to note that the setting of the novel is El Paso, Texas, USA in 1987, therefore most of the songs or artists mentioned were those popular in the 1990s. Artists such as Waylon Jennings, Alice Cooper, U2 and George Michael, at the height of their popularity back then, are all mentioned once; however, other musical acts are mentioned several times, drawing more attention and significance in the plot and their emotional bearing on the characters. The group *Los Lobos* and the artist Richie Valens are among those. What ties them both together is a song named "La Bamba". In the beginning of the novel, it is revealed that Valens was killed in a plane crash in 1959, and later Los Lobos released a remake of "*La Bamba*", originally by Valens (Sáenz 5). While the original singer is mentioned in the book several more times during Ari's conversations with his mother and in a fever dream caused by severe flu, it is the song itself that has significant meaning: "The Los Lobos version of "La Bamba" was my favorite, hands down" (Sáenz 215). As for Dante, his favorite artists are the Beatles, also mentioned several times. When Ari visits Dante's house for the first time, Dante plays the vinyl of *Abbey Road*, an album by the Beatles, "his favorite" (Sáenz 27), and later in novel, the boys have the following conversation:

> "[…]Favorite song?"
> "Don't have one. Yours?"
> "'The Long and Winding Road.'"
> "'The Long and Winding Road'?"
> "The Beatles, Ari."
> "Don't know it."
> "Great song, Ari." (Sáenz 104)

Generally, the songs and mentions of various artists provide more cultural context for the book, as emphasis for the setting; but they also give more information about the characters themselves. Ari is shown to be comfortable with his Mexican heritage therefore the artists and songs he listens to are usually performed by Mexican artists. Meanwhile Dante, not as comfortable with his origins as Ari is, tends to listen to other very popular western artists, perhaps influenced by his father and his love for English culture.

To conclude, there were several non-literary examples of intertextuality in this book such as art and music. Examples of these forms of media serve as a means to emphasize cultural context and give more in-depth information about the characters, their developments, and point-of-views as they grow.

5. IDENTITIES IN BENJAMIN ALIRE SÁENZ'S NOVEL *ARISTOTLE AND DANTE DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE* (2012)

5.1 Family Identity

In coming-of-age novels, relationships and especially relationships among family members are of great importance and this novel is no exception; family is arguably the most discussed topic throughout the whole novel. As Feiler notes, "Research shows that family history and family identity actually help to forge stronger feelings of acceptance, belonging, and well-being within a nuclear family" (Feiler qtd. in Norman), and this fact reveals itself differently in Ari's and Dante's cases. Both characters, polar opposites yet so similar at the same time, show parallel dynamics in terms of their feelings towards family as well.

In terms of identity, Dante only has one identity in his family – a child, or to be more gender specific, a son. He is the only child of Sam and Soledad Quintana, although towards the end of the book it is revealed that Dante's parents are expecting a second child. As for his feelings about his family, he makes it explicit:

> "Would you ever?" I said. "Run away?"
> "No."
> "Why not?"
> "You want me to tell you a secret?"
> "Sure"
> "I'm crazy about my mom and dad." (Sáenz 21)

Dante thus openly admits that he loves his parents. Just from his feelings for them one may assume that they have a good relationship, and throughout the novel, details are given that correlate with this assumption. When Ari goes to Dante's house for the first time, he watches as "Dante walked up to his father and kissed him on the cheek" (Sáenz 24). While just this gesture does not necessarily show

a good relationship, since in certain cases children show such gesture out of respect, the conversation that follows thereafter clarifies this dynamic:

> "Dante didn't like where the conversation was going so he tried to change the subject. "Are you going to grow a beard?"
> "No." He laughed. "It's too hot. And besides, your mother won't kiss me if I go more than a day without shaving."
> "Wow, she's strict."
> "Yup."
> "And what would you do without her kisses?"
> […]
> "You're quick, Dante. You must get that from your mother."
> "Don't be a wiseass, Dad." (Sáenz 25-26)

This conversation here demonstrates several points about relationships in this family. First of all, the conversation between Dante and his father is witty and light-hearted and even though later in the conversation Sam scolds his son for using the word *wiseass*, it is not done in a strict or angry manner. This excerpt shows that while there still are certain boundaries of conversation between a parent and a child, Dante feels comfortable enough around his father to speak freely. Not only the witty conversation showcases ease between father and son, but it also gives some information about the mother, Soledad. Dante jokingly describes her as "strict", and this description reveals that the mother is likely stricter than the father but there is no resentment about it from Dante's side. Sam also indirectly calls his wife smart while saying that Dante got his quickness (to catch hints) from his mother. The conversation about kisses is also symbolic in a sense that it showcases the parents most likely not withholding affection from each other, and the fact that Dante kissed his father as well shows that affection was passed to their child as well. This excerpt of their conversation alone exhibits that Dante lives in a loving home and has a good relationship with his parents.

After it is revealed that Soledad is expecting a second child, Dante acknowledges yet another self-identity in terms of family – older brother. When he announces the news to Ari, at first, he empathizes with Ari's surprise but later he just jokes about the situation: "I hope to God that my mother has a boy. And he better like girls. Because if he doesn't, I'll kill him" (Sáenz 252). The joke seems like an indication that Dante has positively accepted his new role and a conversation later only establishes this:

> "Dante's making a list of names for his baby brother."
> I looked at Dante. "What if it's a girl?"
> "He'll be a boy." There was no doubt in his voice. […]
> The look on his mother's face told me they'd had this discussion more than a few times. […]
> Mrs. Quintana laughed. "Does the mother get a say?"
> "No," Dante said. "The mother just gets to do all the work."
> She leaned over and kissed him. (Sáenz 269)

Dante being sure about having a brother just yet again shows his readiness and acceptant oh the new identity of an older brother. The excerpt here shows more of his relationship with his mother as well, which is quite similar to his and Sam's: full of wit and affection. A connection can be drawn between Dante's personality and his confidence about his family identity. He is portrayed as someone who is of a happier nature than Ari and his family life seems to be one of the reasons why. The positive and non-complicated relationships among the Quintana family members affect Dante so that he is not afraid to speak about his thoughts and feelings.

The only visible external reactions concerning Dante's identity and relationships within his family unit are from Ari, the narrator. He seems to be surprised when he sees the dynamics in the Quintana family, saying "I would have never done that. Not ever" (Sáenz 24) after Dante kisses his father on the cheek. Later on, he expresses more of his feelings about seeing his friend be so close to his father:

> It made me smile, the way they got along, the easy and affectionate way they talked to each other as if love between a father and a son was simple and uncomplicated. My mom and I, sometimes the thing we had between us was easy and uncomplicated. Sometimes. But me and my dad, we didn't have that. I wondered what that would be like, to walk into a room and kiss my father. (Sáenz 26)

Later Ari concluded the Quintana family to be "a family of touchers and kissers" (Sáenz 41) and once again wondered what it would be like to be so affectionate with his own father. Watching Dante interact with his family and seeing the contrast pushes Ari to ponder about his own family and his relationship with his father. The former excerpt also summarizes Ari's relationship with his parents.

Ari's family is larger than Dante's, although it is not as visible without explicit mention. As for family identity, Ari is a child, a son specifically, and a younger brother. The youngest child in the Mendoza family, he lives with his parents, Lilly and Jaime. He also mentions having two older twin sisters, but they are "so far away" from him, Ari having been born "too late" and the age difference being too far apart for the sisters to keep in touch with him. (Sáenz 82) He also has a brother named Bernardo, which, Ari reveals right from the start, is in prison and is somewhat a secret in the family. No one ever speaks about him; therefore, Ari does not know much and just keeps wondering about him. In fact, Bernardo and his father are the two key figures of his ponderings when it comes to family, which suggests that Ari encounters difficulty connecting with his familial entity not only in general, but also in relation to the other men in his family.

When reacting to Dante's family, Ari simply ponders that he and his mother get along well. She is the closest member in the family to him, and in fact, their relationship is quite similar to Dante's with his own parents – it is full of witty conversations, the only difference being that Ari is not as affectionate and open about his thoughts and feelings as Dante is: "I know what he's saying, Mom.

Just like *you* know what *I'm* saying" (Sáenz 68). The quote shows that there is a deep understanding between them, even though Ari does not open up as much as his mother would like him to.

One of the key elements of Ari's family identity is his relationship with his father. Their relationship is difficult and complicated since Jaime is a war veteran and it clearly affected the man. "All I knew is that sometimes my father was sad. I hated that he was sad. It made me sad too. I didn't like sad. So I was the son of a man who had Vietnam living inside him" (Sáenz 14). This is how Ari introduces his father in the beginning of the book. He explains that he was born already after his father went to war, therefore, since war changed the man and he became much more reserved in result, they have never properly communicated nor bonded. As the quote suggests, Ari is deeply affected by his barely existent relationship with his father and the fact that his father has such visible emotional scars from the war. Naturally, he wonders about why his father is this way and why they never communicate:

> And another thing about my father: He didn't give lectures. Not real ones. Which pissed me off. He wasn't a mean guy. And he didn't have a bad temper. He spoke in short sentences […] Why couldn't he just talk? How was I supposed to know him when he didn't let me? I hated that. (Sáenz 23)

Ari is frustrated that his father does not speak much and the way his lack of communication is refraining them from bonding. He later continues to open up to the reader:

> I could have asked my father lots of questions. I could have. But there was something in his face and eyes and in his crooked smile that prevented me from asking. I guess I didn't believe he wanted me to know who he was. So I just collected clues. […] Some day all the clues would come together. And I would solve the mystery of my father. (Sáenz 37)

His thoughts display the way Ari wants to get to know his father, understand him, and get along with him, yet he does not know how to approach him. The situation with his father frustrates him but he eventually starts learning details about Jaime from his own observations and conversations with his mother. Ironically, he himself was quite like Jaime: quiet, closed-off, sad. Both Ari and his dad were not conversational people and did not know where to begin, their dialogues always short and fruitless: "I'm sorry I'm so far away" (Sáenz 65). After finding out that Ari looks for him in his dreams when he has nightmares, Jaime also expresses that he feels bad for their lack of communication. That seems to be the first shift in their relationship. For some time, as mentioned in the previous chapter, their way of communication is reading the same literature, and then eventually it moves to daily conversations. Another major shift happens when Ari asks for a car for his birthday and his dad volunteers to teach him how to drive.

> He seemed so at ease with himself, like he was at home. Even though he didn't talk much, he didn't seem as remote. That was nice. He sometimes whistled, like he was happy to be with me. Maybe my dad just didn't need words to get by in the world. (Sáenz 200)

Through his own observations, reading books together, and through the routine they established while Ari was learning how to drive, he learns to understand Jaime and gets to know him little by little, just as he always wished. The climax of them getting closer was the trip to Tucson, during which his father opens up about Bernardo.

> It wasn't my mother who answered my hungry questions. It was my father. My mother would listen sometimes as my father and I talked about Bernardo. […] And loved my father, too, for the careful way he spoke. I came to understand that my father was a careful man. To be careful with people and with words was a rare and beautiful thing. (Sáenz 324)

Not only Ari finally learns the story about his brother from none other but his father, Jaime also opens up to his son about his trauma of war at the end of the book. It was a very complicate journey towards a bond between a father and a son but as it ended happily, Ari got to fully embrace his identity as a son. This progression fulfills most of the promises of coming-of-age literature (Benyahia et al.).

Bernardo, Ari's older brother, was another key figure in all his thoughts about his family identity. As mentioned before, Bernardo is a secret in the family, having left the family picture when Ari was four and everyone refuses to talk about him:

> All over the house, there are pictures. But there are no pictures of my brother. Because he's in prison. No one in my house talks about him. It's like beng dead. […] Even Charlie, the dead dog, gets a story. My brother doesn't get any stories. (Sáenz 96)

He is aware of the fact that he has a brother but since no one ever talks about him nor there are pictures of him around the house, Ari does not know anything else about his brother except his name and the fact that he is in prison. The silence around his brother frustrates the boy immensely and naturally, as he does not know anything about his brother, he wonders about him frequently ("And then my thoughts fell on my brother. They always fell there" (Sáenz 299)), to the point of having dreams about him ("That night, the dreams came again. My brother" (Sáenz 77)). Anytime Ari attempts to ask his parents about Bernardo, the conversation gets quickly shut down until one day he discovers an envelope with his name in his mother's drawer. "I put the envelope back. I didn't want to do it this way. I wanted my mother to hand it to me. To say, "This is the story of your brother" (Sáenz 218). As badly as Ari wants to know about Bernardo, he wants his parents to be the ones that would reveal all the secrets to him. And in the course of time, they do: during the previously mentioned trip to Tucson, Ari's father finally opens up to his son that Bernardo is a secret because when he was sentenced, Lilly had a severe mental breakdown, and no one wants to upset her again by bringing her

older son up. After the trip, both parents eventually realize how much they hurt Ari by keeping the story of his brother from him and they tell him the truth: Bernardo assaulted someone to death and that is why he ended up in prison. Not only Ari finally gets to hear about his brother and see his pictures, voicing the story of Bernardo out again becomes a healing moment for all of the Mendoza family members. While ultimately Ari does find out the secrets of his father and brother, for a long time his family identity is disturbed. He is aware of his roles as a child and a sibling, but he did not get to fully realize them as he did not keep in touch with his siblings and also struggled to bond with one of his parents. His uncertainty with his family identity also affects his personality, as he is highly critical and very unsure of himself. Identity in general, and here familial identity, can be distressing when one is unsure about it, since cultural and familial identity is how once constructs themselves in larger social surroundings (Jandt 15); so, by finally having all the pieces of the puzzle in hand, Ari is able to define his own identity at last.

In conclusion, family identity is one of most discussed topics in this book. Dante was a child and eventually embraced the role of a sibling. He had a good relationship with both of his parents, lived in a loving and affectionate household which also affected his personality in such sense that he was confident, affectionate, and not afraid to open up about his feelings. Ari's situation was vastly different. While he also was a child and a sibling in his family, and was aware of such roles, they were uncertain as he never got to fully realize his role as a sibling. He had also struggled to bond with his father which also did not make him feel confident with his identity as a child. Such uncertainties in his family identity affected his personality in a negative way as well, as he was closed-off and highly critical of himself.

5.2 Ethnic Identity

Another identity that is prominent and mentioned often throughout the book is ethnic identity. Although the book is set in El Paso, Texas, which is in the United States, both of the characters' families are of Mexican descent. Once in the book it is mentioned that their grandparents come from Mexico (Sáenz 44), therefore this makes Ari and Dante third generation immigrants since they and both their parents were already born in the US. Just like their family identities, both characters express different feelings towards their ethnicity as well, but in this case their roles are reversed.

Ari and his family members seem to be fully comfortable with their ethnic identity. He describes himself being "darker" than Dante (Sáenz 20), but he seems to not have any problem with it since his skin color is only mentioned to compare himself with his friend and nothing else negative is said about it. Ari seems nonchalant about his ethnicity to the point of playfully playing into stereotypes about Mexican people:

> "What are you going to do today?" It sounded like a challenge.
> "I'm going to join a gang."
> "That's not funny."
> "I'm Mexican. Isn't that what we do?"
> "*Not* funny." (Sáenz 8)

While Lilly, Ari's mother, does not find his jokes funny, probably because one of her sons is actually in prison, the joke displays irony towards the stereotype that Mexican people are criminals, and it also shows Ari's point of view on ethnic stereotypes in general. The whole Mendoza family seem to fully embrace their ethnicity. As mentioned before, when Dante comes to their house for the first time, he gifts them an art book of Mexican artists and Jaime, Ari's father is described to be happy and prideful while looking through it. There are also mentions of traditional foods such as *sopa de arroz* (Sáenz 64), *menudo* (Sáenz 273) and others, implying that they are indulging in everyday parts of their culture such as food as well. As the narrator, Ari also uses some Spanish slang quite often throughout the book.

> The only thing I was worried about was trying to speak perfect English. I made up my mind that year—when I was ten—that I wasn't going to sound like another Mexican. I was going to be an American. […] Reading my own words embarrassed the hell out of me. I mean, what a *pendejo*. (Sáenz 94-95)

Not only this excerpt shows his use of Spanish slang throughout his narrative of the story, but it also reveals that as a kid, Ari was ashamed of being Mexican. However, as he called himself a *pendejo*, which translates to 'idiot' in figurative speech (Cocking), for thinking in such way, this only reinforces his current comfort with his ethnic identity.

Both of the characters seem to live among a local Mexican community as there are no interactions with people of other ethnicities throughout the book. Such assumption is also backed by the fact that most outside-of-the-family interactions happen to be held half in Spanish, half in English, like in this example:

> "What the hell's the matter with you, Ari? *Que tu pasa*?"
> I didn't have anything to say. I looked down at the ground.
> "What's going on here, Ari? *A ver. Di me.*" (Sáenz 315)

This conversation happened between Ari and Mr. Rodriguez, after Ari got into a fight with the man's son. It could be assumed that because he is surrounded by a predominantly Mexican community, Ari easily embraces his ethnic identity. Dante also called him a "real Mexican" several times through the novel.

As for Dante himself, he initially did not feel the same way. His unease with his own ethnicity is evident throughout the whole story. In one of their conversations with Ari at the beginning of the book, they discuss Mexican names and their nicknames, and the conversation ends with Dante disclosing his feelings:

> "It bothers you that you're Mexican, doesn't it?"
> "No."
> I looked at him.
> "Yes, it bothers me." […]
> "You know what I think, Ari? I think Mexicans don't like me" (Sáenz 39-40).

From this excerpt, especially his last sentence, one could assume that Dante does not feel like he belongs. Such assumption is drawn from several points. It is mentioned several times that Dante is of lighter skin than an average person of Mexican descent and "everybody looks more Mexican than" him (Sáenz 72). The fact that he does not look like the general person of his ethnicity might create the feeling of alienation or as Phinney describes, "self-conscious engagement with ethnicity issues" (Phinney qtd. in Ragaišienė and Raškauskienė 74). Dante also mentions that he does not get along with his relatives:

> "They don't like me. They think I'm—well, they think I'm a little different. They're really Mexican, you know. And I'm sort of, well, what did you call me?"
> "A *pocho*."
> "That's exactly what I am. My Spanish isn't great." (Sáenz 87)

A *pocho*, as Ari called Dante earlier in the book and also explained, is "a half-assed Mexican" (Sáenz 45). It seems that the lack of relationship with his relatives also adds to Dante's alienation towards his ethnicity, especially since the relatives seem to discriminate against him for not looking or speaking his ethnic part. Finally, the last point seems to be his name. When it is revealed that Dante's mother is expecting another child, he is enthusiastic to pick a name for his sibling. All the names he picks are Mexican and after Ari teases him for not being comfortable with this ethnicity, yet picking a Mexican name for his brother, Dante explains: "Yeah, well, I'm shying away from ancient classical names. And besides, if he has a Mexican name, then maybe he'll *feel* more Mexican" (Sáenz 269). While also subtly poking fun at their own names, Dante also reveals that having such a unique name also added to him not feeling connected to his Mexican roots. Towards the end of the story, however, he is joking about him being Mexican since he knows all about hotwiring (Sáenz 279). The joke that also pokes fun at the stereotyping of Mexican people implies that eventually he does become more comfortable with his ethnicity. Jandt mentions in his theory about cultural identity about how "[…]knowing one person's cultural identity doesn't provide complete or reliable information about that person" (Jandt 15-16) and such is visible in the contrast of both Ari and Dante: while both of the character are Mexican-American, their experiences with and feelings towards their ethnic identity differ.

There is not much about his family in terms of their own relationships with their ethnic identity. Dante does tell stories of his parents, how they fought their way for education since they came from poor families and how they eventually became specialists in spheres

where there is not much representation: “I’d never met a Mexican-American man who was an English professor. I didn’t know they existed” (Sáenz 24). One could assume that ethnicity and following their culture or traditions is not as important or universal in the Quintana family household as it is in Ari’s family. Ari himself called Dante a fake Mexican in the beginning and was rather fascinated with his discomfort about being Mexican, but eventually it is him and their constant conversations that results in Dante joking about his ethnicity and therefore showcasing progress in accepting his ethnic identity.

Overall, compared to family identity, both characters switch places in terms of ethnic identity. Ari, while disclosing that he was ashamed as a child, eventually grows up to be comfortable being a Mexican-American man. He pokes fun at stereotypes about his people, speaks some Spanish and generally indulges in more cultural parts such as food and art with his family. Dante, on the other hand, is not comfortable with his ethnicity. Looking not as stereotypical as the rest of his ethnic group, being alienated by his relatives, and also having a non-Mexican name led him to feel like he does not belong. There is not much about his family being as culturally involved as the Mendoza family either. However, by the end of the story Dante hints at accepting his ethnic identity more by following Ari’s example and poking fun at a stereotype.

5.3 Sexual Identity

Arguably one of the most significant themes discussed in this novel is sexuality or sexual identity. This novel, besides being of coming-of-age or young adult genre, also falls into the LGBT category, since both the main characters, Ari and Dante, eventually end up together as partners. In fact, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, the author of the novel, is homosexual himself, having acknowledged his homosexuality just a few years before the release of this book. (Ballí) Adding to the sparse yet growing Latinx LGBT representation (Nava), the author revealed that writing these characters also “gave him solace” and the book, with the success that it received, “saved his life” (Salazar).

Once again both characters, having different levels of vulnerability and emotional intelligence, discover their sexual identities differently. Dante is the first one to explore his sexuality as he starts retelling his experiences in his letters to Ari, having moved to Chicago with his family for a few months. Although, before the move, Dante tells Ari: “I love swimming—*and you*” (Sáenz 150). This could be interpreted as foreshadowing of future events. Or Dante, the one who is not afraid to show his emotions and vulnerability, expressing his perhaps still platonic love towards his friend. In Chicago, however, Dante starts exploring his sexuality. In his letters to Ari, he expresses how he starts going to parties and in one of the parties he kisses a girl named Emma. Dante expresses that they kissed a long time, and he is still thinking about the kiss, yet he is “not sure about all this” (Sáenz 176). Judging from his reaction and lack of such information previously in the book, this was his first kiss. Later, however, Ari sums up Dante’s experience:

> He was still experimenting with kissing girls even though he said he'd rather be kissing boys. That's exactly what he said. I didn't know exactly what to think about that, but Dante was going to be Dante and if I was going to be his friend, I would just have to learn to be okay with it. (Sáenz 202)

This excerpt reveals several things: Dante's eventual preference for boys and Ari's reaction to his explorations. While he seems unsure on how to react, he is willing to accept his friend, nevertheless. As Dante's exploration continues, he also sends Ari a letter talking about masturbation and during his next letter he reveals that after experimenting kissing with one girl, he eventually realizes that he is, in fact, gay:

> The thing is I love my dad. My mom too. And I keep wondering what they're going to say when I tell them that someday I want to marry a boy. I wonder how that's going to go over? I'm the only son. What's going to happen with the grandchildren thing? I hate that I'm going to disappoint them, Ari. I know I've disappointed you too. (Sáenz 227)

Dante displays fear of rejection and discrimination, he is scared to disappoint people since he is now "playing for the other team" (Sáenz 228) and that he knows it is frowned upon in his community. That is why he is so adamant on having a baby brother when his mother announces her pregnancy; he wants his parents to be able to have grandchildren (Sáenz 252). As mentioned in the previous subchapter, he is uncomfortable about his ethnic identity. His sexual identity also plays a role in his ethnic discomfort when he eventually comes to terms with the fact that he is romantically attracted to other men ("Do real Mexicans like to kiss boys?" (Sáenz 273)). Mexican culture, both in general and here more particularly sexual culture, is heavily influenced by Christianity and religion (Carrillo). Christianity and the LGBTQ community have a history of violence and ideological contention, that have often resulted in legal, physical, and emotional harm to the community (Greenberg 515). As such, religious culture, and a heteronormative society as is in place in Mexico (and most everywhere else in the Americas and Europe) is expected to teach and perpetuate prejudice against the LGBTQ community via its alienation from a supposed norm, the opposite of what queer theory teaches, as Jagose describes it (Jagose 3). In this context, Dante's fear of losing the respect of his parents and Ari, his best friend, is not unreasonable. After he comes to terms with his homosexuality, hints about him being in love with Ari increase throughout the story, although he does date another boy for a short while. Yet even then he is open about his feelings for his best friend: "I wasn't really kissing Daniel. In my head, I was kissing you" (Sáenz 334). This shows that even while dating another boy, Daniel, Dante still has feelings for Ari. He thinks that he does not have any chance with his friend, therefore he tries to move on and date someone else. This situation correlates to the poet Dante and his unrequired love for Beatrice. The Italian poet has been in love with her for years, although their love is not meant to be as she eventually dies. Regardless, Dante Alighieri has dedicated most of his

poetry to her from the first day he saw her to his death (*"Beatrice"*). Dante from the novel eventually gets his happy ending but it is interesting to notice yet another connection between the character and the historical figure.

While Dante himself is in touch with his emotions, therefore his acceptance of himself is rather peaceful, the outward reaction to his coming out is more varied. Ari is the first one to know about his friend's journey and realization and as mentioned before, while he expresses confusion and uncertainty, he still accepts his friend as he is:

> "I think you know what it means. Someday, someone will walk up to you and say: 'Why are you hanging out with that queer?' If you can't stick by me as a friend, Ari, if you can't do that, then maybe it's better that you just, you know—it would kill me. You know it would kill me if you—"
> "Then it's a question of loyalty."
> "Yes."
> I laughed. "I have a harder rule to follow."
> He laughed too. (Sáenz 248)

The joke after Dante confesses his fear of Ari not sticking by him demonstrates that Ari is ready to commit to his friend and not leave him. Unfortunately, he still faces homophobia. When Dante starts dating another boy named Daniel, they get caught kissing in an alley and they get attacked by a group of boys. While Daniel runs away, Dante does not, and he gets assaulted to the point that he ends up in the hospital. After this event, both Dante's and Ari's parents find out about his homosexuality: "If he's so crazy about me, why didn't he tell me?" (Sáenz 303). Dante's father is devastated that his son did not talk to him about his sexuality and reveals to Ari that he already had an idea about Dante being gay. Dante's parents express unconditional love to their son. Ari's parents also accept Dante without a doubt:

> "Sam told me you know about Dante."
> "There are worse things in the world than a boy who likes to kiss other boys."
> "Yes, there are," she said. "Much worse. Do you mind if I say something?"
> I smiled at her and shrugged.
> "I think Dante's in love with you." (Sáenz 307)

Not only Ari's parents speak calmly about Dante being gay, but Lilly also expressed that she knows about Dante's feelings towards her son, and she shows that she is completely accepting of it. In short, while Dante's close circle accepts him without any conflict, he unfortunately still had to experience homophobia and physical harm because of his sexual identity. Such treatment remains common in society as result of inaccurate idea of heterosexuality and cisgenderness as the only natural human traits (Jagose 17).

Ari's journey, on the other hand, is not as simple as Dante's. It is, in contrast, more subtle and timid. In the beginning of the book, he expresses that "guys make him uncomfortable" and that he does not agree with their opinions about girls (Sáenz 16). After he meets Dante, he starts thinking

about him often and while that in itself is natural since he is Ari's first friend, some thoughts might imply that his feelings towards his friend start to grow:

> I thought of Dante and wondered about him. And it seemed to me that Dante's face was a map of the world. A world without any darkness. Wow, a world without darkness. How beautiful was that? (Sáenz 56)

Ari also refers to Dante as beautiful several more times throughout the book. The fact that he also saves Dante from getting hit by a car without even blinking may also show that his feelings towards the boy are not as simple as they seem. His experiments with his sexuality start while Dante is in Chicago as well. After his friend's letters about kissing, he also starts wondering about it and about that time a girl in school, Ileana, catches his eye. She eventually becomes his first kiss, but their relationship ends with that since she is in a relationship with another boy that is in a gang, and she does not want any trouble for both herself and Ari. He thinks that he "took this kissing way too seriously" (Sáenz 224) and eventually gets over the heartbreak, becoming more closed-off in terms of romantic feelings. His second kiss is, in fact, with Dante. Dante talks him into kissing him with the excuse that only after kissing a boy will Ari know that he is indeed not interested. He concludes that it "didn't work for him" (Sáenz 255) and for some time, their relationship becomes awkward. When Dante starts dating Daniel, Ari is shown to be skeptical of the guy and his suspicion is confirmed, when Dante gets assaulted. In reaction to this event, Ari finds out who hurt his friend and physically assaults one of the guys in revenge. Around that time Ari starts to show a lot of anger and confusion on why he is feeling like this, he feels bad that he fought violence with violence. At the end of the book, it is actually Ari's parents who sit him down and tell him what is going on: "Ari, the problem isn't just that Dante's in love with you. The real problem—for you, anyway—is that you're in love with him" (Sáenz 348). The emphasis that this is only a problem for Ari shows that his parents approve of his love towards his best friend. Only after his parents express their observations to their son does Ari realize that he is, in fact, in love with Dante. Shame and self-hatred ("I hate myself" (Sáenz 349)) is his immediate reaction but after some encouragement from his parents, Ari eventually accepts his feelings and confesses to Dante.

It is essential to mention that Ari is not the first queer person in the Mendoza family, and it is not their first experience with the queer community. In fact, the previously mentioned trip to Tucson was to visit Ari's dying aunt, Ophelia. After the funeral, Ari is surprised why so few people came and his mother reveals that the rest of their family "didn't approve" of Ophelia because "she lived with another woman" (Sáenz 285). Ari's parents were the only part of the family that remained by his aunt and expressed anger towards the rest of the family for shutting Ophelia out. It is also revealed that Ari has lived with Aunt Ophelia during his mother's breakdown because of Bernardo. This fact showcases that Ari's

parents did not think any differently of her and trusted her to take care of their child. However, when it comes to Bernardo, he showcases a completely different side to the Mendoza family, as it is revealed that the person he assaulted to death was a transvestite. This contributes to the fact that the parents rarely talk about Ari's brother and by extension, to Ari's discomfort around some of the family dynamics, particularly when it comes to his siblings (either absent or, as he finds, might be unaccepting of parts of his identity). Such experience is also exactly the reason why the parents see through Ari and help his come to terms about his feelings towards his best friend.

The novel displays multiple, yet different struggles faced by the two main characters regarding their sexual identity. While Dante, who is more in touch with his emotions, comes to accept his homosexuality quite fast, his realization is still led by fear of disappointment, and he still experiences homophobia. Ari, who is not as open and in heavy denial, only realizes and comes to terms with his sexuality at the very end of the book, after a long conversation with his parents. This happens in a social and cultural context in which such experiences are common, particularly since the characters are dealing with different yet equally complex cultural ties (Jandt 15). Ultimately, both families are accepting of their sons and altogether, encourage them to act on their feelings, therefore, after many trials, the story of Ari and Dante's relationship has a happy ending.

6. CONCLUSION

In Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), two teenage boys go on the inevitable journey towards adulthood, during which they reflect on themselves as individuals, on their surroundings, their families, ethnicity, and sexuality as it all progresses with time.

This paper discusses that intertextuality in this novel is meaningful; the examples of intertextuality all serve a certain purpose. The most recognizable example lies in the name of the novel, or to be more specific, the characters' names. The author himself has not disclosed the reasons why he chose these particular names for the characters but throughout the novel, after taking a look at the personalities of characters, the connection and tribute to the historical figures of the same names appears more clearly. The author seems to have intentionally left this *allusion* for the readers to figure out themselves. Certain literary works, such as poems, have a function in this novel as well. Not only reading literature becomes a way of connection for several characters throughout the book, but these particular literary works mentioned in the novel also create a *dialogue* between themselves and the characters. The reader may come to find new points of characters' personalities and effect on the plot in general by recognizing the mentioned literary works. The purpose of pictorial art and music mentioned in the book is of similar purpose. Such examples are given to have a more in-depth picture of both the characters and the cultural context of the novel.

As Ari and Dante try to figure out life, several identities eventually come up as key challenges for them. The first identity, family identity, is not much of a problem for Dante: he is aware of his roles as a son, later an older sibling as well, and he seems to be comfortable with his identities. His good relationship with his parents also reflects in his personality, as he is not afraid to communicate his thoughts and emotions. Meanwhile Ari struggles greatly with his family identity. While he is aware of his roles as a child and a sibling and accepts them, he cannot realize them fully as there are several questions unanswered. The first one is about his father: both of them being of similar closed-off personalities, Ari and Jaime struggle to bond, leaving them with a flimsy and awkward relationship. The second unanswered question is of his older brother, Bernardo, who he hardly remembers from his childhood and only knows about him that he is now in prison. Eventually, Ari finds out the story of his brother and gets close with his father as well, such events leading not only to Ari becoming more comfortable with his family identity, but also to the healing of the whole Mendoza family. The next significant identity, ethnicity, provides a contrasting situation. Ari is the one who has fully accepted and is comfortable with the fact that he is Mexican. He throws ironic comments and jokes that poke at stereotypes about Mexican people, and his family seems to embrace the culture as well with constant mentions of food, Mexican art, and words in Spanish in conversations. Dante, contrastingly, confesses that his ethnicity bothers him. The story reveals several reasons for that: he does not possess his community's most common physical features, his "very Mexican" relatives reject him for being different, his unique and non-Mexican name feels alienating, and lastly, his sexuality also causes concern to him in regards of his ethnicity and cultural heritage. However, by the end of the book and after numerous conversations with Ari, Dante seems to become more comfortable with him being Mexican. Finally, the last identity of vast significance and bringing challenges to both characters is sexual identity. After Dante's family moves to Chicago for a short period, he comes to realize that he is gay and in love with Ari. His acceptance of himself is rather smooth, although he still deals with fears, uncertainty about his family's reaction and eventually, homophobia. Ari, on the other hand, is in denial until the very end of the book. He does not experiment as much as Dante and does have a female romantic interest, Ileana, though the relationship does not end well. It is Ari's parents who help him realize that he is in love with Dante and encourage him to act on his feelings. In the end, both families have no problem accepting their children as they are, especially the Mendoza family who already had other queer family members.

In conclusion, the book unveils a well-thought and carefully crafted journey of two boys as they live through the last years of adolescence. With clever and purposeful use of intertextuality, the characters discover the secrets of their own universes and with all their burning questions answered at the end of the book, both Ari and Dante embrace all their identities and seem to be ready to become adults.

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APPENDIX A: Plot summary of Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012)

The book is set in El Paso, Texas, USA in 1987. As summer begins, Aristotle "Ari" Mendoza does not know what to do with himself. He is a loner and has no friends, his only friend being his mother since he feels disconnected from his father, a Vietnam war veteran. He has siblings as well—two sisters and a brother, who is in prison—but he does not keep in touch with them either. His father and brother are one of the main occupants of his thoughts as Ari wonders about them both quite often, desperate to know what is going on in his father's head and what happened to his brother. Desperate to escape the atmosphere in the house, Ari leaves one day to the community pool, even though he cannot swim. There he meets Dante Quintana, who is a trained swimmer, and he offers to teach Ari how to swim. The boys bond over their unique classical names and are quick to form a friendship. Ari is fascinated by Dante, since he is so intellectual, knows a lot about art and literature, is genuinely quite social and open about his thoughts and feelings – he is almost everything that Ari is not. Dante's family, as Ari learns, is also the opposite of his own – loving, affectionate, close-knit.

Their adventures are short-lived as Ari catches severe flu and is bed-ridden for a few weeks. During his flu, he begins experiencing dreams about his brother, father, even Dante, how he can't find them. During his nightmares, his father finds out that Ari is looking for him in his dreams and opens up to his son that he has bad dreams as well. After Ari gets better, Dante announces that him and his family are moving to Chicago since his father got a job opportunity there. Yet, as they are playing in the street that same day, they see a wounded bird the middle of the street. While Dante is trying to save him, Ari sees a car speeding from around the corner and without thinking, pushes his friend out of the way, getting hit and heavily injured himself. This incident brings Dante a lot of guilt, Ari a lot of anger, but on a positive note it bring the Mendoza and Quintana families together, all becoming a close circle. Surprisingly, this exact incident is also the start of Ari and his father slowly becoming closer together.

Dante then leaves for Chicago, keeping in touch with Ari by sending him letters of his life and experiences, as he starts going to parties, kissing girls, and eventually realizing that he likes boys instead. Ari, meanwhile, heals after the accident and becomes more independent. He asks for a pick-up truck for his birthday, learns how to drive from his father, gets a job, gets a dog, and starts going to school again, where he falls in love with a girl named Ileana. Unfortunately, this relationship does not last longer than a few kissing sessions, because she has a boyfriend who is in a gang and eventually becomes pregnant by him and drops out of school to marry him.

Such is Ari's life during the school year – driving his pick-up truck, working after school, working out and playing with his dog, Legs (he found the dog the day his casts came off, hence the unique name). The end of the school year, however, brings Dante home as his family decided that

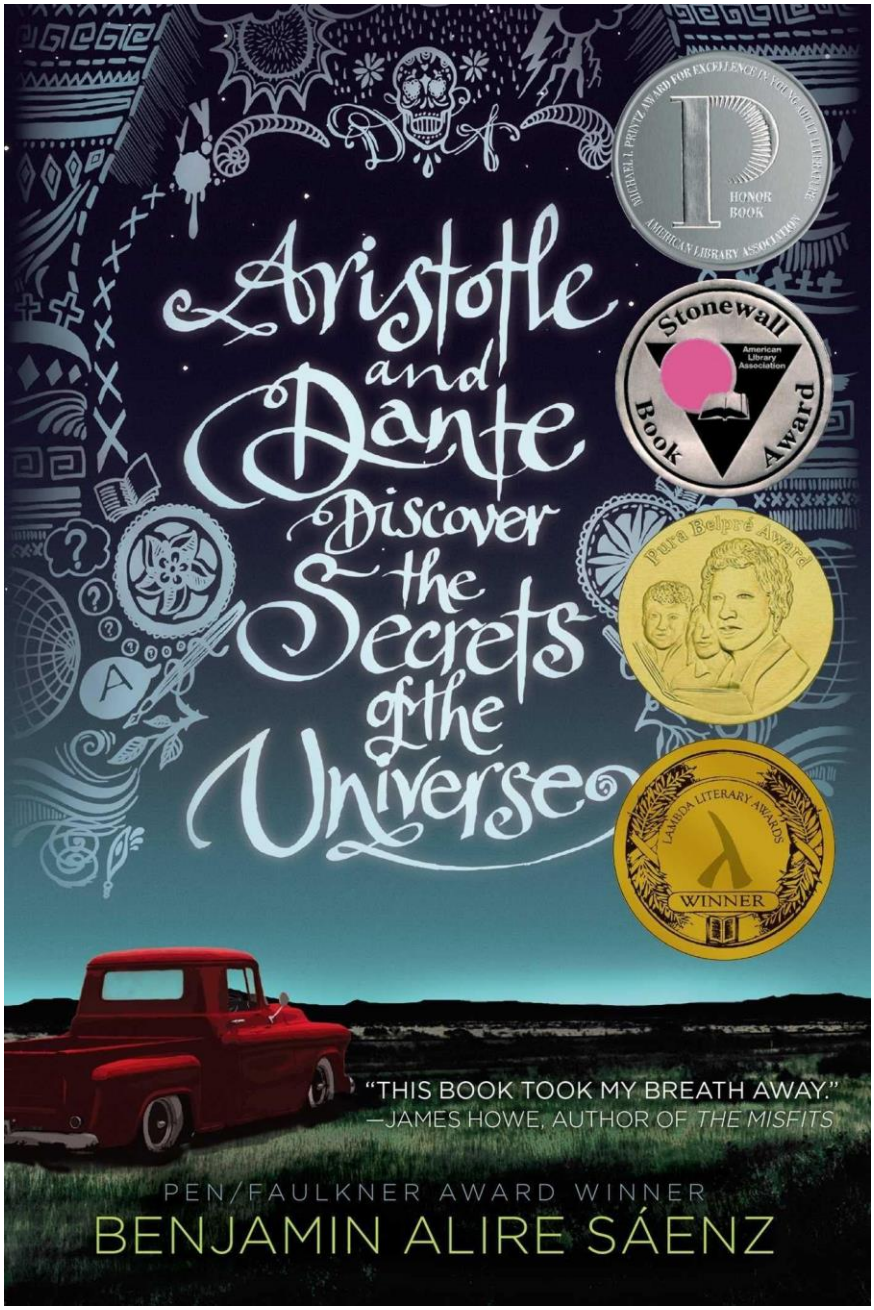
Chicago was not a great environment for him. Their friendship picks off as they left it, Dante announces that his mother is pregnant and continues sharing his uncertainties to Ari. He wants his mother to have another son who would actually like girls, get married and gift a grandchild, since he is sure he will not be able to do so. That is around the time when they have their first kiss, as Dante talks Ari into it. While Ari claims that he felt nothing after the kiss, Dante gets upset because he did feel things and this kiss confirmed to him that he is in love with his best friend.

Ari's family receive the news that his aunt, Ophelia, is dying and they all go to Tucson, where she resides. This trip and Ophelia's funeral is a significant moment for the Mendoza family, as the parents realize that they hurt Ari by keeping the story of his brother away from him. Bernardo, the older brother, beat a transvestite prostitute to death and got sentenced for life. And they were the only family members who showed up at Ophelia's funeral. It turns out that aunt Ophelia was gay, she lived with a woman and the rest of the family shut her out because of it, leaving Ari's parents very angry about the fact. All the stories shared and the story of Bernardo finally out in the open brings the Mendoza family closer than ever.

After they get back from the trip, they hear that Dante is in the hospital. Ari finds out that he got beat up by a group of boys after they caught him and another boy, Daniel, kissing. Ari finds Daniel, who ran away from the scene, threatens him and once he learns who are the boys that beat his friend up, he goes to one of their house and beats the boy, Julian, up. His family is scared that he is becoming just like his brother but once the secret about Dante's sexuality is out, his reasonings are understood and his parents leave him be. Both families accept Dante, he continues hanging out with Daniel and that makes Ari even angrier.

This leads to the end of the book. Ari's parents sit him down for a talk, Jaime, the father, finally opens up about his trauma from the Vietnam war and they eventually tell Ari that he is probably angry not because Dante is in love with him (a fact both Mendozas and Quintanas did not fail to notice nor mention), but he is in love with Dante as well and is scared to come to terms with it. After a long conversation, Ari eventually accepts the fact that he loves Dante. Both families soon meet for a bowling session, after which Dante tells Ari that they cannot be friends anymore, since it is too hard for him. Ari, instead, confesses that he lied when he told Dante that their kiss did not make him feel anything and asked him to kiss him again. Dante asks Ari to kiss him himself and they share a kiss with realization that all the secrets of the universe were closer to him than he used to think.

APPENDIX B: The Cover of Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012)



Source: "Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe: Sáenz, Benjamin Alire: 8601404293382: Books." *Amazon*, www.amazon.com/Aristotle-Dante Discover-Secrets-Universe/dp/1442408936. Accessed 16 May 2022.

APPENDIX C: Photograph of Benjamin Alire Sáenz



Source: Salazar, Alejandra. "Benjamin Alire Sáenz Discovers the Secrets of His Universe." *Latino USA*, 21 Jan. 2022, www.latinousa.org/2022/01/21/benjaminaliresaenz. Accessed 22 Apr. 2022.

APPENDIX D: The List of Benjamin Alire Sáenz's Publications

Young Adult Novels

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood. Cinco Puntos Press, 2004.

He Forgot to Say Goodbye. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008.

Last Night I Sang to the Monster. Cinco Puntos Press, 2009.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2012.

The Inexplicable Logic Of My Life. Clarion Books, 2017.

Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021.

Children's Books

A Gift from Papa Diego. Bt Bound, 1999.

Grandma Fina and Her Wonderful Umbrellas. Cinco Puntos Press, 2001.

A Perfect Season for Dreaming. Cinco Puntos Press, 2008.

The Dog Who Loved Tortillas. Cinco Puntos Press, 2009.

Novels

Carry Me Like Water. Hyperion, 1995.

The House of Forgetting. HarperCollins, 1997.

En el tiempo de la Luz. Rayo/HarperCollins, 2006.

In Perfect Light. HarperCollins, 2008.
The English version of "En el tiempo de la Luz"

Names on a Map. Harper Perennial, 2008.

Short Stories

Flowers for the Broken. Broken Moon Press, 1992.

Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club. Cinco Puntos Press, 2012.

Poetry

Calendar of Dust. Broken Moon Press, 1991.

Dark and Perfect Angels. Cinco Puntos Press, 1995.

Elegies in Blue. Cinco Puntos Press, 2002.

Dreaming the End of War. Copper Canyon Press, 2006.

The Book of What Remains. Copper Canyon Press. 2010.

Sources:

"Books by Benjamin Alire Saenz (Author of Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe)." *Goodreads*, www.goodreads.com/author/list/4841310.Benjamin_Alire_S_enz?page=1&per_page=30&sort=original_publication_year&utf8=%E2%9C%93. Accessed 16 May 2022.

"Ben's Books." *Benjamin Ink*, www.benjaminsaenz.com/bens-books. Accessed 16 May 2022.

"Benjamin Alire Saenz Publications." *Library of Congrass Catalog*, catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/search?searchType=7&searchId=18359&maxResultsPerPage=100&recCount=100&recPointer=0&resultPointer=0&headingId=30793661. Accessed 16 May 2022.

APPENDIX E: Paintings mentioned in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012)



Hopper, Edward. *Nighthawks*. 1942, Art Institute of Chicago.



Géricault, Théodore. *The Raft of the Medusa.* 1818-19, Louvre, Paris.

VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE, LITERARY AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas in a piece of writing without proper scholarly acknowledgment. It is a grave offense within the scholarly world and cannot be tolerated at any level – undergraduate or graduate or postgraduate.

The forms of plagiarism

Original text
"Fabulas sometimes centre structurally on a spatial opposition. Thus, Robinson Crusoe first flees the oppression of society by going to sea. Then he is oppressed by his solitude on the island, but finally he learns to convert his confinement into a form of freedom." (Mieke Bal, *Narratology,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985, pp. 44-45)

.....

a) The student presents M. Bal's words as his/her own:

Student's text
The story of *Robinson Crusoe* is based on a spatial opposition. At first Crusoe becomes a sailor to flee the oppression of society. But when he lives on an island all by himself, he is also oppressed by his solitude. (underlined phrases are plagiarized from Mieke Bal)

.....

b) The student uses Bal's own words and gives a reference to her work, but does not put the words from Bal into quotation marks.

Student's text
The story of Robinson Crusoe is based on a spatial opposition. At first Crusoe becomes a sailor to flee the oppression of society. (Bal, p.44)

This is still plagiarism. The underlined phrases are from Bal and should have been put into quotation marks. It is not enough to have a reference to Bal.

.....

c) The student paraphrases Bal's ideas and presents them as his/her own.

Student's text
Defoe constructs his novel according to the contrast between two places: the social world and the isolated island. In both places Crusoe experiences discomfort; he can be happy neither with others nor by himself.

This is another form of plagiarism – plagiarism of ideas. Even though M. Bal's actual words have not been used, her ideas have been used without any acknowledgement. This text would be acceptable if the words 'As Mieke Bal argues' (or something similar) were placed at the beginning of the text and the reference Bal, pp. 44-45 placed at the end.

.....

d) The student uses an example from someone else's work without proper acknowledgement.

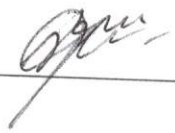
Student's text

Mieke Bal suggests that what she calls "spatial opposition" (Bal, p.44) is the basis of many literary texts. A good example of this would be Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* in which the contrast between the social space (England) and the island space is fundamental.

Here the student correctly references Bal's term. However, there is no reference after the example, which suggests that this is the student's own work, though in reality the example also comes from Bal.

The student's statement

I, Miglė Jurgelionytė, have read the Department of Foreign Language, Literary and Translation Studies statement on plagiarism. I understand that plagiarism is wrong and that it can take different forms, some direct and some indirect. I also understand that plagiarism in an essay, project or thesis submitted to this department will result in a greatly reduced mark or rejection of the paper entirely.

Student's signature  Date 2022-05-19