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# Preface

I was very glad when my students asked me to write this preface to *Yawp*, and this for a number of reasons. I have always been an enthusiast of the project of a journal produced by students to circulate their own intellectual production, and I think there is a lot to celebrate in the continuity of the project. This is issue 7, a number that points to consolidation and stability.

But I was particularly pleased to introduce an issue whose theme is “Politics is everything and is everywhere”. When I was a “Letras” student, back in the 1970s, the idea that politics and letters were inextricably intertwined was not on the agenda. By and large, we still followed the principles laid out in the 1860s by the founder of literary criticism Mathew Arnold, for whom culture was “sweetness and light, the study of perfection, of the best that has been thought and said in the world”. This idealized realm of lofty human values was to be the province of the study of the humanities in general and of literature in particular.

Arnold’s legacy was fundamental for the setting up, in 1917, under the aegis of F.R. Leavis, of the most influential discipline in the humanities in Britain, Cambridge English. The object of study was the canon of English literature, a selective tradition promulgated by Leavis himself. The method of study, pioneered again by Leavis and by I. A. Richards, close reading, clearly embodied the disjunction of culture and society which is the hallmark of the discourse: one should read the words on the page, isolated from the social and historical contexts that shape their meaning and in which the works acquire significance. The purpose of the discipline was to form minorities that would keep up the tradition. In Leavis’s own words this is fundamental because: “Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of the tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that the center is here rather than there.”<sup>1</sup>

It is revealing that the definition is made in such vague terms; if you did not understand what the unstated direction was, or where exactly the center was, it is your problem. You clearly do not belong to this minority. From Cambridge, this idealized notion of English was exported to many other countries in the West and became, as Terry Eagleton puts it “the natural way of studying literature”<sup>2</sup>. Implicit in this constructed naturalness is one of the recurrent themes of the permanent crisis in the humanities: how can an intellectual pursuit be socially relevant if it posits itself above social conflict and validation? How can it combine a noble defense of human value with the belief that only a minority can grasp it?

1 F.R. Leavis. “Mass Civilization and Minority Culture”[1930]. Reprinted in *For Continuity*. Cambridge, Minority Press, 1933, p.40.

2 Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory*. Basil Blackwell, England, 1983, p.24.

It took the discipline a long time to arrive at the point in which it could begin to give productive answers to those questions and a student's journal could confidently state that politics is everywhere. The 1960s saw a truly epidemic phase of conceptions of culture and of literary criticism. In a world in change, even university professors, those slow turtles, as a great critic puts it, had to revise their ways and methods. The way was open for people of my generation to link our political commitments and our intellectual and pedagogic work.

And again I am glad that one of the key contributions to this process of change was made by Raymond Williams, whose thought and principles have been very important in my personal process of joining political and intellectual issues.

Born to a working class family, this "Welsh European" (as he liked to define himself) thinker set out to reclaim the concept of culture for more democratic uses. In his memorable formulation, culture is ordinary, it is a whole way of life. The politics that goes with this definition is not one of preservation or of elitist diffusion, but one of extension. The method of reading also changed, now we had to link culture and society in the very act of responding to a work of art, as literary form and social formation are seen as "manifestation of the same impulse". The reasons for studying Letters also change: the aim was to interpret the world in order to change it. And culture would be paramount in this process of necessary change.

He was fully aware of the fact that he was, and we still are, living at a time of prodigious expansion of means

of communication. He saw those as possible facilitators for an opening up of the possibilities for inverting the customary flow of cultural goods, from a handful of producers to a mass of consumers. He laid out the practical possibilities that new technologies such as cable, and video cameras could offer to emergent producers of culture. But he was also fully aware that in order to achieve this extension, we would have to choose "a different kind of economy and a different kind of society."<sup>3</sup>

We, students and professors of the 2010s, cannot say we have advanced much in this respect. Even though we have deconstructed the opposition between high and low culture, we are as far as ever from any notion of a common culture. On the contrary, we have learned to fear it as if it could only mean a totalitarian homogenization of all difference and plurality.

But of course, and contrary to current fears of any form of community, except the ones marked by one single feature, like sexual orientation or ethnical origin, a common culture need not be yet another version of "more of the same". If by "extending human and social knowledge and critical possibility" we succeeded in engaging the active participation of all the members of a society, then we should expect this democratized cultural process to produce real plurality of values and life forms.

It is to be hoped that "Letras" students who start their academic life stating that politics is everywhere will be able to join in the struggle to achieve this new democratic culture.

MARIA ELISA CEVASCO

3 Raymond Williams. *Towards 2000*. (London, 1983), p.151.

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## Challenging patriarchy: Gender, Sex and Sexuality in *Orlando* and *Maurice*

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**Abstract:** Our society is culturally and socially founded on patriarchal values and ideologies that attribute certain roles and characteristics to people according to their gender. This social dynamics creates and reproduces unequal power relations between women and men. In addition to that, patriarchy is structured so that it generates hierarchies and evaluations of sexual behaviour that presuppose heterosexuality as the natural order of things and, as a result, triggers a process of social marginalisation of homosexuality. Although gender is clearly a process that only manifests socially, it is arbitrarily determined and imposed by taking into consideration solely the biological sex. This biological determinism has severe psychological and social impacts on those who cannot comply with neither the gender nor the sexuality that have been designed for them. This essay analyses how two English twentieth-century novels challenge and subvert preconceived notions of gender and sexuality. It examines Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A biography* (1928) and E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971), and demonstrates that both novels are articulated in order to denounce and deconstruct patriarchal structures, which culturally regulate and police human gender and sexuality. These novels are carefully read in the light of ideas of gender and sexuality developed in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Vol. 1* (1978) and eminent critical works on both novels. The conclusion provides the reader with a brief summary of the main discussions about the two novels and the aspects that approximate them.

**Keywords:** Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, patriarchy, gender politics, sexuality

She remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. 'Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature.'

VIRGINIA WOOLF

His family, his position in society – they had been nothing to him for years. He was an outlaw in disguise. Perhaps among those who took to the greenwood in old time there had been two men like himself – two. At times he entertained the dream. Two men can defy the world.

E. M. FORSTER

## Introduction

Feeling intrigued and puzzled by reading ‘She remembered how, as a young man, she’ and ‘there had been two men like himself [...] Two men can defy the world’ is inevitable, for both excerpts violate well-established gender and sexual norms. These quotations illustrate how modern literature challenges values and beliefs, which are normally taken for granted and serve as social laws. The modern artist will look at stable institutions such as family, religion, social class, colonialism, identity, gender and sexuality, and start questioning them through artistic experimentation and innovation in terms of not only themes, but also and especially of form and style.

This commitment to innovation and subversion is intimately related to the collapse of how individuals see and deal with such social structures whose main function is to bring stability to relations of dominance within society. One of the social constraints to which modern literature pays particular attention and attacks is patriarchy. As Terry Eagleton astutely observes ‘[Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries] lived in an age when it was too late for Victorian paternalism and still somewhat early for socialist democracy’ (Eagleton, 2005, p. 309), which reinforces the idea that even though the Bloomsbury Group was not particularly interested in the radical break with the capitalist social order, they were determined to denounce and break with patriarchal and paternalistic structures that constrained and regulated social rela-

tions. Human sexuality and gender have been used to establish unequal power relations between men and women. It is not hard to find examples of this commitment not only in the Bloomsbury Group, but also in turn-of-the-century works such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *Ulysses* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To The Lighthouse* (1927). These novels were challenging patriarchy either by denouncing the corruption of a society ruled by men, by questioning traditional notions of masculinity, by portraying a world without the bourgeois model of family, by deconstructing the apparent innate chastity, purity and passivity normally attributed to women, or by portraying women in a more profound and privileged way.

The rise and consolidation of the industrial phase of capitalism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to the development of an urban order and to the necessity of creating social control devices by the English ruling class. This urban context, on the one hand, sophisticated state persecution of homosexuals and other social minorities through the Labouchere Amendment 1885 that made gross indecency a crime in the United Kingdom and the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, but, on the other hand, created the necessary conditions for the proliferation of urban gay subcultures (Carlin, 1989, pp. 13 – 19). It was the age of prosecutions and convictions of homosexuals for acts of gross indecency from Oscar Wilde in 1889 to Alan Turing



in 1952. The first was sentenced to two years of hard labour, and the latter to chemical castration. In addition to that, it was in this period that Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) was prohibited from being sold and that some of Sigmund Freud's writings about innate female passivity gained immense popularity. However, it was also a time of resistance with works such as Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913 – 1927), which openly narrates and discusses homosexual relations; Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which strongly criticised many of Freud's assumptions on women's nature; Virginia Woolf's works that challenged gender and sexual constructions; the rise and revival of feminism with the Women's Suffrage Movement in the United Kingdom; and the intellectual movement of some Oxford intellectuals that used works by Plato and other Hellenistic elements to dissociate homosexuality from pathological and medical views (Cramer, 2012, p. 193).

It was within this context of sexual puritanism contestation and vivid political campaign for women's liberation that Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A biography* (1928) and E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971) were written. Such works and writers were not only influenced by this context, but also influential in the social transformations that were occurring at that moment. Virginia Woolf's writings were profoundly shaped by her explicit feminist politics, concern and fascination with gender identities and with women's lives, histories and fictions (Marcus, 2012, p. 142). Even though E. M. Forster's

homosexual themed novel *Maurice* was only published posthumously, it is also a well-known fact that he had started writing it in 1913. The state persecutions and his self-oppression might have prevented him from publishing *Maurice*, but it is impossible to deny the fact that he was using his art as a way of relieving his sexual and psychological constraints. Essentially because *Maurice* should be seen as a political work, which supports the fight against social constructions of sexuality and the pathologization and marginalisation of homosexuality.

This essay examines how patriarchy is not only challenged, but also how its norms are subverted in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and in E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. These two novels have been selected because of their privileged context of struggles for sexual transformations and liberation, and also because they provide us with a rich depiction of social constructions of sexuality and gender. Firstly, we will verify how Woolf deconstructs the naturalness and rigidity of gender, and the way gender is commonly used to control the self. Secondly, we will analyse E. M. Forster's depiction of the cultural process of constructing a masculine identity that is fundamentally based on patriarchal notions of virility and heterosexuality, and his strong criticism of English society. Finally, the conclusion will present the main aspects that approximate the novels in terms of theme, style, format and engagement with criticism of patriarchal ideologies.

## Orlando

### I

On 9 October 1927, only a few months before the publication of *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf wrote in one of her letters to Vita Sackville-West 'It sprung upon me how I could revolutionise biography in a night' (DeSalvo and Leaska, 2004, p. 75). This statement suggests that in a certain way the main theme, the format and the style of *Orlando* were being articulated to reach one of its author's main objectives, which was to revolutionise biography. Woolf wanted to revolutionise and subvert one of the most popular, traditional and prestigious literary genres at that time: the biography. It can be said that she successfully accomplished such objective by writing *Orlando*, for even though it is commonly referred as a novel, it is less a novel than a kind of parody of the classic way of writing biographies. It can be called a parody or an anti-biography, for it does not only tell the story of a fictional character, but also because it has innumerable passages, in which the narrator, and at the same time biographer, reflects upon his difficulties in writing. These comments make the reader start thinking about the impossibilities of writing a biography:

The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is

to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth;... But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it. Volumes might be written in interpretation of it;

(WOOLF, 2008, p. 63)

Woolf mixes up long-established biographical techniques such as the use of photos, documents and real historical facts to give background and context to the narrative with her modernist style and writing inventiveness in order to blur the boundaries of the biographical text and the novel itself. This commitment to subvert biography can be read as a way of deconstructing the false sensation that many people have whilst reading a biography, which is the sensation that one will be given access to what the biographee was really like simply by reading a book that is, in practice, a collection of interpretations of documents. In other words, *Orlando* shows biography's incapability of telling its readers about the individual identity of the person, firstly because it suggests that it is impossible to restrict one's identity to documents. In Woolf's view, identity is not something easily accessible, neither perfectly stable, on the contrary, modernism shows us that individual identity is something much more unstable, fragmented and is frequently shaped by bigger forces, for example, politics, economics, culture and religion, which are beyond the individual's control. Secondly, because the very notion of iden-

tity is a way of reducing the individual to something social stable and intelligible.

It is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career, when he played a most important part in the public life of his country, we have least information to go upon. [...] But the revolution which broke out during his period of office, and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what can give is lamentably incomplete. Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence. Just when we thought to elucidate a secret that has puzzled historians for a hundred years, there was a hole in the manuscript big enough to put your finger through. We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination.

(WOOLF, 2008, p. 115)

In this passage the biographer admits that documents are not irrefutable, they require interpretation and also that the biographer needs to 'speculate' and even to 'use the imagination'. Although the passage above clearly and strongly mocks biographical conventions, *Orlando* should not be read merely as a protest against biography, but against the limitations it imposes on people's identity and personality instead. The problem is

not the biography itself, but the relation people establish with it instead. Biography readers are led to believe that they are reading the indisputable truth about one's life, whilst they are in fact learning fragments of one's life that were interpreted and very likely intensified or omitted by the biographer. Essentially Woolf is showing that the distance that separates biographies from fiction are not so big, and, most importantly, not so clear as we are led to think. Furthermore, the biographee's characteristics that are usually taken for granted by people, such as gender and sexuality, are in fact very unclear. It is very ironic that even though one can read Orlando's biography entirely, one will not be so sure about one of the most basic human characteristics, which is Orlando's gender. For this reason, it is possible to say that Virginia Woolf articulates theme and format, for she deliberately links the instability of identity, which is restricted by the traditional biography with the instability of gender, which is restricted by biological sex. It can be easily proved by paying particular attention to Woolf's depiction of Orlando as a character with a free-floating gender and nebulous sexuality, and her deconstruction of biography's universal and unquestionable truth character.

## II

In *Orlando*, Woolf does not only narrate the process of fabricating a masculine identity based on the protagonist's innate sex, but also the collapse of such identity by parodying the randomness of biologi-

cal determinism and its consequences in shaping one's gender. For, Orlando is introduced to the reader as a young nobleman who was playing with a sword as a typical boyish behaviour: '[Orlando] was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters' (p. 13), and, as the novel develops, he suddenly becomes a woman: 'Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been' (p. 133). It is fundamentally important to highlight that he 'remained precisely' the same, because it is crucial to the deconstruction process of the naturalness of genders's binary division and, consequently, the social practices naturally attributed to them, for Orlando is able to compare how he was taught to look and classify women when he was a man with how he truly feels now that he is a woman. This process is particularly evident when she has her first experiences with her new sex in the company of the captain in the ship going back to England. She realises that the preconceived ideas she had of the nature of women were badly inaccurate:

She remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. 'Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature.

(WOOLF, 2008, p. 150)

This passage can be viewed as an illustration of Judith Butler's line of reasoning, which says that 'the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it' (Butler, 1999, p. 10), for Orlando clearly perceives that her nature and personality traits have been limited by her gender. Orlando's biological sex was used to determine her gender, which also determined the type of clothes she would wear, the education she would have, what her nature would be like, the way she would experiment her sexuality and the boundaries of her own individual identity as a whole.

Moreover, Orlando does not only cleverly understand that her idea of the nature of women was arbitrarily constructed and taught to her, but also she learnt that the perspectives women had in society and the way they were treated were quite different from men's. Woolf was aware of women's inferior position in society and this is the reason why she uses Orlando to show the contradictions of preconceived ideas of gender, for when Orlando becomes a woman, she loses all social privileges attributed to her former gender, nonetheless, at the same time, she is now able to talk about gender discrepancies taking into consideration both points of view.

'And that's the last oath I shall ever be able to swear,' she thought, 'once I set foot on English soil. And I shall never be able to crack a man over the head, or tell him he lies in his teeth, or draw

my sword and run him through the body, or sit among my peers, or wear a coronet, or walk in procession, or sentence a man to death, or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall on a charger, or wear seventy-two different medals on my breast. All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. D'you take sugar? D'you take cream?' And mincing out the words, she was horrified to perceive how low an opinion she was forming of the other sex, the manly, to which it had once her pride to belong.

(WOOLF, 2008, p. 151 – 152)

Orlando's observations about gender roles are fascinating, because she does not only simply see what is left for women in English society, but also critically compares women's position with men's. It is significant to point out that the military examples present in this passage can be easily connected with historical processes that are usually used to explain women's oppression. One of the typical arguments to explain the consolidation of patriarchy is precisely the militarization process that many primitive western societies underwent and were hardly reconcilable with women's reproduction work. Such social dynamics was fundamental for the confinement of women in the domestic work and men's privileged position in the public sphere of patriarchal societies (Carlin, 1989, p. 5; Leacock, 1981, pp. 33 – 194).

It is also noteworthy that in a certain way Woolf is anticipating her criticism of the patriarchal organization

of English society, which becomes more fierce and direct in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929) published one year later. There are other examples in the novel, in which the author denounces women's political and social inferiority in English society, for instance, when Orlando goes back to England and discovers that she is being sued, for women cannot hold any property, and in the nineteenth century when she realises that she needs to have a husband to fit in with the society. As Orlando learns, women are immensely dependent on men, taught to be chaste, scented, apparelled and to serve tea, whereas men are the ones who can say what they truly think and accomplish glorious military achievements. In this sense it is perfectly plausible to say that gender is used to create and reproduce unequal power relations between men and women, which are the very basis of patriarchy.

### III

After getting tired of spending time with Alexander Pope in the eighteenth century, Orlando goes to her house and starts taking advantages of her free-floating gender by switching genders and enjoying the lack of restrictions that this condition provided her with. As the narrator describes, Orlando has no difficulty in switching genders and such facility can be seen as an unusual and profound instability in the usually fixed notion of gender.

Then she rose, turned , and went into the house, where she sought her bed-

room and locked the door. Now she opened a cupboard in which hung still many of the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion, and from among them she chose a black velvet suit richly trimmed with Venetian lace. It was a little out of fashion, indeed, but it fitted her to perfection and dressed in it she looked the very figure of a noble Lord. She took a turn or two before the mirror to make sure that her petticoats had not lost her freedom of her legs, and then let herself secretly out of doors.

(WOOLF, 2008, PP. 205-206)

Orlando's facility for alternating genders does not only drastically minimise the importance of the biological sex to determine gender, but also indicates that gender is more a group of cultural actions and behaviour than an immutable and biological characteristic. Orlando breaks free from the gender constraints, experiments her sexuality freely and live her life at will. Woolf denounces the artificiality of gender by showing that, in practice, Orlando's gender depends less on her sex than on her clothes.

In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the

deed—the deed is everything." In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.

(BUTLER, 1999, P. 33)

As Judith Butler affirms, gender cannot be seen as an immutable deterministic social category in which we are classified according to our 'natural sex'. On the contrary, gender is a constant process based much less on biology than on social practices. Although Orlando had her sex changed, nothing else changed, neither in terms of personality nor features. Due to the fact that Orlando lived as a nobleman for most of her life, she does not find very difficult to perform both genders. Orlando is a woman only whilst she behaves or dresses as a woman and she is a man whenever she acts as a man. Such flexibility makes us see the very notion of 'being a gender' as an inaccurate one, for if Orlando were a gender it would not be possible for her to be any other gender at will. Therefore, the gender is not within her, it is in the clothes, behaviour, and in her social and sexual practices. Thus gender should be seen more as an action than a being or less as a 'noun' than as a 'verb'.

#### IV

By examining the novel, we can quickly perceive that Orlando is not the only character, whose gender is uncertain



and unstable. Sasha, the Russian princess, is presented to the reader as an extremely androgynous figure, for not even Orlando is capable of easily saying whether she is a boy or a woman when they first met:

a figure, which, whether boy's or woman's [...] The person, whatever the name or sex [...] When the boy, for alas, a boy it must be – no woman could skate with such speed [...] but no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts [...] She was a woman.

(WOOLF, 2008, PP. 36-37)

Another example is the Archduchess Harriet who confesses to Orlando upon her arrival in London that she is actually a he. Archduke Harry cross-dressed in order to seduce Orlando when he was a man and now that Orlando is a woman he is finally capable of letting Orlando know the truth.

In short, they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour and then fell into natural discourse. The Archduchess (but she must in future be known as the Archduke) told his story – that she was a man and always had been one; that he had seen a portrait of Orlando and fallen hopelessly in love with him; that to compass his ends, he had dressed as a woman and lodged at the Baker's shop; (Woolf, 2008, p. 171)

It is also worth mentioning that Woolf constantly draws the reader's attention to the sex indeterminacy effect

that certain clothes might generate, as it can be seen in the opening of the novel: 'He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it' (p. 13). Rachel Bowlby points out that 'here the denial of the doubt is just what lets in the doubt, by saying what it says needs no saying.' (Bowlby, 2008, p. 37). Another illustration of gender indeterminacy is the scene that Orlando is leaving the gipsy community, in which she remarks that 'the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men.' (p. 147). All these examples of gender ambiguity can be read as proofs that gender should be seen more as social decisions than something innate to the human being (Bowlby, 2008, p. 40).

To what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person? To what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity? In other words, the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of

those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.

(BUTLER, 1990, p. 23)

As Butler points out, gender and sexuality are concepts that stabilise identity and makes it social intelligible. Virginia Woolf is not interested in reproducing the mechanical ways of representing the self that have been used by traditional biographies. She is more concerned with the fragments, failures and mutability of the self that might not be very intelligible and extremely hard to be interpreted or understood. It is possible to say that Woolf revolutionised biography because, if on the one hand, one of biography's main objectives is to provide the reader with a rounded, stable and seductive access to one's individuality. On the other hand, even though one reads all her *Orlando*, one will be barely capable of telling if Orlando is a man or a woman, heterosexual or homosexual.

Although Virginia Woolf did not believe in literature as a simple, practical, and, most importantly, mere way of conveying political ideas, her *Orlando* does challenge patriarchy, for it defies one of the most fundamental ideologies that supports patriarchal practices, which is gender. She subverts gender by deconstructing its commonsensical naturalness and by exploring its arbitrariness and instability. Besides, Woolf connects her gender criticism with her biography experimentation in order to revolutionise both. Espe-

cially because, she does not only depict the impossibility of confining one's individual identity to the boundaries of biography and one's gender and sexuality to a binary division, but also demonstrates that the 'social intelligibility' these things aim at are in fact ways of controlling, reducing and restricting the self.

For it is probable that when people talk aloud, the selves (of which there may be more than two thousand) are conscious of disseverment, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent.

(WOOLF, 2008, p. 299)

## Maurice

### I

**E**. M. Forster finished writing *Maurice* in 1914, however it was only published posthumously in 1971. It is of great importance to highlight that *Maurice* is a novel without antecedents and its main theme was very avant-garde for the early twentieth century, not only because it explicitly portrays homosexual relationships without pathologising them, but also because it has a happy ending, which was very rare during that period and suggests a positive view of homosexuality (Leavitt, 2005, pp. 11-13). Furthermore, at that moment, homosexual relations, either privately or publicly, were considered acts of gross indecency and criminal punishable through the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which was revoked only in 1967. It is not a very surprising context, for the early twentieth century was vastly



influenced by the Victorian period, which is known for having been very conservative, puritan and, above all, patriarchal particularly in terms of sexuality.

Despite the fact that neither capitalism nor Victorianism inaugurate sexual and gender oppression, it is possible to affirm that there was an intensification and sophistication of conservatism in Victorian society. It can be argued that some of the reasons for this ideological dissemination of puritanism was due to the fact that the emergent urban industrial cities in England were seen as highly dangerous by the new and old English ruling class. Not only because of the geographical and temporal proximity to the French Revolution, but also and especially due to the terrible working conditions of the early industrial phase of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which culminated in many riots. In times like these, the nuclear family is usually strengthened and deviance and rebellious behaviour is brutally repressed in order to forge social stability (Carlin, 1989, pp. 12 – 23; Dee, 2010, pp. 31 – 57; Trumbach, 1997). This is the context of the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which is constantly seen as a more efficient way of condemning homosexuality, for even though it was not as drastic and severe as the death penalty, it was much more comprehensive and easier to be executed.

Throughout the eighteenth century sodomy remained punishable by death and continued to be referred to as 'the abominable and detestable crime against nature'. Although capital pun-

ishment was rarely used in the eighteenth century, the murder of a plasterer during a vicious pillory against him and his partner, a coachman, in 1780 was a warning of the kind of brutality that could be meted out and a precursor to a very bloody period from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century in which persecution of same sex acts was intensified.

(DEE, 2010, p. 35)

For the English ruling class, homosexual relations represented a threat to immensely important institutions, ideologies and norms that brought social stability, for instance, the nuclear family, monogamy, chastity, virility and heterosexuality. As a result, homosexual relations were extremely marginalised because they did not only disobey those patriarchal rules, but also challenged them. This is why E. M. Forster's *Maurice* can be viewed as an attack on patriarchy, for it denounces the imposition and artificiality of patriarchal masculine identity, the English society conservatism and the severe social sanctions to those who defy patriarchal norms.

## II

Forster meticulously depicts the process of cultural construction of masculine identity, which is essentially heterosexist. By showing patriarchal masculine identity as something constructed instead of innate, Forster is preparing the reader for an alternative way of experimenting sexuality, which is not in line

with the one that is socially prescribed. Additionally, the happy ending of the novel indicates Forster's opinion that it is possible to be happy without complying with a social prefabricated identity. Howard J. Booth provides us with an insightful comment that relates *Maurice's* ending with its main theme:

Maurice does not look like a text of modernist period in its positive, and some might say 'old-fashioned', resolution. However, the text can be seen as addressing self-formation in a way that anticipates the era of 'identity politics'.

(BOOTH, 2007, p. 176)

Taking into consideration Booth's observation, *Maurice* can be read as novel about an Englishman's search for identity, mainly because it shows its protagonist's psychological conflicts and reluctance to fit in with a sexual identity that has been designed for him. In other words, although Maurice Hall is obviously attracted to the same sex, he cannot live his sexuality freely, for he is socially sentenced to a compulsory heterosexual life. As discussed above, this social and cultural condemnation happens due to the hegemonic cultural role that patriarchal structures played in early twentieth century England.

Patriarchy is founded upon the cultural construction of masculine identity, which is essentially composed of virility and heterosexuality (Badinter, 1992, p. 149). This patriarchal masculinity has been culturally and historically constructed and is socially reproduced every

day through the premise that it is the real nature of men. Forster draws the reader's attention to certain moments of Maurice's adolescence in order to show the artificial process of fabricating masculine identity. One of this moments is the opening of the novel, in which Mr. Ducie, a teacher at Maurice's school, is asking some questions to him and learns that Maurice did not have significant male references in his life. As a result, Mr. Ducie ends up giving Maurice a lesson in the secrets of sex between man and woman.

'Well you're quite an ignorant little beggar.' They laughed. After a pause he said, 'When I was your age, my father told me something that proved very useful and helped me a good deal.' This was untrue: his father had never told him anything. But he needed a prelude to what he was going to say [...]

I am going to talk to you for a few moments as if I were your father, Maurice! [...]

You are becoming a man now, Maurice; that is why I am telling you about this. It is not a thing that your mother can tell you, and you should not mention it to her nor to any lady, and if at your next school boys mention it to you, just shut them up; tell them you know.

(FORSTER, 2005, pp. 8-9)

The first thing to be considered is Mr. Ducie's emphasis on the necessity of having a male figure in Maurice's life; secondly, his insistence that he is telling it because Maurice does not have a father and his mother cannot talk about it with him;

thirdly, he says that other school boys might know about it, possibly because their fathers told them. This dialogue has an extremely patriarchal view of family, for it reinforces the supposed vital and irreplaceable importance of having a man in a family, and also makes it very clear that only men have the power to talk about the unspeakable secrets of sex. It is worth mentioning that Mr. Ducie's authority is very artificial and it is granted because of patriarchal social structures. He is socially allowed to be a type of Maurice's temporary surrogate father in order to teach him how to reproduce heterosexuality. Furthermore, the artificiality of this authority and of this conversation as whole is denounced by Mr. Ducie's inoffensive lie, which, in practice, functions as a way of making this kind of conversation more natural than it really is. By the end of the scene, we can see that Maurice is aware of the instability of Mr. Ducie's explanations not only because they were written on the sand, but also because Maurice remarks that 'Ducie is a 'liar', for 'he worries that women will see the images, and a world of hypocrisy, guilt, and complexity opens up that Ducie said he was removing' (Booth, 2007, p. 179).

Later in the novel, Forster gives another example of how heterosexuality is socially imposed on Maurice:

'Oh, you young fellows! Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth these days. Don't know what I mean! Prudish of a petticoat! Be frank, man, be frank. You don't take anyone in. The frank mind's the pure mind. I'm a medical man and an

old man and I tell you that. Man that is born of woman must go with woman if the human race is to continue.'

Maurice stared after the housemaster's wife, underwent a violent repulsion from her and blushed crimson: he had remembered Mr Ducie's diagrams. A trouble – nothing as beautiful as a sorrow – rose to the surface of his mind, displayed its ungainliness and sank. Its precise nature he did not ask himself, for his hour was not yet, but the hint was appalling, and, hero though he was, he longed to be a little boy again, and to stroll half awake for ever by the colourless sea. Dr Barry went on lecturing him, and under the cover of a friendly manner said much that gave pain.

(FORSTER, 2005, p. 21)

In this passage Dr. Barry, a doctor, neighbour and friend with the Hall family, explicitly and literally reminds Maurice of the nature of men's sexuality. Ironically it is exactly Dr. Barry's very necessity of reminding Maurice of heterosexual sex naturalness that can make us suspect of its naturalness. In other words, if heterosexuality were the only natural order of things, as Dr. Barry states, it would not need to be remembered. Besides, this scene is a turning point in the novel because it is in this part that Maurice begins to become more aware of what is expected of him in terms of sex. He combines his two male references, Mr. Ducie and Dr. Barry, and understands that in order for him to be accepted by those surrounding him, he needs to embrace heterosexuality, however the mere image of it makes him

feel 'repulsion' and 'pain'. In both scenes Forster is focusing on two stages of Maurice's growth in order to demonstrate and denounce the social compulsoriness of heterosexuality and its psychological consequences for those who cannot conform to it. By the end of his adolescence, Maurice realises that the process of formation of his own identity is not completely under his control, but it is shaped by bigger cultural, political and social forces that are beyond his control instead.

Moreover, another aspect that approximates both scenes of Maurice's masculinity formation is the transformation of sex into discourse as a way of establishing unequal power relations between him and those older men.

The sex of children and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed. It may well be true that adults and children themselves were deprived of a certain way of speaking about sex, a mode that disallowed as being too direct, crude, or coarse. But this was only the counterpart of other discourses, and perhaps the condition necessary in order for them to function, discourses that were interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations.

(FOUCAULT, 1990, p. 30)

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Vol. 1, Michel Foucault de-

scribes and goes beyond what he calls the repressive hypothesis that basically believed that there was a process of constant and brutal repression of human sexuality. Although Foucault admits that there have been political and social forces that had been repressing sexuality for centuries, he is more concerned with the process of transforming sex into discourse. He observes that especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth century there was a proliferation of scientific, educational and even religious discourses on sex. Essentially this process represented the establishment of a new series of power relations that were supported by the very secrecy of sex.

Mr. Ducie and Dr. Barry felt the patriarchal necessity of "fixing" Maurice's "broken" nuclear family, and their patriarchal male role in society provided them with the social privilege that is required to talk about sex. It is worth remarking that the nuclear family is fundamental for the reproduction of patriarchal and heterosexist ideologies and this is the reason why the lack of a father figure implicates a 'broken' family, for it is exactly the father who is going to be the main, not the only one, responsible for reproducing patriarchy. If we use Foucault's observations to analyse these two scenes of *Maurice*, it will be possible to say that Mr. Ducie and Dr. Barry combine their patriarchal social position with sex discourse to establish unequal power relations with Maurice. These power relations are essential to make Maurice not only willing to accept social conventions, but also to make him legitimise and reproduce them.

*Maurice* also draws the reader's attention to the artificiality and collapse of this heterosexist education, for not only Maurice rejects heterosexuality, but also Clive Durham and Alec Scudder undergo a processes of sexual reorientation in the novel.

He saw a gamekeeper dallying with two of the maids, and felt a pang of envy. The girls were damned ugly, which the man wasn't; somehow this made it worse.

(FORSTER, 2005, p. 146)

It is not a coincident that Forster introduces Alec as heterosexual man, for Alec's apparent bisexuality is essential for Forster's deconstruction of the naturalness of heterosexuality. Later in the novel, Scudder tells Maurice that it is 'natural to care for women' and that he has never had sexual relations with other man before. Maurice questions Alec's affirmation by saying that to care both for women and men 'isn't natural for [him]'. Alec was born in a patriarchal society and has been exposed to all its patriarchal ideologies, and for this reason, it is expected that he reproduces heterosexuality and sees it as the natural order of things. It is exactly his homosexual experience that makes him start questioning heterosexual sex as the only possibility. Forster is not concerned with rigid binary definitions of sexuality, on the contrary, he defies and subverts them by showing Clive's acceptance of homosexuality and later change from homosexual to heterosexual; Alec's reorientation from heterosexual

to homosexual, and finally Maurice's reluctance to accept heterosexuality at all costs. These reorientations should be read as a way of blurring the long-established boundaries of sexuality and to attack the naturalness of patriarchal and heterosexist ideas of masculine identity.

*You prefer to be natural?*

*Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.*

OSCAR WILDE

### III

One of the most important characteristics of *Maurice* is its engagement with criticism of English society and Western culture in general, which are strongly influenced by patriarchal ideologies. This social criticism can also be exemplified by Clive Durham's sexual reorientation, for it is commonly read as a way of showing how society can repress one's feelings and desires, particularly in terms of sexual practices, and by Maurice's loneliness, psychological conflicts and attempt to be cured of his own homosexuality.

First of all it needs to be said that it is not possible to affirm without a shadow of a doubt that Clive opted for getting married and living a heterosexual life only because he was afraid of the social sanctions he was subjected to if he had embraced homosexuality. Basically because he clearly desired and wanted to be desired by the opposite sex, which can be verified in Clive's thoughts about his nurse and women in general:

He noticed how charming his nurse was and enjoyed obeying her. When he went a drive his eyes rested on women. Little details, a hat, the way a skirt is held, scent, laughter, the delicate walk across mud – blended into a charming whole, and it pleased him.

(FORSTER, 2005, p. 103)

The narrator's use of the verb 'noticed' and Clive's apparent rediscovery of his own sexuality, whilst driving his car in the excerpt above, suggest that these sensations were not noticed or felt very often before. This whole part of the novel is carefully written in order to create a type of photograph of his reorientation and the new sensations that came with it. Nevertheless, the reasons that motivated Clive's supposed reorientation and the reorientation itself are debatable, for Forster's descriptions of Clive's feelings are ambivalent and give the impression that he was not only seduced by women, but also by the social privileges that embracing heterosexuality could offer him. Furthermore, this ambivalence can be strongly felt if we take into account the less sexualised and more metaphorical tone of Clive's brief sexual experiences, and if we compare the much more sexualised relationship between Alec and Maurice with the relationship between Clive and Anne.

In essence, what seduces him [Clive] is the system of 'beautiful conventions' that embraces him and Anne, his fiancée, once they announce their engagement. Whereas men 'had never responded', women now welcome him

'into a world of delicious interchange'. When he goes to see a film, it pleases him that 'the man who made it, the men and the women who looked on – they knew, and he was one of them'.

(LEAVITT, 2005, p. 17)

For these reasons, it is perfectly possible to state that, regardless of Clive's sexual orientation, his sexuality was strongly shaped by English social conventions that evaluate heterosexuality positively, whereas marginalise homosexuality. This sexual instability suggests that perhaps if Clive had Virginia Woolf's Orlando ability to switch genders, he would be able to live his sexuality to the full, for either women or men would equally respond to his flirtations and he would not be socially nor criminally punished, for he would be, at least apparently, respecting the patriarchal boundaries of gender and sexuality.

Maurice's second appointment with Mr. Lasker Jones is another scene that illustrates Forster's commitment to denouncing English society conservatism:

'And what's to happen to me? Said Maurice, with a sudden drop in his voice. He spoke in despair, but Mr Lasker Jones had an answer to every question. 'I'm afraid I can only advise you to live in some country that has adopted the Code Napoleon, he said.

'I don't understand.'

'France or Italy, for instance. There homosexuality is no longer criminal.'

'You mean that a Frenchman could share with a friend and yet not go to prison?'



'Share? Do you mean unite? If both are of age and avoid public indecency, certainly.'

'Will the law ever be that in England?'

'I doubt it. England has always been disinclined to accept human nature.'

Maurice understood. He was an Englishman himself, and only his troubles had kept him awake. He smiled sadly. 'It comes to this then: there always have been people like me and always will be, and generally they have been persecuted.'

(FORSTER, 2005, PP. 187-188)

The passage above is preceded by Mr. Lasker Jones' several unsuccessful attempts to hypnotise Maurice in order to cure him of his 'congenital homosexuality'. Mr. Lasker finally desists and suggests that Maurice should live in a country where people like him are tolerated. This scene is immensely important due to the fact that it does not only openly criticise English society's reluctance to 'accept human nature', but it also shows the limitations and inefficiency of discourses and practices that pathologise homosexuality, above all, because it demonstrates that Maurice cannot be cured. Moreover, it is fundamental to highlight that the association of 'human nature' with homosexuality and Maurice's conclusion that 'there always have been people like [him] and always will be' are elements that construct an image of homosexuality as a natural manifestation of human sexuality, for it contradicts early twentieth century English society commonsensical notions of homosexuality as an abnormal mental

disorder. In fact the impossibility of cure, and Maurice and Alec's happy ending indicate that Maurice's real problem was not homosexuality itself, but the way society dealt with it instead.

This passage and the end of the novel clearly represent the massive social contradiction between the English patriarchal dominant culture and the individual who defies it. Maurice Hall needs to break with English society in order to try to be happy and the price of doing that is to renounce all his social class privileges. *Maurice's* ending can also be seen as a fierce criticism of the hypocritical and judgmental English society and dominant culture, for we should remember that by the end of the novel Maurice and Alec abandon English society, but not England.

They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. Her air and sky were theirs, not the timorous millions' who own stuffy little boxes, but never their own souls.

(FORSTER, 2005, P. 212)

## Conclusion

It is not imprecise to say that *Orlando: A Biography* and *Maurice* are quite different in many respects, particularly in form and style, nonetheless it is also true that both novels have strong commitment to challenge and subvert patriarchal structures, which inevitably approximates each other. Especially because both nov-

els engage with the depiction and denunciation of the instability of traditional notions of gender and sexuality, which repress and confine the self to a prefabricated identity. In Virginia Woolf's novel we are exposed to characters whose gender are difficult to be determined such as Orlando, Sasha, Archduke Harry and the gypsies, whereas in Forster's work we are introduced to characters whose sexuality is free-floating: Clive Durham and Alec Scudder, for instance. These indeterminations do not only corroborate, but also demonstrate the collapse of the natural and immutable characteristics associated with patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality.

Besides *Orlando: A biography* as well as *Maurice* can be viewed as critiques of society and the social actors within it, which are the ones responsible for reproducing unequal power relations between genders and sexual hierarchisation. It can be verified in Orlando's reflections on women's inferior position in English society and in Maurice's observation of how much English society is hypocritical for relying merely on appearances and condemning people because of their unwillingness to conform to its conventions:


While paying three guineas he caught sight of himself in the glass behind the counter. What a solid young citizen he looked – quiet, honourable, prosperous without vulgarity. On such does England rely. Was it conceivable that on Sunday last he had nearly assaulted a boy?

(FORSTER, 2005, p. 134)

It is also of great importance to state that both novels are carefully structured in a such a way that they convey in a very profound way the formation processes of their protagonists, and their reluctance to accept social conventions of gender and sexuality. Therefore, Orlando, Maurice and Clive's memories, impressions and emotions should not only be considered constitutive components of the novels, but also elements as significant to depict the characters' psychological and identity conflicts as their actions, particularly because they reveal a much less fixed and stable experience of gender and sexuality.

Not only the conventions for representing character had changed for Woolf's generation, but also the very concept of character and personality. The human personality was not one given fixed monolithic entity, but a shifting conglomerate of impressions and emotions. Psychoanalysis was uncovering a multi-layered self, in which dreams, memories, and fantasies were as important as actions and thoughts.

(SHOWALTER, 2000, p. 18)

Finally I want to consider that *Orlando: A biography* and *Maurice* are two early twentieth century works that anticipate the era of identity politics, for they already questioned and destabilised patriarchal structures, which aim at reducing the self to artificial, oppressing and restrictive binary divisions of gender and sexuality. 





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# The American Social Exclusion Through the Space Element: A Compared Analysis of *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote

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**Abstract:** The space feature is a useful element in the analysis of the social oppression in the North American society. Through Capote's novel, it is possible to identify some fixed structures of exclusion which have appeared in other canonic novels. The recurrent usage of journeys and contingent spaces in these novels reveals a deep sense of dissatisfaction in relation to the historical conditions and political relationships.

**Keywords:** Truman Capote, space, social class, American literature, exclusion.

## Introduction

The novel *In Cold Blood* (1966) is mainly known for its non-fictional aspect. It is based on a story of a murder, which takes place in the South of the United States. In fact, the first impression caused on the concerning the book comes from this gossip frame which gives consistency to the narration. In the first few lines, it is evident the amount of description, which constitutes one of the main features. In different levels, it is possible to identify details from the most diverse nature, conveyed by a third person and omniscient narrator who seems to have access to all possible information. More precisely, the reader can also notice that the space is constantly described throughout the narrative.

Having said that, the purpose of this essay is to analyze, from a comparative perspective, the constitution and significance of such formal element and its importance through the whole novel. Besides, it is vital to establish a connection between the question of space and the social relation between characters in order to clarify the reading and interpretation. To substantiate the analysis, other three American novels will be used in opportune moments: *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *As I lay dying* (1930) and *The grapes of wrath* (1939).

Before starting the analysis itself, it is important to highlight some theoretical points about space. In *Espaço e romance* (1985), Antonio Dimas argues that this technical feature is not taken into account properly by critics, it has been neglected over the years. In certain passage, he claims that one of the objectives of studying it is

ir-se descobrindo a funcionalidade e organicidade gradativamente, uma vez que o escritor soube dissimulá-lo tão bem a ponto de harmonizar-se com os demais elementos narrativos, não lhe concedendo, portanto, nenhuma prioridade.

(DIMAS, 1985, p. 6)

Actually, the purpose of this analysis is to point out this broader meaning of space in the novel and its relation with the social frame rooted in the descriptions, in order to establish 'um quadro de significados mais complexos' (Dimas, p. 20).

The beginning of the novel is a good example of how the category of space can be directly to the configuration of characters. Before narrating facts themselves, the narrator resorts to a careful description of the small town of Holcomb 'The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call out there' (Capote, 2000, p. 21).

As the narrative progresses, it is possible to notice that the isolation of the area has resonance in the constitution of Holcomb's citizens in a general sense. In his article about Capote's style, Ralph Voss indicates such association, saying that 'the opening and closing lines of the book are often quoted as evocative of the isolation of the area, but the richness of detail in the opening pages also evokes the people as well as the place' (Voss, p. 74). Thus, the feeling of loneliness is established through the element of space, which confirms the theoretical approach of the part of Antonio Dimas, which consists of proving the novel's organicism:

Não permitir que os componentes se mostrem gratuitos e soltos ao longo do romance ou que ganhem valor por si mesmos, mas que de uma forma ou de outra cobrem significado contextual e abatem o potencial virtuosístico que toda descrição carrega dentro de si. (Dimas, 1985, p. 42)

On grounds of what has been stated, it is possible to adopt a more accurate approach in terms of analysis. At first, the isolation of the city – place where the actions are developed – is of paramount importance in the narrative. In addition, there is a sense of fixity in the constitution of Holcomb that seems to characterize the town's structure precisely. The jobs carried out by the citizens are absolutely determined, creating a sense of permanence in relation to old social structures:

The inhabitants of the village, numbering two hundred and seventy, were satisfied that this should be so, quite content to exist inside ordinary life - to work, to hunt, to watch television, to attend school socials, choir practice, meetings of the 4-H Club.

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 23)

The intersection between the isolation of the area and the pre-established functions of Holcomb citizens gives us a sense of "normality" and demonstrates the persistence of old social and ideological structures.

In *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the protagonist lives in similar conditions. In the beginning of the first chapter, the reader finds a boy in a homely environment, living according to strict laws established by his aunt. The civilized world of Miss Watson and her sister reveals a sense of rigidity, based on religious and social contact orientation, which clearly worries and limits the freedom of action. The motivation of the journey comes from this delimited sphere.

Coming back to Capote's novel, it is interesting to pay attention to Clutter's description and configuration. The head of the family, Herbert Clutter, occupies a center position in this fixed world, a consequence of his social position in the Holcomb society. This leadership is also suggested in the description of his office.

The office was fundamentally his retreat - an orderly sanctuary, paneled in walnut veneer, where, surrounded by weather barometers, rain charts, a pair of binoculars, he sat like a captain in his cabin.

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 40)

The rising social position of Mr. Clutter – especially important in the context of an isolated city – maximizes the crime previously described. In a certain passage, one resident of Holcomb questions himself about justice.

How was it possible that such effort, such plain virtue, could overnight be reduced to this - smoke, thinning as it rose and was received by the big, annihilating sky.

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 111)

Furthermore, the ignorance and indifference of these citizens in relation to people from other class is clear. Many times, the posture adopted attempts to avoid the social tensions:

he was known for his equanimity, his charitableness, and the fact that he paid good wages and distributed frequent

bonuses; the men who worked for him - and there were sometimes as many as eighteen - had small reason to complain

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 30)

This social consciousness - impossible to be expanded in the context aforementioned – is carefully developed in *The grapes of wrath*. The transitions of space as a consequence of the Joad's journey, which does not exist in the case of Holcomb city at a first moment, allows these characters to develop a social view that they were not equipped with in the beginning. Tom and his relatives, enclosed in their low social position, adopt a different world vision after the disintegration of the family. From this situation, it becomes possible to place the individualized characters into a bigger structure.

It is important to say that Herbert Clutter is the only Clutter member able to leave the small city after the marriage of his two daughters. However, the travels mentioned by the narrator are provoked by the demand of money, in order to maintain Clutter's social position. Differently from the Joad family, Mr. Clutter does not acquire the same social consciousness as in Steinbeck's novel. As well as the other citizens in the context, the social differences are ignored:

Without exception, Garden Citians deny that the population of the town can be socially graded [...] but, of course, class distinctions are as clearly observed, and as clearly observable, as in any other human hive

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 59)

Another interesting detail in Clutter's configuration is the figure of Nancy. Suffering depressive mental disorders, she develops an important function as a spatially fixed character and demonstrates the instability in a structure that seemed fixed and stable at a first moment. Her social function in the husband's absence causes insecurity, the character cannot execute the actions required.

(...)when her husband was off on one of his business journeys she was continually expected, in his absence, to supply snap judgments concerning the affairs of the farm, and it was unendurable, a torment. What if she made a mistake? What if Herb should be displeased?

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 53)

These individual and social conflicts are repressed by the order and stability brought in the city's descriptions. These tensions are revealed when the crime disestablishes the superficial relation between the citizens. Consequently, the sphere of Holcomb is modified "Another reason, the simplest, the ugliest, was that this hitherto peaceful congregation of neighbors and old friends had suddenly to endure the unique experience of distrusting each other" (p. 121). When the figure of the murderers Perry Smith and Richard Hickock appears, the conservative space of the city is invaded "Or did, until, as she complained, Clutter thing came along," bringing with it "all these out-of-towners, all this newspaper fuss" (p. 112).

Considering these commentaries about Clutter's family, it is important to

take the murderers in an opposite perspective. Both Perry and Dick are characterized through their constant movement in the American territory. In a first approach, the characters are described as poor people, which are obliged to constantly travel in order to survive:

until Mrs. Meier explained that the cats were hunting for dead birds caught in the vehicles' engine grilles. Thereafter it pained him to watch their maneuvers: 'Because most of my life I've done what they're doing. The equivalent (...)

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 327)

In this case, the journey performed by Perry and Dick is provoked triggered by their social condition, but its aim is not only the need for better material conditions. In this sense, the reasons are similar to the ones in *As I lay dying*. In such Faulkner's novel, the social condition of the Brundrens is similar to the murderers' in *In cold blood*, and there is a mixture of interests among the characters. Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos argues that

No corpo morto de Addie, ou seja, na promessa feita à morta de lhe enterrar o corpo em Jefferson, se projetam os anseios das diferentes personagens do romance. O enterro de Addie é, assim, a viagem do mais secreto desejo de cada um, realizado ou não"

(SANTOS, p. 168)

This way, Perry and Dick face several obstacles during their lives, and the

journey becomes a consequence of their loneliness, difficult material situation – ‘his lonely, mean life’ (p. 224) – and individual interests.

Moreover, the aforementioned journey seems to have a substantial similarity in relation to Twain and Steinbeck novels. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, there is a kind of desertion in relation to the society represented by Miss Watson. The protagonist is in conflict with the society where he lives and the presence of disbelief about the chances of transforming the social space is made clear. Maria Irene argues that

trata-se de uma viagem que levará Huck do estabelecido, do cruel, da civilização de Miss Watson, de tudo o que reprime para o desconhecido, não civilizado, e que por ser novo é simultaneamente excitante

(SANTOS, p. 156)

In *The grapes of wrath*, the family’s condition requires them to travel across the country and there is always an utopian vision of a better place, represented in the image of a harmonic California. Throughout the narration, the family, as well as the initial dream of finding an auspicious place to live, failed in many levels, but the characters can transform their aspirations according to the developments of facts.

Up to a certain extent Perry and Dick carry the same discomforts towards the social environment and show hope for change. In Dick’s case, the character evinces a desire for occupying a higher so-

cial position, which motivates his actions in the novel:

These feelings seem to be overcompensated for by dreams of being rich and powerful, a tendency to brag about his exploits, spending sprees when he has money, and dissatisfaction with only the normal slow advancement he could expect from his job

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 364)

These aspirations are present, in a different level, when it comes to Perry’s configuration. However, his desires seem to belong to another order and his lonely childhood is an important factor to explain it. Perry develops a strong sense of loneliness, which is evident in the continuous descriptions of spaces occupied by the character. The end of the narrative, for instance, is marked by his absolute isolation in the prison sphere ‘this establishment, officially called the Segregation and Isolation Building, constitutes a prison inside a prison’ (p. 381).

It is important to say that Perry’s loneliness is also associated to his difficult social conditions. In a certain passage, the character points out his family difficult situation, which caused them to keep moving out ‘we were always what you would call semi-poor. Never down and out, but several times on the verge of it’ (p. 343)

Another interesting topic in *In cold blood*, also present in the other three novels, is the frustrated forms of resistance in relation to the unequal social conditions. In fact, the journey itself represents, in

*The grapes of wrath* and *Huckleberry Finn*, an attempt to find a way of facing the oppressive society and social needs. In *As I lay dying*, the motifs vary according to the character and their individual point of view, represented by the fragmented aspect of the novel – including the space element. In every way, the reflections about the contradictions of modernization and the permanence of social class tension work as a way of imposing resistance.

In Capote's novel, this form of resistance is present in the behavior of the excluded characters, best represent by Perry and Dick. The attempt of stealing is recurrent through the novel, which reinforces the idea of resisting to the economics system, in which they occupy a peripheral position. The crime described in a meticulous description also works in the same way.

All that belonged to him, Dick, but he would never have it. Why should that sonofabitch have everything, while he had nothing? Why should that "big-shot bastard" have all the luck? With a knife in his hand, he, Dick, had power

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 252)

However, *In cold blood* demonstrates how far the insoluble aspect of the economic environment can reach. The frustrated results of these attempts are represented by Well. Upon denouncing his colleague Dick, Well tries to solve his own financial problem. Nevertheless, the oppressive and exclusionary social system keeps him in the same position 'at present he is a resident of Mississippi State Prison in Parchman, Mississippi,

where he is serving a thirty-year sentence for armed robbery' (p. 352).

Furthermore, the element of space is an important element in the representation of these frustrated attempts of resistance. The utopian California in *The grapes of wrath* becomes a disappointed destiny; in *Huckleberry Finn*, the returns to Miss Watson's house indicates a contrast between a frustratedly-constructed society and continuous hope for a new America of dreams; and the status of space in *As I lay dying* along with other formal elements, function as an incomprehensible and oppressive element of power, absorbing and separating the characters from each other.

*In cold blood* gives a similar sense of deception in relation to it. The absence of a place where the character can reach works as a symbol of their continuous and irreversible social position. The destination of the journey excludes the character in question as a social element.

Anyway, he couldn't see that he had "a lot to live for." (...) What was there to look forward to? He and Dick were "running a race without a finish line" - that was how it struck him. And now, after not quite a week in Miami, the long ride was to resume. (...) So tomorrow, with only twenty-seven dollars left of the money raised in Kansas City, they were heading west again, to Texas, to Nevada - "nowhere definite."

(CAPOTE, 2000, p. 254)

In this sense Maria Irene in her analysis of *Huckleberry Finn*, reveals that



there is a 'denúncia perfeita da contradição entre a utopia e a ocupação sócio-econômica do espaço, entre a promessa do lugar e os conflitos sociais de classe e raça' (Santos, p. 167). This thought seems to approximate the four novels and their usage of the element of space as a representation of the frustrated form of resistance.

Overall, in light of what has been analyzed, it is possible to affirm that the element of space is crucial when it comes to the social conflicts of the north Amer-

ican society. The crime brought up by Truman Capote reveals a complex system of social exclusion and its consequent repressive violence which, in a diverse and multifaceted way, has direct relation with the other three novels. The recurrent usage of journeys and contingent spaces in these novels represents, in a broader sense, a deep feeling of disappointment in relation to society and also depicts an operant system of social exclusion from which the characters try to escape in vain.

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# Pirate Grace – How American Values, Capitalism and Brecht are Developed in Lars Von Trier's *Dogville*

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**Abstract:** The present paper aims to study Lars von Trier's 2003 film *Dogville* taking into consideration the criticism of American culture and capitalist values present in the film, to observe how the two main characters are developed throughout the narrative, as well as to propose a comparison between von Trier's film and Brecht's poem "Pirate Jenny".

**Keywords:** Lars Von Trier, *Dogville*, Brecht, Capitalism.

## Pirate Jenny – Seeräuber-Jenny *Lyrics: Bertolt Brecht/Marc Blitzstein*

1

You people can watch while I'm scrubbing these floors  
And I'm scrubbin' the floors while you're gawking  
Maybe once ya tip me and it makes ya feel swell  
In this crummy Southern town, in this crummy old hotel  
But you'll never guess to who you're talkin'.  
No. You couldn't ever guess to who you're talkin'.  
Then one night there's a scream in the night  
And you'll wonder who could that have been  
And you see me kinda grinnin' while I'm scrubbin'  
And you say, "What's she got to grin?"  
I'll tell you.

There's a ship, the black freighter  
with a skull on its masthead  
will be coming in.

2

You gentlemen can say, "Hey gal, finish them floors!  
Get upstairs! What's wrong with you! Earn your keep [here!]  
You toss me your tips

and look out to the ships  
But I'm counting your heads  
as I'm making the beds  
Cuz there's nobody gonna sleep here, honey  
Nobody! Nobody!  
Then one night there's a scream in the night  
And you say, "Who's that kicking up a row?"  
And ya see me kinda starin' out the winda  
And you say, "What's she got to stare at  
[now?"  
I'll tell ya.

There's a ship, the black freighter  
turns around in the harbor  
shootin' guns from her bow

3  
Now you gentlemen can wipe that smile  
[off your face  
'Cause every building in town is a flat one  
This whole frickin' place will be down to  
[the ground  
Only this cheap hotel standing up safe  
[and sound  
And you yell, "Why do they spare that  
[one?"  
Yes, that's what you say.  
"Why do they spare that one?"  
All the night through, through the noise  
[and to-do  
You wonder who is that person that lives  
[up there?  
And you see me stepping out in the  
[morning  
Looking nice with a ribbon in my hair.

And the ship, the black freighter  
runs a flag up its masthead  
and a cheer rings the air

4  
By noontime the dock is a-swarmin' with  
[men  
comin' out from the ghostly freighter  
They move in the shadows where no one  
[can see  
And they're chainin' up people and  
[they're bringin' em to me  
askin' me, "Kill them NOW, or LATER?"  
Askin' ME! "Kill them now, or later?"  
Noon by the clock  
and so still by the dock  
You can hear a foghorn miles away  
And in that quiet of death  
I'll say, "Right now.  
Right now!"  
Then they'll pile up the bodies  
And I'll say,  
"That'll learn ya!"

And the ship, the black freighter  
disappears out to sea  
And on it is me

**BRECHT**, Bertolt, "Seeräuber-Jenny", Song Lyrics in German and English.  
Available at <[http://german.about.com/library/blmus\\_hknef06mb.htm](http://german.about.com/library/blmus_hknef06mb.htm)>

From reading Brecht's "Pirate Jenny", we can consider the importance of both this poem and Brecht himself in the structure of Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. Firstly, it is clear from the storyline of the poem that it was a great influence in the plot of the film: a girl who is ill-treated by those around her keeps a secret, and is able to violently force revenge upon those who abused her. Another important element is the influence of Brecht's Epic

Theater, which excludes one of the most basic fundamentals of ordinary theater – and ordinary cinema: the engendering of illusion. The film does not attempt to create an atmosphere of reality, and is able to do so from the very first scenes of the film by the use of the scenery.

*Dogville* is shot in a black studio, where we have a blueprint of a city, and just a few props here and there. There is no mesmerizing horizon for the audience to be distracted by<sup>2</sup>, no beauty whatsoever that would prevent us from focusing solely on the plot, the dialogues and the horror that is slowly being played out.

There is, from the beginning of the film, a sense of universality, present in the unidentified nature of the scenery, in the seclusion of the town, the simplicity of its townspeople, which give us the impression that the story being told could have happened anywhere, at any time. *Dogville* does not want to create an illusion of reality, as we are accustomed to expect from films. It seems to make use of the estrangement we feel towards these unusual formal elements to emphasize troubling aspects of human nature – showing how self-preservation instincts and revenge can take over anyone's actions – and also how a capitalist system excels in exploring what is worst in our nature. According to Brecht, in "Street scene", "The epic theatre is a highly skilled theatre with complex contents and far-reaching social objectives"<sup>3</sup>.

The choice of America as the spot where this apparently timeless tale is taking place cannot be seen as an accidental or minor characteristic of the film, as

there seems to be such a clear intention of taking away from the audience anything that might interfere with the plot, or distract us from what is happening to the characters. *Dogville* is directed by a Danish filmmaker who has never been to the United States, and yet this does not seem to be an obstacle to Von Trier's writing and directing a film about a society that has its geographical center so far away from him and his homeland. Indeed, *Dogville* shows us how deep American cultural values are incorporated in what we believe to be "human nature", how easy it is for us to mistake these values as universal, how impregnated we are by them, even if we have never left our own countries thousands of miles away from Hollywood. According to Fredric Jameson, on the essay "Notes on globalization as a philosophical issue", "American blindness can be registered, for example, in our tendency to confuse the universal and the cultural, as well as to assume that in any given geopolitical conflict all elements and values are somehow equal and equivalent." (JAMESON, page 59).

The film's plot is elaborate. It is divided into chapters that give a concise description of what is about to happen, and the film is narrated by an omniscient narrator. In a small town near the Rocky Mountains, during the Great Depression, *Dogville* begins. Tom is a young man that lives in Dogville, and believes to be a writer. Through him, we are introduced to the other residents of the town, that he clearly sees as flawed and in need of guidance – and Tom believes he is worthy of this task. Yet, he has nothing to show to back up

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to notice how in *Melancholia*, this is not the case anymore, the film is hauntingly beautiful, and this beauty is as terrifying as the effect of the lack of aesthetic elements in *Dogville* – if not more.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <http://bit.ly/tkFJsY>

this notion, aside from his own intellectual pretension. In reality, it seems that his neighbors are just a poor excuse for him to postpone any actual writing.

One night, he hears gunshots, and the fugitive Grace arrives in the town. She refuses to tell Tom the reason why she is running away, and puts herself in a completely vulnerable position, telling him that he would be greatly rewarded if he betrayed her and called the gangsters who were after her. Driven by the pleasure of finally having someone to hear his advice and willing to blindly follow his directions, Tom suggests that, in exchange for protection, she would work some time everyday for all the residents of Dogville. The townspeople quickly go from saying that they don't need any help at all to the total and cruel abuse of Grace, who takes it all with a martyr's endurance. Verbal violence becomes physical violence, climaxing in her rape by all the male residents of the town, with the exception of Tom. He just observes everything and tries to rationalize his neighbor's, and his own, behavior – in spite of the alleged love he had for her. The vulnerability of her position seems to give an excuse in the townspeople's mind to do whatever they wanted with her – because they were giving her protection. She is then chained to a device to stop her from running away and, after being refused by Grace, even Tom turns his back on her and decides to call the gangsters to capture her. We find out then that Grace is the gangsters' boss's daughter, and by him is given the possibility of wiping out the entire town. Reluctant at first, she eventually realizes

that what had been stopping her from judging them all along, the fact that they were poor and did not know any better, was no longer enough to justify their actions, and mercilessly and cruelly has the entire town put to death.

The film was largely viewed by critics as anti-American, and it is effortless to think of the story as a dark illustration – a word that is so many times used by Tom – of how apparently friendly Americans can become brutal and inhumane when confronted by a stranger. A country of immigrants, that has for centuries received vulnerable and poor people who had nothing to offer except their workforce, the U.S. have a long history of xenophobia, abuse and rationalization of this violence – all of which are present in von Trier's film in Grace's suffering. The ending credits that close the film to the sound of David Bowie's "Young Americans", the pictures of working class Americans from the 1930s, combined with the Independence Day sequence, where all the townspeople sing "America the beautiful", ironically the verse "God shed His *grace* on thee", are also clear indications of that the film can be seen as a critique to American culture.

A strange sense of unity is developed by the residents of Dogville throughout the film. At the beginning of the story, this unity does not exist: each house seems to be detached from the other, the townspeople are often in conflict amongst themselves, and they are more individualistic. But this changes with the arrival of Grace: she supplies them the 'other' without which no 'we' would be possible. As

they unite and become a group, Dogville now works together against the outsider, Grace. This has been observed in America time and time again; there always seems to be a new threat, a new minority, which is persecuted and humiliated in order to “protect” the interest of “real Americans”. The people of Dogville believe themselves to be virtuous – they are just doing what they can to protect themselves given the circumstances – there was no other choice.

It is possible to draw a comparison between what is depicted in *Dogville* and the situation analyzed by Susan Willis in her essay “Quien es mas macho?”. Her focus is the photos taken by members of United States army in Iraq of prisoners being tortured: “Fresh-faced American girls who could easily double as Disney employees are shown smiling over a pile of naked prisoners and enthusiastically giving the “thumbs up” while Iraqi men are forced to masturbate or simulate sex. (...) Slavoj Žižek maintains that the Abu Ghraib photos offer insight into ‘the obscene underside of US popular culture’”<sup>4</sup> (pg 117). The story of a simple, Christian and friendly community that rapes and tortures an innocent girl seems to follow

the same logic as the Abu Ghraib photos. Willis relates the incident to the KKK movement, that according to her was impelled by ignorance and poverty<sup>5</sup> – the same excuses that Grace gives to not apply the same moral standards she sets for herself to the residents of Dogville. Ignorance and poverty have been subterfuge for racism, xenophobia, violence and segregation throughout American history – as we can see in Willis’ text, from the KKK to Abu Ghraib – and is exploited by von Trier as he begins his trilogy portraying America<sup>6</sup>. Still, Grace does not comply to this innocence in penury until the end of the film: the final turn of the plot suggests that people should be responsible for their actions, that they do have a choice of action, and to lower moral standards for people who are from a lower class or do not have a higher degree of education is arrogant and patronizing. This is, of course, one possible interpretation.

According to Lars Von Trier: “Grace presents herself as a gift to the townspeople, and that’s dangerous. It gives people power over you and power corrupts. I think that the people of Dogville were OK until Grace came along, just as America would be a beautiful country if

4 Willis’ text also deals with the relationship between sex and violence in her essay, and how these two combined have constantly been a part of American history. They also have a significant role in *Dogville*, for through rape the violence against Grace reaches its peak, and through it she loses her own position of human being, to the eyes of the townspeople. The narrator says: “the harassments in bed did not have to be kept so secret anymore because they couldn’t really be compared to a sexual act. They were embarrassing the way it is when a hillbilly has his way with a cow”. Sexual violence can be seen, then, as a device for lowering people, forcing a sense of inferiority.

5 Can we say that the social factors of ignorance and poverty that fueled the Klan’s growth have ever been overcome?” (Willis, pg 120)

6 *Dogville* is the first film of a trilogy by Lars von Trier called USA: Land of Opportunities.

7 DUPONT, Joan. "Lars von Trier: Looking for America", International Herald Tribune. Available at <[http://www.ihrt.com/articles/2003/05/23/dogville\\_ed3\\_.php?page=2](http://www.ihrt.com/articles/2003/05/23/dogville_ed3_.php?page=2)>

there were only millionaires playing golf. It would be a wonderful, peaceful society, but that is not how it is, as far as I've been told."<sup>7</sup> Grace's role in the downfall of Dogville here seems to be more than ever related to the figure of the foreigner, the outsider who, in his inferior position, ends up disturbing the security of those who are already well settled. However, Grace's character seems to be more complex and extrapolate this plan. She is no simple outsider in desperate need of help, she hides the fact that she is powerful and rich, much more than her torturers could ever dream of being.

The specificity of Grace's character makes her a more elaborated and interesting individual, but it is also responsible for giving the plot of the film more complexity and depth. She is not so innocent herself and, just like the other characters, is compelled by the environment she is in to make difficult and controversial decisions. In order to better understand the character's motivations, we will direct our focus to Tom and Grace, and how they are developed throughout the film.

As the film begins, we are first introduced to Tom Edison Jr's character by the narrator (that we need to keep in mind is exceptionally sarcastic, despite his serene and nonjudgmental tone of voice). He informs us that Tom is a writer. At least he believes so: Tom has only written a small sentence – "Great or small?" –, which by itself is the definition of Tom. Regardless of the fact that throughout the film Tom is constantly trying to make himself look greater, he is aware of his insignificance. Over-nar-

cissistic behavior is often related to very low self-esteem. Nevertheless, despite the fact that this sentence says so much about Tom, it is clear that its literary relevance is null, still Tom carefully archives it, as if it was worth keeping. The manner the narrator informs us of Tom's 'profession' is particularly sarcastic, as he describes it through Tom's eyes. He sees himself as a philosopher, a miner of the human soul, an observer and an educator to the uninstructed inhabitants of his town. He has not done anything to earn all of these titles, but he firmly believes that he is in a position to counsel the others, as he can so clearly point out the moral failures in all of them.

Tom is remarkably arrogant when it comes to the townspeople. He disagrees with them at every opportunity he gets: his father should listen to the news; Chuck should allow the children to give Moses food; Ma Ginger should not hoe the soil as much and, more importantly, they should all confide in him when it came to ethical issues. These are all things he is not qualified to judge the others on, but still he allows himself to do so. Tom fantasizes about being surrounded by other writers, "great gatherings that'd listen in silence to Tom after the publication of yet another volume that scourged and purged the human soul". Tom's desire for attention and recognition is clear, and he would go through great lengths to achieve it, but he preferred to postpone actual writing.

The cause for Tom's displeasure before Grace's arrival is soon exposed. Firstly, he is infatuated with Bill's sister Liz, who despises him. She is the only one

in Dogville who intimidates Tom, and he is not able to confront her and respond to her insults. Secondly, he feels compelled to educate his neighbors on acceptance and morality, which is nothing more than a way to disguise his inability to write. He hopes to use the townspeople and their behavior as an illustration to his work, hence he consciously converts the town into his own social laboratory, to provide the illustration he craved. When he meets Grace, he obtains all the tools he needed in order to start his experiment.

The reason why Grace became so attractive in Tom's eyes is simple. Apart from her looks, she was on a terribly vulnerable position, so that from the start Tom had a great amount of control over her fate. Being responsible for whether she lived or died was the gift he was hoping for. The narrator tells us Tom felt "a fine sensation of mastery... New for him in terms of the opposite sex". Liz was immediately forgotten, as Grace's vulnerability and amiableness made her a much simpler object for his advances than Bill's sister did.

After Tom's intervention in her favor, he takes Grace for a walk around the township, showing her the houses and describing each of Dogville's residents. The manner he characterizes his neighbors is extremely disdainful. They are all defined by short, demeaning sentences, that are meant to make them appear smaller, and Tom look greater: Chuck and Vera hate each other, Jack McKay pathetically hides in his own house, Ben drinks and frequents a whorehouse, Ma Ginger and Gloria use their store to exploit the

other citizens. Tom deliberately chooses to mention only negative things, to show how clearly he is able to see where the others are going wrong.

Another important factor is that Tom and Grace shared ideals. As much as this was attractive to Tom at first, later on, when he is inclined to put ideals aside so that they can sleep together, Grace's ideals prove to be more powerful than his, and he eventually is unable to cope with rejection.

It is unlikely that Grace was ever more than just an instrument for Tom. She fitted his purposes perfectly, always agreeing with him, trusting him and his convictions, relying on him completely. As time passed, peoples' ethical standards began to sink lower and lower, whereas Grace's dependence on Tom became higher and higher. She elevated his self-worth, and probably was responsible for increasing his confidence until Tom was strong enough to betray her, when Grace came to be hazardous to him.

The fact that Tom is repeatedly putting Grace in danger validates this hypothesis: he exposes her to Chuck, who is obviously dangerous; even though he threatens to, he does not hinder the men from raping her; he tells the other citizens that she stole money from his father; all of this before he actually turned his back on her and called the gangsters, a possibility he had on his mind all along, otherwise he would have just thrown the telephone number away. What led to Tom to turn Grace in was the fact that she incisively injured his ego. When the town demanded that he took sides and, more



specifically, got rid of Grace, he stood by her, for he believed this to be was the sacrifice he needed to make in order to be gain acceptance in Grace's bed. When she rejects him once more, accusing him of being tempted to join his neighbors, Tom became angry, "not because he'd been wrongly accused but because the charges were true! His anger consisted of a most unpleasant feeling of being found out!" as put by the narrator. After that, Tom quickly concludes that Grace was not worth threatening his professional career, or depriving his future readers of his works. His behavior from this point on shows us how feigned he could be, and might have been all along, for he is able to lie to Grace's face the next morning, and even be affectionate to her. Later, completely unmasked, he exposes himself to Grace in all his cruelty, before trying to fool her one last time, when he realizes that the tables are turned, and now she is the one holding his life on the palm of her hand.

Grace's character is responsible for *Dogville's* mystery and the denouement of the film. She is superficially represented as a generous, altruistic person, but this notion is subverted when she opts for revenge, and is responsible for the murder of all the citizens of Dogville. Yet a closer look at her behavior can suggest that this was not a sudden change in her position, but that she was capable of doing this all along. Grace's analysis will connect her to Brecht's poem "*Pirate Jenny*", which Lars Von Trier admittedly used as an inspiration when writing *Dogville*, and is on the first page of this paper.

When giving a second glance at

Grace's attitudes at the beginning of the film, it seems that as much as Tom is testing her and the townspeople, she is also conducting a behavioral experience herself. She had never been in touch with a poor community before, and naively believes that they might be different from the people in the city. She decides to "give herself to Tom at random, like a gift", a strange choice of action for a girl who had been involved with gangsters all her life, and perhaps should be more suspicious of people. The fact is that, from the start, Grace is also testing Dogville, trying to figure out how far they are willing to go for her. Because of that, she does not ask for Tom's help after the gangsters are gone the first time, on the contrary, she says: "I'm sure he'd offer a big reward if you told him where I was". Instead of trying to convince the town that she is reliable, she tells them they really have no reason to trust her. Grace only tries to charm them because she is told to do so by Tom, and from then on she obeys his every instruction. Grace's admiration for Dogville comes from the fact that they survive under such harsh conditions and, in her mind, that is enough to gain her complacency. All of the negativity that Tom sees in the town is irrelevant to Grace, because living like they do, they could not have done any better. She can pardon their faults because she has very low expectations of them, and therefore the standards she sets to herself are much higher than the ones set to the townspeople, that can behave like animals, for they do not know how to act any differently. They are inferior, irresponsible children in her



eyes, and consequently Grace vainly feels that what she is doing is close to charity work. What can be superficially seen as generosity in Grace's tone of voice is condescension and a patronizing superiority.

This can be observed in the countless times Grace forgives, and even encourages immoral attitudes in the people of Dogville. Ben, for example, should not be ashamed of going to the whorehouse, for he should make the best of his life. This statement is extremely contrasting to Grace's own behavior when it comes to sex, as she passively allows all men in Dogville to rape her, but does not allow herself to be intimate with Tom, with whom she is supposed to be in love. She even tells Tom that he can have her if he is willing to force her – once again testing his reactions – but she would not consent to it herself, because her ideals are too great.

An example of how Grace's benevolence is actually disguising her arrogance is her conversation with Chuck, after he tried to kiss her while they were picking apples. He confronts her, never denying he tried to kiss her, but saying that he cannot teach her without touching her. He goes on to say that he does not believe she cares for apples and, in his rage, he thought of turning her in if she did not show him more respect. Grace's reaction is astonishing, as she actually apologizes, an attitude that is absurd considering the circumstances, and even gives him an excuse for acting the way he did: "You've been really alone here haven't you? You haven't had anyone to comfort you. And I should ask for your forgiveness". Her disregard for this first attempt

of abuse gives Chuck the encouragement for raping her later. After he does, Grace does not want Tom to confront him, because "even though Chuck looks strong, he is not". His weakness is to Grace an excuse for his behavior, thus she sees no reason to discipline him. Once again, poverty gives them the right to be uncivilized. And Grace, because she did not grow up poor, thinks that she should endure, for she is strong and well-educated, and therefore is in a position to be better than them.

When Vera confronts her about hitting Jason, Grace could simply have explained properly what had happened, but she chooses not to, once again testing the townspeople's limits. She does the same thing when Vera believes that Chuck and her are having an affair, Grace could have told her that she was being raped, but again she does not. After the figurines are broken, Grace follows Tom's advice and tries to leave town, only to be raped again and accused of stealing Tom Senior's money. Instead of defending herself from the accusations, Grace remains silent, and for that she is punished with the escape mechanism built by Bill, with the help of the entire town, one of the strongest scenes in the film.

Grace addresses the citizens one last time, taking Tom's advice, and finally unemotionally reveals to them all she has been through since her arrival in Dogville. After she finishes her speech, the townspeople decide that she should leave, and that Tom should do something to make her disappear without letting her 'lies' spread. As we mentioned before, Grace rejects Tom's attempt to sleep with


her afterwards and confronts him about being tempted to betray her. Again, we see her challenging him, trying to discover how far he will go for her. Tom calls the gangsters, and for some days the townspeople try to pretend that everything is normal. From the first morning after the meeting, Grace is suspicious, and for the first time actually doubts Tom. The fact is that she could not conceive that the people of Dogville could act any differently, and from her behavior, we can assume that she knew what was going on.

On Brecht's poem, "Pirate Jenny", the girl that is abused consciously develops a trap to punish the people that harmed her. Jenny is not innocent in any point, and she is plotting her revenge from the beginning, even taking some pleasure in her own pain: she grins because she knows there will be retribution. On the third stanza, Jenny says, while making the beds: "Cuz there's nobody gonna sleep here, honey, Nobody! Nobody!" – a sign that she knows that they are all going to die. Ironically, the same thing happens to Grace. Hours before the gangsters arrive, while making June's bed she says "Nobody's gonna sleep here", and feels startled, not knowing where the words came from. The sentence shows us that, even if only unconsciously, Grace already knew the decision she would make some hours later, when she was bound to meet her father. In addition, we can consider that Grace's relationship to the mob was a way to approximate her to Jenny, as the mafia may be seen as a modern equivalent of piracy, in its widespread institution of illegal actions and violence.

Grace's father exposes her. He accuses Grace of being arrogant, because she forgives those she finds inferior, for it is in their nature to behave the way they do. She exonerates everyone, for nobody could attain the same moral standards as her, not giving them the chance to be accountable for their actions and learn from their mistakes. His speech is extremely convincing, mainly because Grace cannot defend herself from his accusations. She is given time to think, and quickly realizes that if she had acted like them, "she could not have defended a single one of her actions and could not have condemned them harshly enough", and suddenly she decides that it was her duty to make justice, as she had the power to do so. She now vainly takes the place of a vindictive god, and believes that it is her responsibility to "make the world a little better", by burning Dogville to ashes and shooting every single one of its residents, punishing them for their sins. It is, therefore, erroneous to believe that Grace's decision is spontaneous and that the Grace that burns Dogville is detached from the one from the beginning of the film. They are both the same. Grace gave Dogville every chance to abuse her, and then takes the role its executioner. As Jenny, she is given the choice of killing everyone: "And they're chainin' up people/ and they're bringin' em to me/ askin' me, "Kill them NOW, or LATER?"/ Askin' ME! "Kill them now, or later?". The passage emphasizes the inversion of power, how she comes from victim to killer. In the end of the poem, Jenny says: "And the ship, the black freighter/disappears out to sea/And on it

is me”, a scene that is very similar to the ending of the film, in which Grace leaves Dogville burnt to the ground, driving off in a black car.

It seems impossible to be indifferent to *Dogville*. The film deals with sensitive issues and is excessively logical and cruel, in a way that it does not allow us to feel safe, which is what we have grown accustomed to expect from a movie: a vehicle to escape our everyday reality, not one that makes us question our beliefs, principles and ideals. Moreover, because *Dogville* takes this second category to extreme levels, it is profoundly disturbing – but it demands our attention. Despite taking into consideration the innumer-

able references to American culture and values in *Dogville*, it is very unlikely that the film can be seen by a Brazilian audience, for example, and people would not identify themselves with what is happening on the screen: the discomfort we feel from watching the film has a lot to do with the fact that we recognize ourselves in the characters. This is, also, a sign of the cultural reach that the United States have had, but it is mainly a consequence of the capitalist system that is now present in most of the world, shaping culture, and creating what we consider to be “human nature” and “universal” because it can be witnessed all around the world. 

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# The Grey and the Green: Aspects of Escapism and Environment in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien

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**Abstract:** In this paper I discuss how the British writer and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien, who has frequently been labelled as ‘escapist’, can and should be seen as an author aware of the problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The core of the study consists of an approximation between his biographical and fictional elements concerning the theme of nature, having in mind the representative images of the Tree and the Machine and their implications. The addressing of these questions leads to the conclusion that escapism in Tolkien is a form of resistance, which allows, up to some extent, a political understanding of his works.

**Keywords:** Tolkien, Escapism, Environment, Politics

## Introduction

Much has already been said about the stigmatization of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien as an author who, when not indifferent to his time, tried to flee from it. Therefore, I will here make only an account of main considerations about this paramount problematic.

The critics who have put Tolkien under the label of escapist had reasons to do so. Not only is the fantastic genre in literature considered the escapist one *par excellence*, but also the surface of his works provides enough argument for such an opinion. Moreover, Tolkien’s own deliberate defence can be easily understood as the outright confession of what they regard as a literary crime:

[...] I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which ‘Escape’ is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers of Escape are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic.

(TOLKIEN, 2006, p.148)

However, it is now a consensus among the experts that his works should not be taken as “escapist” in the pejorative sense. Two of these great experts, though not entirely consonant in other respects, converge to this one point: for Verlyn Flieger (2000, p.6), “his work could not have spoken so powerfully to his own century if he had completely succeeded in escaping it.” Accordingly, Tom Shippey (2001, p.xxvii) claims that Tolkien was “responding to the issues and anxieties” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Two World Wars, the ascension of Nazism and Fascism, the rule of six different monarchs in England: as a witness of such events and many others in more than eighty years of life, Tolkien could not be alienated to his surroundings, and certainly not unaware of political issues. Some of his opinions on Nazism, Fascism, Communism, Gender and so forth can be found scattered throughout excellent books with biographical content, but in this article I intend to deal with another issue that has been widely discussed in recent decades: environment.

In spite of Tolkien's suspicion about the overlapping critics made of his life and his fictional work, their proximity in the question of environment cannot be overlooked. Thus, this article will feed on this proximity, by means of a description of both aspects and the establishment of a relation between them, so that in the conclusion I will try to explain how this matter can be ultimately regarded as political (however subtly) in its implications.

### **It had begun with a leaf...**

In search for Tolkien's relation with nature, the biographical records lead us straight to Sarehole, a hamlet near Birmingham to which John Ronald moved with his mother and brother in 1896. Humphrey Carpenter (2002, p.35) notes that "The effect of this move on Ronald was deep and permanent. Just at the age when his imagination was opening out, he found himself in the English countryside."

This period of his life is easily romanticised, especially because it soon

became part of an idealised but lost past: in 1900, the family moved to industrial Birmingham, and this clash between the pacific rural England and the overcrowded city, says Carpenter (*ibid.*, p.43), was rapidly felt: "trams struggling up the hill, the drab faces of passers-by, and in the distance the smoking factory chimneys of Sparkbrook and Small Heath."

Birmingham played an important role throughout the Industrial Revolution that took place in England from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Tolkien's move from Sarehole to this city happened some fourteen years before the end of what has been conventionally called the Second Industrial Revolution. Among the technologies that were consolidated during this phase was the internal combustion engine.

"How I wish the 'infernal combustion' engine had never been invented. Or [...] that it could have been put to rational uses — if any.", remarked Tolkien in one of his letters (*id.*, 2006b, p.77). He had such a rich imagination that even this contempt for cars served as a fictional matrix to him: a car was a "supporting actor" in *Mr. Bliss*, a children's book invested with Tolkien's own lack of skill in driving the automobile he bought in 1932.

Besides technological progress, the chief notion we nowadays have of pollution is also a product of the Industrial Revolution, when great loads of coal were used to feed the voracious machines. How ironic it is that Tolkien's love for the Welsh language, which was later to become important to his *legendarium*, should have been awakened by the inscriptions on coal-trucks during his period in Birmingham.

There was something of an Arcadian<sup>2</sup> in him. Warren Lewis, C. S. Lewis's brother, recollected in his diary an anecdote which tells how Tolkien, strolling with a group in Oxford, spotted some deer: "Tolkien swept off his hat to them and remarked 'Hail fallow [sic] well met'" (id., 2006a, p.56). There certainly coexisted in him both Arcadian values of *fugere urbem and locus amoenus*. Once again the issue of escapism emerges: was it possible to escape from City in a physical world, in "Real Life" as it were, when City was devouring whatever stood on its way? Was there any familiar *locus amoenus* remaining? In Tolkien's case, the answer seems no. He did return to Sarehole in the 1930's, but Sarehole was not there anymore. At least not the one he used to know, with its new and numerous buildings.

All nature, its importance and gradual disappearance, was summarised, for Tolkien, in the Trees. Some justification is necessary. In a letter to his son Christopher (id, 2006b, p.91), he said that spacious, barren lands, such as those he used to see as a small child in South Africa, stirred deeply his heart, and that if this kind of landscape did not exist, he would be left with a hatred for green. But the delight in barren grounds does not undermine the role of Trees in his *imaginarium*, as long as they are natural and not a product of human hands. In this sense, even devoid, sandy grounds can be circumscribed within the range of the arboreal image.

To mention some examples, the Ents in Fangorn forest, the Two Trees in Valinor, the Fragrant Trees in Númenor, the Mallorns in Lórien; the White Tree in

Gondor, Niggle's tree, the Birch in Faery; even the sparse, incipient trees on the mountains of the Dark Land of Mordor: the recurrence and relevance of this image throughout the books is so noticeable that the Tree has become one of the strongest, if not the strongest symbol of his works. And it was not only in fiction: many of his finest drawings are depictions of trees (cf., for instance, the *Tree of Amalion*); his letters are full of references to them. Even the last picture took in his life shows him in front of one of his favourite trees in Oxford.

As it occurred with nature as a whole, the destruction of trees was a sorrow for him, and he found "human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals" (ibid, p.220). When a large poplar tree of his acquaintance (and "acquaintance" is an appropriate word) was suddenly cut down, he remarked, grieved: "I do not think it had any friends, or any mourners except myself and a pair of owls" (Tolkien, 2001, p.vi).

Of course, against what is "natural" stand "artificial" things. For him, artificiality was epitomised in the aforementioned machines; the polluting, noisy devices, which supposedly saved labour, but ended up creating "endless and worse labour", as he himself asserted (Carpenter, 2006b, p.88).

Nor was this the kind of thing enjoyed by the hobbits, a rustic folk who "do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom [...]" (Tolkien, 2008a, p.1).

Christopher Tolkien commented in a documentary<sup>3</sup> that, for his father,

2 The reference here is to the literary movement that arose in some European countries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, called *Arcadismo* in Portuguese, and which cherished the simplicity and temperance of a pastoral life. It is roughly equivalent to what is called Neoclassicism in English (or perhaps a branch of Neoclassicism rather than an equivalent), but the word 'Arcadian' is more appropriate to the present discussion than 'Neoclassical'.



machines represented coercion and domination. This may be interpreted in two ways, both of them correct: the domination of Men over Nature, the main scope of this paper, and the domination of Men over Men. Tolkien dealt with the latter on a basis of inversion and dissipation that can be explained by means of examples.

One of themes that most moved him was the aggrandisement of the seemingly unimportant people before the course of History, and his hobbits are the greatest representatives of this theme. Farmer Giles of Ham, the protagonist of a homonymous story published in 1949, also evinces this kind of ennoblement. It is noteworthy that Giles is sometimes referred to as a “churl”, a word which is inserted in the semantic field of “rustic” and can also be used pejoratively.

Thus, both terms show how the “unimportant” characters were at times related to rural landscapes, and yet they were the ones who carried the potential to change radically the lives of many and ascend socially: Farmer Giles becomes king; Meriadoc, Peregrin and Samwise, three of the main hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*, the latter being a gardener, eventually achieve high social positions. Frodo’s trajectory is also upwards, since he is granted the transcendent right of sailing overseas never to return.

On the other hand, there are plenty examples of “great” characters being portrayed in a moral and physical process of debasement. The greedy king of *Farmer Giles of Ham*; the arrogant king of Númenor, Ar-Pharazôn; or Gríma Wormtongue, the deceitful advisor to the sovereign; Fëanor,

the proud and powerful elvish prince; the jealous elf and courtier, Saeros: they all belong to a higher rank in their spheres, but suffer some kind of disparagement.

Therefore, the roles of superior and inferior *personae* are inverted, and the nefarious domination is dissipated, generating a period of appeasement in the final scenes which, however, does not configure an altogether “happy ending”, at least not in a permanent sense: in Tolkien’s literature, Evil works in cycles, and though it can be kept at bay, it cannot be fully eliminated, since its seeds will ever grow again.

The land of the hobbits, called The Shire, seems to be consolidated in people’s minds as an earthly paradise. But this image can be deceitful, particularly for those whose appreciation of Tolkien goes no further than Peter Jackson’s film trilogy. By the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Shire has gone through a drastic change: “An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End, they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air” (id., 2008b, p.1314).

The degradation of the Shire is but a glimpse of what the whole world began experiencing long before the time of *The Lord of the Rings*: according to Tolkien’s *legendarium*, we live in Arda Marred, the world disfigured by Evil. Take, for instance, another fragment that pungently depicts the corruption in nature:

Where once the fair pool of Ivrin had lain in its great stone basin carved by falling waters, and all about it had been

3 J.R.R.T.: A Film Portrait of J.R.R.Tolkien was a documentary produced in 1992, the centenary of his birth.



a tree-clad hollow under the hills, now [Voronwë] saw a land defiled and desolate. The trees were burned or uprooted; and the stone-marges of the pool were broken, so that the waters of Ivrin strayed and wrought a great barren marsh amid the ruin. All now was but a welter of frozen mire, and a reek of decay lay like a foul mist upon the ground.

(ID., 2010, p.49)

This is also indicative of how the Shire is a small illustration of the whole world: in the above quotation, Evil is the Primordial Evil, configured in the arch-villain Morgoth. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Evil is incarnated in lesser spirits. With regard to the case of the Shire specifically, it is represented by Saruman, a wizard. Wherever he is, Saruman promotes the destruction of nature in favour of machines, and his deeds leave behind a trail of smoke. Again there is an opposition between Natural and Artificial: on one side, Saruman; on the other, Radagast, another wizard, whose provinces are the plants and the animals. Saruman holds for him great contempt and refers to him as “the Simple” and “the Fool”, words that carry a semantic relation with “Churl” and “Rustic”.

Besides his fondness for machines, he is known within the books for the persuasive power of his voice. Concerning his speeches, Tom Shippey makes a brilliant assertion (2005, pp.135-136): “Saruman talks like a politician”, and in his claptrap he betrays, among other things, a defence of the “subordination of means to ends.”

Why, contemporary world can be largely described as a product of such

subordination. To overthrow enormous areas of forest and put a pasture instead or to disrupt fragile aquatic ecosystems so as to build hydroelectric stations are flagrant illustrations of how the ends overcome by far the means. Only that these ends are perhaps not the best ones. Many “hindrances to progress” had to, have to and will have to be sacrificed in this whole process of subordination.

However, one might argue that all ended well in the Shire. It is eventually healed: Saruman is killed, trees grow again stronger and more beautiful, and the streams and rivers run clear once more. But, as a counterargument, every healing presupposes a wound, as much as every healed wound presupposes a scar, if not a physical one, at least a scar in Memory. And Memory is, in Tolkien’s works, the great abyss that separates a healed thing and a renewed one. As mentioned before, “happy endings” in Tolkien’s more serious works are often illusory.

Another example of this distinction, in a simplistic way, are the immortal characters, the Elves, who can “die” by means of violence or grief but are able to reincarnate with the same memories and without the sorrow they once bore. They are, in this way, healed, but not new. The same occurs with the Shire.

We end up with the same question: is there any familiar *locus amoenus* remaining for the hobbits to return to? The answer is still no. Not while Memory lingers. Tolkien’s Shire does not owe to Sarehole its origins alone, but also the feeling of an irremediable loss. It is “long ago in the quiet of the world, when there

was less noise and more green” that *The Hobbit* begins, but that is not how *The Lord of The Rings* is closed. In the end, the fate of the Shire is to be green but stained with the specks and the memory of grey.

### Conclusive remarks

The title of the second session, “It had begun with a leaf...”, is a direct reference to the short story *Leaf by Niggle*, published in 1945. In this allegorical piece, the painter Niggle begins his *magnum opus* with a leaf, which then evolves to a tree and finally becomes a whole country. This gradation can be used to illustrate the expansion of the environment issue, which began timidly but has now become urgent: greenhouse effect, global warming, deforestation, pollution, overgrowth of cities and overpopulation are some of the key-expressions of our time. Being urgent, such questions made their way into the agenda of politicians. Nowadays, it is in to be green.

Of course politics is not exclusive to politicians. Literature, for example, has always played a decisive role as a political tool. One may ask, however, if *engagé* literature is the most efficient of tools. Shippey (ibid., p.371) holds it is not: “it is the fantasists like Orwell or Golding or Vonnegut or Tolkien who have been confronting the fearful and horrible issues of political life, while the E. M. Forsters and John Updikes stayed within their sheltered Shires.”

For the last time, I put the question of “escapism” on the stage. Shippey’s interpretation is that Tolkien ultimately

rejects it, either in political and supra-political levels. This is one plausible way of looking at it. However, one can see escapism also as a form of resistance, and a most “heroic” one, as he put it. By finding his way into ancient times, Tolkien projected in literary form the values that he wanted to see restored, and also, in opposition, reinforced which elements in his contemporary society should be dismissed, despised and disposed of.

In other words, it is not a simple escape, a mere nostalgic trip, but a fictional revisiting to the past in search for answers to questions and solutions to problems which then afflicted him. However, these problems, rather than being solved, acquired even greater proportions nowadays: the dragons got bigger. Therefore Tolkien, with his literature, was offering resistance to a concrete world, and be sure to understand “concrete” as an adjective *and* as a noun.

Many who were eager to interpret *The Lord of the Rings* in a political, engaged perspective, did so by means of wrong and easily refutable premises, say, “*The Lord of the Rings* is an account of World War II in fantasy form,” and “Tolkien was a racist”. There are more down-to-earth ways to search for this kind of content.


To exalt nature and loathe machines, for example, was a subtle political response to one of the anxieties of his time. But that was not the only concern in his mind. He himself recognised that “there are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench, ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are hun-

ger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death.” (Tolkien, 2006, p.151)

Readers of this article may have reached this point with the impression that Professor Tolkien’s work is a collection of Manichaeian dichotomies: green and grey; Natural and Artificial; Trees and Machines; simple people versus powerful people; Radagast and Saruman. Another article would be necessary to explain why this is not true as a general rule, but if readers think so, they are not to be blamed. In fact, an impression of dichotomization, however false it may be, is also reflected by politics; a battlefield for the Left and the Right. With the only difference that the Evil one is always... the other one.

After all, is politics everything in Tolkien’s works? And is it a pervasive feature? Not likely. Under the light of this exposition, the word *politics* itself, derived from *polis*, “city”, would be even a contra-

diction. But the point is that if this characteristic was generalised, it would be overexploited and, as a consequence, the richness of his stories would be reduced. Therefore, it is better and more profitable to think that there are political concerns indeed, which are strewn throughout his narratives in a way that allows them to be recognised and/or interpreted as such, but also preventing the work from being merely propagandistic.

To say that Tolkien was an environmentalist, or an activist (a word laden with political implications), or a “tree-hugger” is preposterous to anyone more or less familiarised with his life. On the other hand, it would be even less acceptable to think that he must be regarded as a “*détaché-entertainer*”, someone who wrote exclusively to delight the general public, a stranger in his own world and to his own time. 

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# The Demystification of the Figure of Genius and Sexist Stereotypes of Dominant Society in the movie *Deconstructing Harry* by Woody Allen

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**Abstract:** The movie *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) by Woody Allen unveils the myth of the Genius, a person apart from society with “natural” fantastic abilities which could be represented by the writer Harry Block, the main movie character. However, the “natural ability” for fiction from Harry comes from his stories lived with his ex-wives retold with different names and places in his books, so the Harry geniality is wrong. Implicitly, the movie shows how the concept of geniality from the dominant culture might be misleading. Also, the movie shows a plenty of cultural stereotypes about women, they are “turned to aggressive behavior”, they do harm towards men according to the perspective from the main male characters or they are merely a commodity to be consumed by them since the protagonist wastes his money with hookers, showing how women are objects to be manipulated by the hegemonic paternalistic society seen until today.

**Keywords:** Woody Allen, Capitalism, Patriarchy, Geniality, Romanticism

The movie *Deconstructing Harry* begins with a scene of woman leaving a taxi car desperately, which repeats several times along with the classical opening credits of Woody Allen movies, showing a black background and white letters.

Also, they are accompanied by music, precisely a song called *Twisted* performed by Annie Ross.

However, the song is not used as a futile accessory either increasing or manipulating an emotion on the movie spectator, a sad song to portray a deep sorrow felt by any movie character. The song is applied as a reflection element.

Who sees the movie needs to be aware if the song corroborates or not with perspective of the main narrator in the movie, seeing what is the relation between the song and the action represented.

The important issue of *Twisted* is how the song recovers the romantic myth of genius, a person apart from the society, who has something unique. She is locked on her own world creating, composing “masterpieces”, thinking about them and her apparently “madness” is a result of prejudice by those who do not understand her ideas and peculiar way of being and did not to study hard, representing the belief of capitalistic society in which the product is only a product, it exists alone, without interference, hiding the fact was done by human hands and the fabrication of these products requires oppression of dominant class upon the minorities. So a man is a man by his own, Harry did

not finish his college to become a writer and to sell his books which some stories underlies sexist stereotypes about women which will be analyzed in this essay.

Every statement of the song is a key element to comprehend the perspective of main narrator and character in the movie, Harry Block, a writer who lives a deep crisis life which affects his writing; he does not know anymore how to begin a story.

*"My annalist told me that I was right out of my head"*, this phrase is a literal mention to the mind state of Harry Block, he is a writer and the fiction world created by himself will intrude his life. He starts to talk with characters from his novels or living situations lived by his characters as in *The Actor*, a story he tells to his annalist in which the protagonist, an actor who is completely blurred physically and Harry will live the same situation.

However, as it was mentioned before, the issue of geniality as important issue of the song, it appears on these phrases:

*They say as a child I appeared a little  
bit wild  
With all my crazy ideas  
But I knew what was happening', I knew  
[I was a genius"  
"But I said "Dear doctor, I think that it's  
[you instead  
Cause I have a got a thing that's unique  
[and new  
It proves that I'll have the last laugh  
[on you  
'Cause instead of one head ...I got two*

If we connect the geniality of the song with the geniality of Harry, this union is "false". The geniality discourse is relativized through the movie. It is clear that Harry is not genius. He writes his stories inspired by his own life, there are autobiographical elements which are very notable on his fiction. The woman that appears in the first scenes is Lucy, his ex-lover and sister of his last and ex-wife Jane.

After the opening credits, we have scenes of betrayal by Leslie and Ken, both are married, and the latter is married with her sister. Then, will be known that these scenes are filmed scenes from Harry's novel were really inspired on his betrayal of Jane with Lucy. Nevertheless, the story is not well disguised, even the name of the characters. Harry just changed the name of Jane to Janet. Thus, Lucy recognizes everything on his story, she is furious and there are scenes in the Harry's apartment where she tries to kill him, because Jane discovered though the book, the betrayal of her sister and Lucy is abandoned by her husband.

Her dialogue with Harry is important. As Lucy says

How could you write that book? Are you so selfish...you don't give a shit who you destroy? "Everyone's misery, you even cause misery... and use your alchemy to turn it to gold", "literary gold"

Although she is exalted, her words make sense, Harry explores what he lived, and his experiences are used to write

books and to sell them, they are worthy profit. However, they are used not to make their readers learning, reflecting their lives, though they are used to entertain them. If we remember the text of Walter Benjamin, *The narrator*. The type of narrator who tells his stories, he has something to tell, because he learned with his experiences and acquired some knowledge which is passed to those who hear them. Thus, if we look at Harry, he is not this kind of narrator.

When Lucy says *"Of, course, you made a few stupid exaggeration"*, *"Ken fondled Leslie's large breasts"*, *"You gave her large breasts"*. This indicates the Harry *modus operandi*. He modifies his real experiences in his books to be funnier, to be delighted in the common sense of what arts should only entertain their receivers. The scene of betrayal is settled inside the cottage and Leslie grandma appears, though she is blind and they talk with her while they are making sex. In real life, we know through Lucy that this scene really happened, but it was settled on her father's funeral, showing how things are "nicer" in fiction than the reality according to Harry.

When we see the characters from the filmed scenes of his novels that appear in the movie, and then compare them with the characters of "real life" from Harry, we see physical differences.

The characters from his books are more beautiful physically if we think about the hegemonic and dominant view of beauty in our society. The actresses who represent the sisters Lucy and Jane, they have nicer appearance by those who

represent the real characters. The Harry's second wife, Joan is represented by Demi Moore, an actress known by her beauty. Besides, the Joan fictional seems calmer than the real one. The same is applied with the characters that are alter-ego from Harry.

All these examples illustrate his perspective; the art is a sort of "salvation", where the world which can be manipulated through characters, plot and it is nicer than the real world. It shows his alienation from the rest of the world.

Even though he is not considered himself as a genius, the way he lives is like a genius figure, but if we see the whole movie, we see how this figure is an ideology, because everything he writes is not "unique", "new" or he had an original ideas to write.

As it was mentioned before, his fiction is inspired by situations he lived.

Besides, he believes in geniality. This can be seen in the dialogue with his young son, Hilliard. Harry congratulates his son when Hilliard wants to name his penis as "Dillinger". The writer says "Dillinger is perfect!", "Dillinger is great!", "Dillinger was a genius in his chosen profession... like Willy Sutton".

Dillinger and Willy Sutton are known as American famous gangsters and their exceptional intelligence to commit his crimes. They represent this figure of geniality, living not according to the legal laws<sup>2</sup>.

Also, when he knows that Adair University wants to honor him because of his work, even he did not finish his college. He feels pride about it. Implicitly, we

<sup>2</sup> John Dillinger.  
Disponível em:  
<[http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Dillinger](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dillinger)>.



can think that as he is a genuine artist, he did not to study to become one.

The manner Harry lives, alone and desiring that life conspires according to his wishes, makes him to live immerse on his narcissism. When he tells one of his stories, the Actor to his annalist, the end of the story is the actor's family using glasses to deal with his new way of being, since he became physically a blurring figure.

When the annalist says to him *"You expect the world to adjust... to the distortion you've become"*. He is not wrong in this affirmation. Harry became a selfish man, spending his money with hookers, because with them he does not need to conquer them, he just pays, as he says *"You don't have to discuss Proust or films"* with them.

His life is without meaningless and coherence. He compensates this with hookers and pills, showing an element of contemporary life. As says Girgus (2002):

Deconstructing Harry proposes concomitant crises in our culture of mind, morality and psyche. Allen presents a world, according to Harry Block, of incoherence, fragmentation, and distortion that defies human understanding. As Harry lives in this world, morals and values become arbitrary. (...) In the absence of coherence, belief, and certitude for Harry, forces and institutions of pornography, perversion, and power converge to define the current social and cultural condition.

To compensate their meaningless lives, the capitalistic society buys a great

deal of products which are not necessary to live with. Harry, immerse on his narcissism, he will not accept that his last girlfriend who abandoned him to flirt his friend, Larry. As he knows that he will be honored by the Adair University, he invites Fray, but the homage date is concomitant with her wedding with the "devilish" Larry.

One of his stories, when he talks about the marriage with his second wife and mother of his only child, it is clear he blames her in relation to their relationship was not successful, because her "exaggerated Jewish beliefs" and her motherhood makes them "never socialize".

Trough his stories, the problems occur not because of him. The "others" cause his problems.

Peter Bailey clarifies this idea:

The central defect of Harry's work, clearly, is the cardinal defect of his life: narcissism. Because it is so busy indicating others for what Harry believes they have done to him, his work never moves beyond the closed circle of egotism to register the reality or complexity of other lives. Therefore, his characters are caricatures expressing Harry's resentment at their models' refusals to fulfill his desires.

(BAILEY, 2001)

His egocentrism will make him to a weird road movie, with a proposal of searching meaning of life in the homage to him from a University he studied, but he did not finish the course there.

He kidnaps his son from her ex-wife; he takes the hooker Cookie and his



friend Richard who has a heart disease with him.

Through his journey, he goes to his sister house. She is strictly Jewish and he does not accept that she became a religious person as she says to him *"Because it always enraged you that I returned to my roots"*.

However, she is the character most next to understanding Harry. His absence of parameters to live and how he compensates it: *"You have no values. Your life...it's nihilism, cynicism, sarcasm and orgasm."*, *"He's betting everything on physics and pussy. He has no spiritual center"*.

In the moment that he cannot understand anymore what he lives and sees in the world and so rooted on physical experience and how he believes in this world which can be "touchable", this makes him to have "the block" of his last name in his work.

This "block" not only appears on Harry, though also in the construction of the movie. There are fast abrupt cuts from a frame scene to the other. The scene which we see Richard coming to Harry for the first time, the camera does not capture the whole action of Richard's walking towards Harry. We see Richard appearing and going to Harry, though it is not shown totally this act, we see only its half of it. Soon, we see him talking with Harry.

The movie does not have the pattern of naturalism of causality between from scene to the other which gives the impression of realism as witnessing a "real" action developing in front of us.

We see Harry talking with his characters and with his dead friend Richard who dies during their crazy journey

to the University, there are flashbacks together with filmed scenes from his books.

Other important aspect in the movie is how the characters use their intellectual apparatus superficially. Harry comments about Freud with his son *"Freud said the most important things in life... ate the work that you chose and sex"*

He left behind a plenty of issues from Freud's work, the historical context of his studies about sexuality and other important aspects are not mentioned. He justifies he likes sex because Freud said this.

He talks that *"When I was younger, it was less scary... Waiting for Lefty than it is Waiting for Godot"*, he just say this without purpose or what is the reason he says this.

Fray says to him that their relationship was like "Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle", characters from the play *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw. The play story tells about a phonetic teacher who tries to attenuate the cockney accent from the flower girl Doolittle and make her to look like as if she was a Duchess, a member of High Society. Fray just underlies the fact of teacher – student. Harry is a sort of a teacher to her and learned with him. However, the play is much more the relation between teacher and her pupil. It satirizes the rigid British Class system and talks somehow about the women's independence.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the characters show a lot of cultural stereotypes. Amazon is summarized as place with *"Malaria"* and *"Butterflies with the size of doves"* by Larry and Harry.

<sup>3</sup> *Pygmalion of Bernard Shaw.*  
Disponível em:  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion\\_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_(play))>.

The woman's position in the movie is diminished as merely commodities.

When we see the scenes of the story "Death knocks", Harvey Stern, alter-ego from Harry, he works in a shoe store and wants to betray her wife. He talks with a co-worker who advises him to pay a hooker and go to a hotel, though Harvey says that he does not have money enough. So, his friend says that Harvey needs to get a borrowed apartment from someone else and says that he knows a wonderful Japanese hooker.

All this dialogue happens in a commercial establishment, a shoe store. The place was not chosen occasionally, women are products as shoes. Even name of the hooker Cookie emphasizes this fact. She is a product to consume.

As Sam Girgus says

Figures, most especially women, function as such object-instruments (...) Whether in Harry's imagination with Leslie (Louis Dreyfus) or with the prostitute Cookie (Hazel Godman), sexuality in this film manifests elements of sadism and masochism, faceless service, domination, subservience, self-depreciation, and mechanized and routinized pleasuring, all usually at special cost do the dignity and respect for women.

(GIRGUS, 2001)

Also, there are stereotypes typical from bourgeoisie society about woman personality when Larry says to Harry "Some women are turned on by aggressive behavior", suggesting that women

like man who are aggressive, which can be considered a trace of masculinity (other stereotype).

At the end of the movie, his journey to Adair University is a disaster. His friend Richard dies, while Harry is talking with University about his works, he is arrested due to his son kidnapping.

The dialogue with the professor of Adair is interesting, because he assumes his defect; he has no traces of geniality on his work. He confesses that everything he wrote is part of his life. While he tells the story of man who has his blond girlfriend was stolen by the Devil, inspired by his story with Fray and Larry who his ex-girlfriend preferred his friend instead of him, so accusing Larry of being the "devil" who took his girlfriend from him. When this story is filmed, differently from the other Harry's stories, all the characters are acted by the same actors of "real" life from Harry. There are not traces of disguising. Harry is lived by himself as well Larry.

While Harry starts to write this story 'While Goldberg was asleep one night... the devil entered his apartment... abducted his beautiful blonde love... and took her to hell'. There is a scene of a man who is not Harry, an actor representing sleeping in the bed with the actress who plays Fray, Elizabeth Sue.

Larry and Fray visit him and pay his bail and Harry accepts their marriage, saying 'I give up'.

However, all the facts that Harry had to live, in the end of the movie he learned nothing from his last experiences.

He goes to his house and imagine that finally received his homage from the


Adair University Scholars and the characters of his stories are happy and cheer him.

So Harry says that

This, for me, is like the best dream I've had in months", "the happiest dream". So, he talks about a new story, again inspired on him: "A character that's too neurotic to function in life... but can only function in an art. Notes for a novel.

The movie ends with Harry still believing that art is the ideal place, where

he is happier than the real life. The song Twisted appears again, making the cyclic movement of movie, showing that the Harry's perspective did not change.

This happy-end, if the spectator adheres to this perspective, probably he will think that art is really "nicer than the real world", not an important element to reflect, to understand about many aspects of human life which are not either are circulated or told by the hegemonic power. 

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## The Laughable Woman

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the short story “The Laughing Man”, by J.D. Salinger, relating it to the moment of female empowerment experienced by the United States in the context of the publication of this short story. Through this analysis, we show how the author used a story that relies basically on male characters to talk about issues that concern the woman of that society.

**Keywords:** Salinger, abortion, feminism, American literature

Originally published in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1948, the short story *The Laughing Man* discusses the collective rite of passage of a group of children and the young man who takes care of them. The story is driven by an unnamed narrator who reflects on a remarkable experience in his past while looking to revisit this traumatic experience with adult eyes, trying to use what he knows at the time of the narrative to elucidate what he went through nine years before, in 1928. In this analysis, we intend to explain how social, economic and gender issues permeate a story that seems to be so simple and uncomplicated. According to our reading, this story, that apparently focuses on male characters, actually brings a powerful portrayal of the changing roles of American women from that time and their process of untying the home environment that brought consequences for both family and society organization.

During his childhood, the narrator of *The Laughing Man* belonged to a group of 25 children who were taken care of during the afternoons, Saturdays and most national holidays by a young college student who functioned as a kind of babysitter or “full year camp monitor”. Hiring his services shows beforehand that these are presumably middle class children with busy parents. The fact that the kids have a “nanny” during the holidays gives the impression that they are slightly neglected by their families. The amount of kids — 25 for only one adult — and the young age of the caregiver reinforce the idea of the parents’ lack of heed.

The group environment that is present in the story is essentially masculine not only because it is composed of boys but also because any sign of femininity and family is refuted. The physical plays and displays of aggression are often punctuated by the narrator. Early in the story, the narrator explains that when the group is in the mood for sports they prefer to go to a place where the fields are large and the “opposing team does not include a pram”: “If we had straight athletics on our minds, we went to Van Cortlandt, where the playing fields were regulation size and where the opposing team did not include a baby carriage or an irate old lady with a cane” [page 57]. This subtle comment presented as one of the narrator’s many rhetoric jokes, is decisive in our interpretation of the story:

John Gedsudski, the “monitor”, is the central figure of the story. While the other boys in the group are vaguely and sparsely described, giving the idea that they work rather as a cohesive group than as individual characters, “the Chief”, the leader of the Comanches — as the group calls itself — is thoroughly studied by the narrator. His job is to get the boys at 3 pm at school with his van and take them to Central Park to play football, baseball or whatever ball they want for the day. On rainy days, they go to the Natural History Museum or to the Metropolitan.

John lives in Staten Island — which means that he lives in a less privileged area than the boys, who live in Manhattan — and combines his “nanny” activities with his role as a law student at the New York University [NYU]. He was also a baseball “star”, something that may have facilitated his entry into a private university. As far as his physical appearance is concerned, the Chief is far from being the best looking guy that ever walked the Earth — he is short, stocky and has a broad nose — but in the eyes of the boys he looked like a heartthrob, like a movie star. The general picture is that of a young man in financial trading and with an exhausting workload that includes Saturdays and holidays.

The plot of *The Laughing Man* drags on for months and takes the reader to a tour around New York as if they were aboard the van in which the characters wander. By remembering these childhood tours, the narrator aims to unmask a pivotal moment that marked his passage to maturity. This narrator, however, does not

have access to the thoughts of the protagonist and is unable to give meaning to his actions. In this aspect, he resembles other narrators that appear in Salinger’s work, such as the one from *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, who also refuses to explain the meaning of the most decisive actions of the protagonist.

It is worth noting that this is a short story that explicitly presupposes the existence of a reader and enters into dialogue with this presupposed audience, an artifice explored by Salinger in other works. The narrator not only speaks to the reader, he also makes it clear who leads this narrative by saying: “I’m not saying I will, but I could go on for hours escorting the reader — forcibly, if necessary — back and forth across the Paris-Chinese border.” [page 61]

As the narrator explains his power as a storyteller by stating that he could be “escorting the reader forcibly, if necessary” [page 61], John Gedsudski also wields power over the group of children through creating a mythology that indirectly enhances his own figure. Of all the many skills of the “Chief”, storytelling was the most valued by the narrator. In the late afternoon, when it got too dark to play, the boys went to the bus and vied for the best places to hear The Laughing Man’s adventures narrated by John. The story of the “Laughing Man” runs parallel to the one of the boys and their caregiver. It means that the narrative of the short story works in layers: in the foreground we have an adult who remembers facts from his childhood. In the background we have the story of John Gedsudski and his boys

walking around the town. In addition to this, we have the story of *The Laughing Man*, who works at the same time as a strategy that the caregiver developed to entertain the children and as a way to improve his self-esteem by projecting a more attractive image of himself to the kids.

According to the narrator, the tale of *The Laughing Man* was tailor-made for the Comanches and combines the features of a classic. The story has traces of famous legends such as *The Phantom of the Opera*. The only son of a wealthy missionary couple, the protagonist is kidnapped in infancy by Chinese bandits. His parents decide not to pay the ransom for “religious conviction” [page 58], so the bad guys decide to torture the child to deform him and let the boy live with them, always wearing a mask made of poppy, so that he will not scare them with his monstrous face. The Laughing Man learns the bandit’s secret techniques and excels them, turning himself into the biggest crook in the region. The bad guys became jealous of his fame and decide to kill him while he sleeps wrapped in a sheet, but they end up killing the mother of the leader of the pack by mistake instead. To protect himself — not from death, but from hassle — the Laughing Man is obliged to lock the bad guys in a mausoleum. Then, “our” hero follows committing crimes and crossing several times the “border” between China and Paris. The Laughing Man becomes the richest man in the world, but gives everything for monks and lives in a hut with four friends — a wolf, a dwarf, a giant Mongolian and an Eurasian girl who is in love with him, but he does not correspond

to this affection. His greatest enemy is a French detective and her daughter, a girl who is kind of pretty, but who looks “like a transvestite” [page 60].

Until this point we can notice an insistent — though subtle — work of issues related to family and femininity. It appears in the French girl who looks like a transvestite, in the orphanage of the Laughing Man, which conflates with the boys’ condition of certain parental abandonment, in the stroller that hinders the fun in the park, on the death of the mother of the leader of the pack — and will be even more explicit hereafter.

The boys embrace the history of Laughter as a personal mythology. Each of them imagines themselves as a direct descendant of the character, not as the child of their real life parents. Family life and boyish everyday activities are just a scam to protect their identity as legendary bandits:

I was not even my parents’ son in 1928 but a devilishly smooth impostor, awaiting their slightest blunder as an excuse to move in — preferably without violence, but not necessarily — to assert my true identity. As a precaution against breaking my bogus mother’s heart, I planned to take her into my underworld employ in some undefined but appropriately regal capacity. But the main thing I had to do in 1928 was watch my step. Play along with the farce. Brush my teeth. Comb my hair. At all costs, stifle my natural hideous laughter.

(PP. 61 – 62)

The driving force that stops the collective farce of the Comanches is a woman. One day, the narrator enters the van and observes a strange picture of a girl near the driver's seat: 'It seemed to me that a girl's picture clashed with the general men-only decor of the bus, and I bluntly asked the Chief who she was. He hedged at first, but finally admitted that she was a girl'. (p. 62)

The entry of a female element in the scene is not very well received. John is challenged to explain who the girl is and what she is doing there. She is Mary Hudson, we learn, a former student of Wellesley College. The Chief does not tell us what she does for a living or what the status of his relationship with the owner of the photograph is, but he emphasizes that the university she attended is a school for rich people, everything that John himself does not seem to be. In fact, the Wellesley College is a school for rich girls: it is a member of the "Seven Sisters Colleges", a collective of American universities aimed solely at women and intended as a "female Ivy League" at a time — as late as 1960 — when many Ivy League universities did not accept women. "Ivy League" is a group of eight private and traditional universities of northeastern United States associated with high-quality in both sports and academia, but also with an elitist and conservative spirit. The term Ivy League came into use in 1954, and, therefore, after the publication of this short story, in 1949. Until the 1960s, many of the Ivy League universities accepted only men in their undergraduate courses. The last college to receive women

was Columbia, in 1983. The Seven Sisters worked as a female parallel of these elite universities, with broad social (and marriage) flow among their students. The university attended by the protagonist, NYU, does not belong to this group.

John justifies the presence of the photo giving the impression it was imposed to him: "(...) the picture had more or less been planted on him." [page 63]. The word used in the story is "planted", a meaningful lexical choice to this analysis: This word is also used in the old metaphor of the seed planted in the belly of the woman to bear a child. Whether it was planted or not, the picture remains intact in the following weeks, it is not swept out of the bus along with the candy wrappers and other traces of children presence, but the boys are oblivious from that unpleasant image and go on with their lives and their farces: "During the next couple of weeks, the picture — however forcibly or accidentally it had been planted on the Chief — was not removed from the bus. It didn't go out with the Baby Ruth wrappers and the fallen licorice whips.

(p. 63)

At one point, the owner of the picture appears. She knocks on the bus' door interrupting the narration of another chapter of "The Laughing Man", all dressed in a fur coat: she arrives interrupting the collective farce, the story that has given group identity to those little men. Woodland animals were the first friends that the Laughing Man had



in his life. Now, a woman in a fur coat enters his bus. Mary Hudson is astonishing beautiful. Throughout the narrator's life, he only meets three women who were irreproachably beautiful. The first was Mary Hudson. The second, a girl in black swimsuit that he saw struggling to put down her orange tent on the beach, when he was already an adult. The last, a girl aboard of a ship tour who threw her cigarette lighter on purpose (the Laughing Man would not approve this last one). Despite the strength of the group, which considers her to be a girl who "does not know when to go home" (p. 64), Mary is incorporated into the Comanches and plays baseball with them a few times a week. Their friendliness and the fact that she does not play as badly as they expect helps in her acceptance.

One day, the van of the Comanches stops at the Fifth Avenue to wait for Mary Hudson, but she does not come. Feeling angry, the Chief goes away and takes the kids to the park. In the middle of the game, the narrator realizes that Mary Jane is there, watching the game from a seat between two nannies with strollers. This is the time when baby strollers definitely makes the opposing team. The narrator tells John about the presence of the girl. He goes over to talk to her. The couple apparently fight. The Chief returns to the field. Mary changes place and go to a bank reserved for players. The narrator goes to her and invites her to join the team. She refuses. Then he invites her to have dinner at his house one day and says that the Chief always goes there. She emphatically refuses and asks to be left alone. Mary

Hudson is a girl who does not know when to go home. Just like the beautiful girl in a bathing suit that the narrator would meet years later, she has trouble nailing her tent on the beach. The narrator is appalled by the refusal and stumbles on a third stroller. The game ends and the couple does not reconcile. Mary Hudson goes away running and crying and Chief goes back to the bus with his team.


The narrator does not know what happened between them, even today, when he is already an adult, he just has an "intuition" about what could have happened: "I had no idea what was going on between the Chief and Mary Hudson (and still haven't, in any but a fairly low, intuitive sense), but nonetheless, I couldn't have been more certain that Mary Hudson had permanently dropped out of the Comanche lineup". (p. 70). This intuition is not shared with the reader. The narrator doesn't even try to assign meaning to the attitude of the protagonist, which seems suspicious, since the very purpose in telling the story was to use his adult gaze to understand an episode of childhood. Instead, the narrator refuses to make any kind of analysis, to raise any hypothesis of explanation for the breakup between John and Mary. From our point of view, the narrator of *The Laughing Man* can, therefore, be classified as unreliable due to this retraction over the central event of the narrative.

Back at the bus, John brings a tragic end to the story of the Laughing Man for the terror of the boys. The hero dies on the hands of the detective and his "transvestite" daughter. The evildoers also die, but not before giving out the Laughing

Man's best friend. It means that the character does not only dies, but he dies in a useless an antiheroic way, unable to give protection to his friends. The tragedy is complete and thoroughly descriptive. When the story gets to its final point, the youngest of the Comanches hiccups from crying. The narrator recalls that his knees were shaking. He is left home in shock, where he receives a bureaucratic treatment from his parents. 'I arrived home with my teeth chattering uncontrollably and was told to go right straight to bed'. (p. 73) In the first version of the story, published in the *New Yorker* magazine, this passage was slightly different: 'I arrived home with my teeth chattering uncontrollably and had to be put to bed'.

This version excludes any possibility of physical contact between parent and child. The narrator is now a completely orphan since John gives up to protect the Comanches and surrender them to the hardness of life. What happened between the couple, which probably motivated the tragic end of the Laughing Man, is left open. One possible interpretation that has already been raised by several

critical is that Mary Hudson has an abortion. Frustrated by failing to protect his own son, John quit playing the father of his 25 Comanches. Maybe things do not need be that radical: the couple might have just decided to put an end to the relationship when it became clear to both that Mary Hudson did not know "when to go home": she did not know how to fulfill her "female role". She was displaced, had problems in exercising her femininity as well as the other women who appear in the plot: the daughter of the detective who looks like a transvestite, the mothers of the Comanches with their eloquent absence, the girl who couldn't down her tent on the beach.

Although the end of history is left quite open, the approach to the issue of women and their new roles in American society of the time is made clear in this short story and Salinger —an author who is usually and quite unfairly taken as cloistered in his own subjectivity and oblivious to social issues —, disclose a quite interesting artistic treatment of these new female roles in a story that on the surface appears to be dominated by men. 

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# Luiz Ruffato and Aluísio Azevedo: A socio-comparison between *Um Outro* *Mundo* and *O Cortiço*

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the novel *O Cortiço* (1890), by Aluísio Azevedo in comparison to the “short story” *Um outro mundo*, from the novel *O Mundo Inimigo* (2005), by Luiz Ruffato. The objective here is to compare the socio-political aspects from both works through Claudio Guillén’s supranational model of comparative literature and detect how this historical background influences the content and form of these sample Brazilian literature. The supranational model of comparative literature, from Guillén, claims that a comparison can occur when the social-economic aspects is similar to the literary works compared. I approximate the end of the nineteenth century with the 1960s and 1970s during the twentieth century, in terms of socio-economic characteristics, to show how those local and particular characteristics of our history influenced the literary work of Azevedo and Ruffato, in concern with the novels already mentioned.

**Keywords:** Brazilian Literature, Comparative Literature, Socio-Economic aims, Aluísio Azevedo, Luiz Ruffato.

## Introduction

As a common knowledge, *O Cortiço* (1890) has been studied as a naturalistic novel from the second part of the nineteenth century in Brazil. It narrates the tenement’s development – which is the main character – through the social rise of João Romão and his exploitation of Bertoleza as slave. They thus become the parents of the main character – a building – and the tenement represents metaphorically Brazil with a huge variety of characters. What I claim here is that this novel, before being considered a naturalistic work of literature, is a representation of the social-political moment in our particular history; Azevedo’s writings originates from a local preoccupation with our politics, not only a aesthetic one.

The scientific ideas/philosophies in this novel came from the social practices from a generation of political agents. It was since 1890 that this “intellectual” generation, socially heterogenous, carried forward their political actions against the Brazilian imperial *status quo* (Alonso, 2002). According to the sociologist Angela Alonso (2002) these actions was shown in the form and in the act of write and it was made by politics and intellectuals as well. That’s why the author does not overlap culture and politics,

but she identifies the social practices of the politics/intellectuals agents and prioritizes these practices rather than the analysis from the ideas plan. Then she comes to the conclusion that politics and intellectual activity cannot be separated from each other.

I also share some of Antonio Candido's ideas in his article "*De Cortiço a Cortiço*" to this analyses. Antonio Candido (2004) claims that *O Cortiço* is a primary text, in the way that it tries to reproduce and interpret the Brazilian society, and a second text, because of the direct influence from Émile Zola's *L'Assomoir*. In this sense, at the same time the novel reproduces the Brazilian reality, it makes it with the form of the French literary novel (Candido, 2004). Therefore, this Brazilian novel creates a hybridism that reveals a compositional style between the European Naturalism movement and the Romantics movement of José de Alencar. As a result, the novel becomes more thematic, in comparison to the French: because it makes the relation between who exploits and who is exploited coexist together, as it does to the Brazilian nature with the capital accumulation process as well (Candido, 2004).

Ruffato's novel makes part of a literary project from the author that intends to show the Brazilian industrial history from the urban proletarian point of view. The project, named as *Inferno Provisório* (2005-2011), with five volumes, begins to narrate since the 1950s to the present the social and personal history of our urban working class. The second volume of the series, *O Mundo Inimigo* (2005) is totally situated between the 1960s and 1970s. It is

in this novel that we find "*Um outro mundo*", an excerpt that will be analyzed and compared with *O Cortiço*.

In "*Um outro mundo*", differently from the narrative linearity of *O Cortiço*, the story combines two temporal dimensions – present and past – without a clear separation in the life of the main character, and also, in a way, the narrator, Zé Pinto. He reports to us his glorious past, nostalgically: how he has been consolidated as a capitalist, owner of rent house, how he has been forsaking friendships and passions – like his passion for gambling and his love for Valdira – and how he is now in his old-age. It would be as João Romão's story could continue until his getting old, after his social climbing.

As follows, after having situated the novels, this study proposes a comparative analysis between these Azevedo and Ruffato's works, already mentioned, through the theoretical assumption from the Spanish comparator Claudio Guillén (2005), who developed three models of literary comparison. It will be used here the model b.

According to Guillén's supranational model b of literary comparison, we can compare two or more literary works when the socioeconomic process and development is common for them (Guillén, 2005). The historic component becomes relevant in this theoretical approach, therefore the consciousness between literary and social aspects is a theoretical premise, and the analysis should combine both socioeconomic and compositional aspects of the narrative.

When Azevedo and Ruffato's literary works are compared and, as an

extension, the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in a first moment it is possible to assess the dissonance of the compositional narrative techniques. As a consequence, an approximation becomes possible to the way that both authors treat a common theme: the logic of capital accumulation and social ascension in Brazilian capitalism economy. Different moments of our capitalism are treated through the histories of João Romão and Zé Pinto. Thus Zé Pinto's past is connected with João Romão at the end of Azevedo's novel; between the last decades of nineteenth century and twentieth century there is a socio-historical approximation in which permitted that the socio ascension becomes equal to the characters. Basically the difference between both texts, besides the esthetics elements, is that in Ruffato's work is narrated the moment before this social ascension and in Azevedo's novel the narrative ends with João Romão in his higher acquisitive power.

Those decades, 1960s and 1970s, carry an economic development called Brazilian "economic miracle". In the end of nineteen century the Brazilian agrarian sector was the most relevant to the country, with the service sector starting to grow by the first capitalists, like João Romão and in the 1960s and 1970s the Brazilian industrial potential starts to develop, meanly the automobilist one (Fausto, 2010). Those facts changed the way of life and acquisitive power of the population.

In those contexts the two narratives are developed, justifying a comparison between them.

## ***O Cortiço*: brief considerations**

As a photograph that reveals a reality fragmentation picture, even passing through the subjectivity of the photographer, Aluísio Azevedo's literature also exhibits the external Brazilian reality with his personal intellectual ideas. Those ideas were a result from the European exportation thought with the confrontation with the Brazilian nineteenth century reality. Then his aesthetics expressions were published in journals of religious and slavers critics, pre-determining a posture that is called by Angela Alonso "Positivists Abolitionists" (2002). His most famous novel, *O Cortiço* (1980) is an example of how he re-signifies European ideas with our social reality.

The novel takes place Rio de Janeiro City, in a time when the urbanization process favors this kind of residence. Through the narrative of João Romão's enrichment and development of the tenement, from three little houses to João Romão Avenue, the narrator advise us that this construction, besides João Romão rent money from Bertoleza and work together with her, he also steals, "graças à circunstância de que nesse tempo a polícia não se mostrava muito por aquelas alturas" (Azevedo, 2011 p.18). It was, then, from the political-economical model from Brazil nineteenth century that made possible this kind of ascension: through a negligent politic who permitted steals and slavery, with a private sacrifices because of the particular desire to become rich, the novel traces an economic trajectory of a capitalist. The focus is how the

process of accumulation of financial resources and capital works and what kind of result this economic system provides to the oppressed, like the slave Bertoleza, who takes her own life at the end of the book after she finds out that João Romão would to give her back to her “owners”.

The narrative begins with a presentation of the main character: “João foi, dos 13 aos 25 anos, empregado de um vendeiro que enriqueceu entre as quatro paredes de uma suja e obscura taverna nos refolhos do bairro Botafogo [...]” (*idem*, p.14). Since the beginning the Picture takes from the character’s life only covers the economic aspects. It does not matter his subjectivity, his past, what matters are the years that he began the process of accumulation that, here in this case, it was passed from João Romão’s boss to himself as a cycle: an unscrupulous accumulation cycle:

Desde que a febre de possuir se apoderou dele totalmente, *todos os seus atos, todos, fosse o mais simples, visavam um interesse pecuniário*. Só tinha uma preocupação: aumentar os bens [...] Aquilo já não era ambição, era uma moléstia nervosa, uma loucura, um desespero de acumular, de *reduzir tudo a moeda*.

(*IDEM*, p.26, 27)

This part of the novel reveals a naturalistic description of a character; the desire to become rich that influences all his actions, like a pathologic disease.

Another character that represents the desire to become socially important is the Portuguese Miranda. His desires to have a noble title, and decide to buy a title of Baron a common practice on that time:

Foi da superação fétida destas ideias que se formou no coração vazio do Miranda um novo ideal – o título. *Faltando-lhe temperamento próprio para os vícios fortes que enchem a vida de um homem; sem família a quem possa amar e sem imaginação para poder gozar com as prostitutas [...]* desde então principiou a sonhar com um baronato, fazendo disso o objeto querido de sua existência, *muito satisfeito no íntimo por ter afinal descoberto uma coisa em que podia empregar dinheiro, sem ter, nunca mais, de restituí-lo à mulher, nem ter de deixá-lo a pessoa alguma*

(*IDEM*, p. 32 – 33).

The first part in italics reveals the motives that the character wants a noble title: without vicious, without love and imagination, what remains for him is the selfish desire to have a name and show it to the society. It also shows a personality who lives in accordance to what the others think through the worship for to money and social convention.

The character of “*Um outro mundo*” is going to display this same behavior of João Romão and Miranda. Centuries after this previous novel the same Brazilian issues would be problematized by Luiz Ruffato.

### Aspects from the “*Um outro mundo*” and possible approximations with *O Cortiço*

*Um outro mundo*, like *O Cortiço*, contains a narrative procedure that has the process of accumulation. Through



this process it tells the story of a character that is making a revision from his past. Hence present and past are conjugated as the same way that the narratives voices are condensates.

In the begging of the narrative a third person narrator describes Zé Pinto being awaken by a life never stop, opposing his stagnation situation. There is a description of a man of seventy years old. This description takes the mental voice of the character, although there is no dialogue or speaking from Zé Pinto, the only one who speaks is the housemaid twice. So after the housemaid says a robotic “good morning”, Zé Pinto thinks:

Às vezes acreditava que Deus o escolhera para semente. Já passara muito dos setenta anos, o mundo dera tantas voltas! e ele ali, firme, rijo, as juntas doíam de quando em quando, mais no inverno, mas era uma bobiça à-toa, a saúde de ferro [...] e o pinto, esse! não podia ver uma bunda que já ia despertando, enxerido (p.173).

The enunciation “o mundo dera tantas voltas e ele ali, firme, rijo”, contains the antitheses of world that continues to develop and a life that is stagnated. There is no action in the present because the presence of this character is to remember the past between his movements of prosaic life. The *I* and the *world* are problematize, like the temporal dimension. It also appears here a latent sexual desire. As we read it we know that Zé Pinto married a Portuguese woman to have “a name”, because he believes that a man is the name he has. But he renounced his passion to the black Valdira to have a social position,

like Miranda and João Romão’s desires. But different from them, here the old man is alone in the end of his life, finding in the pornographic videos his lost passion.

Some movements of the prosaic life, as the kitchen noise made by his housemaid washing the dishes and making his food, as well she speaks from the housemaid, put the short story into the present of the narrative. Thus the narrative has a pendulum image, going to the present and to the past temporal dimensions.

Zé Pinto’s past is narrated as something positive to him but that he does not have anymore. All his life meant the effort to accumulation things and has “a name”, like João Romão. When he tells us his story he clearly assumes what kind of paper his wife, Maria, developed in his needs:

Ela debruçada em cima da máquina-de-costura, as pernas inchadas de tocar pedal, para ajuntar uns trocados e comprar um metro de areia, uma carroça de tijolo, um saco de cimento [...] E ele na labuta, pedreiro sem ser, suspendendo pouco a pouco o prumo de cada parede-e-meia; puxando luz, cômodo por cômodo, sem eletricista ser

(p. 174).

This excerpt is very similar to the beginning of *O Cortiço*: like the slave Bertoleza, Maria helped her husband to become rich, making an enormous effort (“pernas inchadas”) to reach such financial status. Maria can be compared with Bertoleza, they are both only a path that men use to get where they dream to. Also, when Mary is on the verge of death, Zé



Pinto, opportunistically, asks her to sign a document that transfers her material possessions to his name. This passage compares the story with the last chapter of the tenement, in which João Romão while delivering Bertoleza again to slavery and sees committing suicide because of that, get a group of abolitionists in his office, bringing a degree of socio-worthy. Thus, we note that the relations between both Ruffato's character from Azevedo's ones, are permeated by the interest in increasing social position.

The material issue is so important to Zé Pinto that he is described in the story by the things his possess: "Quem ainda se lembra de Zé Pinto? O primeiro na rua a ter geladeira, quando ninguém nem sonhava com isso. A ter televisão [...], a ter telefone [...] a ter fogão-a-gás. Mas para conquistar esses confortos todos, haja tino! E tutano" (*idem*, p.181). Thus, Zé Pinto is what he has, he constructs himself to the other in a relationship of these possessions. However, this relationship changes when the other also has access to such possessions, which occurred between the 1960s and in 1970s.

Zé Pinto accumulated their capital working hard with his wife as João, lending at interest, and also, mortgaging. However, with the government policy of granting credit, and with the advent of industrialization, the population increased their purchasing power and could buy the items that Zé Pinto got first. As follows, the social function of the character is lost. And to recall his past, it seeks to understand that your loss utilitarian for others, like an old object. Accordingly, such a character

moves away from João Romão, because he contains a greater complexity. Zé Pinto is not only the man who wanted to get rich; he lost his humanity for that and at the end of his life, he noticed it. He had other desires, as passion for Valdira, which when does not hold up to bring the feeling of frustration for him. After all, the other is seen to such a character as a springboard for social climb or a cliff that provides financial plummeting. Maria is linked to the first example, the mulatta Valdira to the second. Their tenants are in the middle: they can either help him with the rent money, and overthrow him with friendship and compassion that he could nurture.

Valdira can be compared to Rita Baiana, as João Romão to Zé Pinto: but differently from *O Cortiço's* characters, who were overwhelmed by the place they lived in (Brazil), Zé Pinto stands firmly by his capitalist ideals. This also makes it back to his past, questioning it. Just like in the beginning of the story it is said, "All stores are remorseful", by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Zé Pinto's one also makes the character have any sense of guilt and distress in relation to whoever lived, which can be verified only in the fact to revisit his past.

Levanta-se, madrugada alta, coloca uma fita pornográfica no videocassete e deixa-a rodar, rodar, até que a manhã, com seus barulhos, o surpreenda e a vida volte a girar, sem amigos, compadres, parceiros, nem ninguém para lhe fechar os olhos na hora em que a indesejada encostar-se ao batente da porta para anunciar o fim

(p. 186).

In the end the story comes full circle. Thus the capital accumulation relates to the lack of human relations and experience. All those lost experiences are re-affirmed, but it is too late.

All the present analysis had the Claudio Guillén's supranational b model. It was possible to notice that although with different time of history the so-

cio-historical relations gave the same characteristics to the literary works. When we look at our economic history through the social and economic ascension of the characters João Romão and Zé Pinto, in different moments of our capitalism, the works question the ways and the politics that made those ascensions possible. ♫

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# Creative work

## Simply Forgiven

MARCELA PRADO SIQUEIRA<sup>1</sup>

What is forgiveness?  
A murder of what I cannot forget?

If I were as innocent as a kid  
Wouldn't I see beauty in the world and  
[forgive?

If I were as pure as an angel  
Wouldn't I see the truth in the words and  
[forget?

If I were as simple as breathing  
Wouldn't I feel warmth and peace and  
[forgive?

If I were as natural as tasting  
Wouldn't I feel flavors of joy and forget?

Now I know what forgiveness means  
It is as eternal as dying  
A part of me that forgets and dies to  
[forgive.

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## Compromisso

WANDERLEY CORINO NUNES FILHO <sup>1</sup>

Úrsula acelerou o passo para pegar o ônibus que estava parado metros adiante. Não fosse o peso excessivo de sua mochila repleta de livros, teria corrido. Não corra, perdera o ônibus e teria de aguardar por no mínimo 20 minutos pela próxima condução. Lei de Murphy, pensou. Essas merdas só acontecem comigo! Decidida a não desperdiçar tempo, resolveu comprar algo para comer e entrou na padaria. Dez mini pães de queijo e um sonho, por favor. Pagou pelo pedido e enquanto retornava ao ponto, engoliu rapidamente o desjejum antes que viesse o próximo ônibus. Úrsula indagava-se há quanto tempo não fazia uma refeição sem pressa. No pain, no gain, concluiu enquanto chupava o resquício de doce de leite sobre os dedos.

Passados alguns minutos, percebeu que as pessoas no ponto moviam-se ansiosamente; sinal de que o ônibus estava chegando. Ao que o veículo estacionou, Úrsula tomou a dianteira da multidão, disposta a conseguir um assento. Rodou a catraca, avistou um lugar vago e sentou. Pelo menos vou conseguir estudar tranquilamente antes do seminário. Lido o primeiro parágrafo, Úrsula percebeu que não conseguia se concentrar. Talvez fosse a conversa de duas senhoras à esquerda que estava atrapalhando. Talvez fosse o barulho irritante de um casal que estava se beijando logo atrás. Talvez fosse alguém que estava a ouvir música no celular sem o fone. Abandonou a leitura.

Sabia que era inútil estudar minutos antes da avaliação. Sua idiota! – murmurou – Você sempre deixa tudo pra última hora.

Enfiou uma edição surrada de um livro dentro da mochila. Havia adquirido-o em um sebo por mais da metade do preço. Mais do que pagar um preço acessível, lhe atraía a ideia de possuir um objeto que já pertencera à outra pessoa, ainda mais a um desconhecido. Por quantas mãos haveria o livro passado? Por que o dono anterior teria se desfeito dele? Teria achado-o ruim? Ou será que o dono falecera e a família resolveu desfazer-se dos pertences? Adorava se prender a esses detalhes mínimos e valorizava ainda mais o livro se houvesse inscrito o nome do antigo proprietário. Era como se possuísse não somente o objeto, mas a pessoa em questão. Podia controlar a história, o passado, mesmo que numa brevidade temporal. Mais além, havia uma espécie de empatia por livros rotos. Remendos feitos grosseiramente com fita adesiva eram cicatrizes, provas de como o livro havia lutado bravamente para sobreviver. Quem olhasse para Úrsula apenas com a visão não poderia enxergá-la. Viver, para Úrsula, era sinônimo de sobreviver.

O toque do celular avisou o recebimento de uma mensagem de texto. Vou me atrasar. Perdi a hora. Fala pra psôra que vou me atrasar, belê? Bjos,

Miriam. Oh, great! – pensou Úrsula – Pelo menos não vou passar carão sozinha.

Cerca de meia hora depois, Úrsula percebeu que estava perto de sua parada e então dirigiu-se à porta. Deu sinal, desceu e caminhou sem pressa alguma pelos cinco quarteirões que a separavam da faculdade. Um peido não é nada pra quem já tá cagada, murmurou. Odiava ficar sua da sempre que corria. Achou conveniente aguardar Miriam na entrada do prédio para entrarem juntas na sala de aula. Não demorou muito para divisar a desgredinhada cabeleira da amiga. O volume dos cachos denunciava que a garota também saíra às pressas.

— Eaê Mi! E essa juba que nem viu pente hoje? Já não tá na hora de ir tosar, não?

— Ah, meu cu pra você! Que que cê tá fazendo aqui fora? Não me diga que a vaca da professora faltou e eu desloquei minha beleza até aqui pra nada?

— Eu me atrasei também, tava esperando você pra subirmos juntas.

- Ai, como você é romântica! Olha que assim você reforça a fofoca de que somos fanchas...

— Me dá um beijinho, amore! — disse Úrsula fazendo biquinho.

— Como você consegue manter esse bom humor antes do seminário? Eu tô cagando tijolos...

— Tô tão nervosa quanto você, benê. Não li nem metade do livro. É só a gente usar a estratégia de sempre: faz carão de eu-sei-o-que-estou-falando e repete tudo o que a professora falou em aula. Basta dizer o que ela gosta de ouvir e a gente garante nossa média. — Ao dizer isso, Úrsula sentiu uma pontada de remorso, porém não o deixou transpare-

cê-la. Sabia o que cada pessoa gostava de ouvir. Tinha necessidade de ter a atenção das pessoas — mesmo que isso significasse não expor o que realmente pensasse.

— Então vâmo logo acabar com essa porra — sugeriu Miriam. Tenho coisas mais importantes pra fazer depois.

— Como o quê? Curso de origami?

Gargalhadas explodiam da boca de Miriam. Seu riso era marcado por soluços compulsivos, o que a deixava corada, sem ar. Com o peito ainda arfando, disse:

— Deixa a Cris ouvir você dizendo isso! Aliás, como é que você se tornou tão venenosa? Vocês eram amigas, não eram?

— C'mon! You're my fucking best teacher. Digamos que se estivéssemos em "Garotas Malvadas", você seria a Rachel McAdams e eu, a Lindsay Lohan.

— Por que você tem que ser a mais gostosa?

— E depois você pergunta de onde vem a nossa fama de sapatas.

As duas subiram um lance de escadas e em seguida entraram na sala que restava num profundo silêncio. Apenas uma voz masculina levemente nasalada ecoava pelo ambiente. Sentaram-se então perto da porta. Adquiriram esse costume no decorrer do semestre, pois facilitava a fuga depois de terem assinado a lista de presença.

Logo que o rapaz terminou sua fala, a professora disse em tom monótono e desafiador:

— Quem serão os próximos?

Úrsula levantou o braço. Esse ato fez Miriam suar frio.

— Cê tá louca? Vâmo por último — cochichou.

— Eu sou ansiosa demais. Se eu esperar, tenho um troço.

As duas amigas se dirigiram à parte frontal da sala. Era visível o nervosismo de Miriam. Sua mania de enrolar as pontas do cabelo com os dedos estava acentuada por suas mãos trêmulas. Úrsula olhava para um ponto fixo no fundo da sala quando começou a apresentação. Falava com uma confiança quase convincente, sem pausas, quase sem respirar. Abruptamente passou a palavra pra Miriam, que não conseguiu evitar uma expressão cômica de terror, como se houvessem jogado uma granada sem o pino em suas mãos. Miriam sempre fora mais indisciplinada no quesito estudos que Úrsula. Não raramente dependia da solidariedade da amiga para livrá-la dos sufocos acadêmicos. No entanto, naquele momento estava desamparada: tinha de falar por si. Começou a falar em voz baixa um discurso mecânico, decorado. Foi quando veio a intervenção da professora:

— Fale mais alto. Ninguém lhe ouve.

Miriam não suportava críticas. Não que fosse arrogante ao máximo. Havia, na verdade, um quê de incapacidade: não conseguia encontrar solução frente a um problema. Úrsula achava que a amiga era mimada demais pelos pais, o que resultava numa preguiça sem medidas. Conforto é para os fracos — pensou.

Miriam retomou a fala visivelmente abalada. Sua voz soou exageradamente mais alta, evidenciando uma gagueira nervosa. Pulou trechos importantes, confundiu termos específicos e concluiu apressadamente.

Enquanto retornavam aos seus assentos, a professora fazia anotações em seu caderno sobre a última apresentação. Sua boca desenhava um traço que indicava uma severidade. Aos olhos de Úrsula, aquilo significava uma coisa apenas: estou na lista negra.

Miriam afundou-se na carteira e pôs-se a mexer compulsivamente em seu celular. Úrsula lembrou-se de como tempos atrás costumava recriminar mentalmente a amiga pelo vício em redes sociais virtuais: “Qual o sentido de ficar online até as tantas? Ficar postando citações que se dizem ser da Clarice Lispector, isso sim é cult, hein? Pra mim isso cheira a uma tentativa desesperada de chamar a atenção dos outros, como um constante exercício que certifica sua existência nesse mundinho medíocre.” Quem diria, hein! Agora você pode falar com pro-pri-e-da-de sobre a mediocridade humana e como é perder horas de sono e foco nos estudos por conta da internet. Medíocre e hipócrita, isso sim é o que você é. Você se acha superior aos outros, se acha melhor que seus amigos, mas não passa de uma vagabunda preguiçosa que não consegue cumprir os compromissos que arranja. Fraca. Isso mesmo, uma fraca!

Tão absorta que estava em seus pensamentos, Úrsula demorou a notar que a aula havia terminado. Saiu da sala evitando qualquer tipo de contato com Miriam ou com qualquer outro conhecido: precisava urgentemente ficar só e em silêncio. A mais remota ideia de ter que responder a um “Oi, tudo bem?” irritava-a profundamente. Do que adianta perguntar-me se está tudo bem se ninguém se

interessa de verdade em como estou me sentindo?

Entrou numa sala de aula vazia e jogou o peso do corpo sobre uma carteira. Ficou a fitar a lousa branca, como se quisesse absorver o vazio do quadro. Estava cansada de racionalizar. Outrora achava que conhecimento lhe traria respostas, conforto, paz de espírito. No entanto, a extrema consciência não aliviara suas dores: potencializava-as. Ok, sou uma poooobre vítima da civilização capitalista e machista. E daí? Estar ciente disso ajudou em alguma coisa? Não! Permaneço a mesma garota sonhadora e estúpida de antes. Só os sonhos que mudaram. Se antes minha vida se resumia a acreditar numa vidinha aos moldes dos romances de Nicholas Sparks, hoje sou a trouxa que acredita que pode mudar o mundo.

Mundo. A palavra ressoou pesadamente sobre os pensamentos de Úrsula. Olhou para o relógio e se deu conta que havia passado muito tempo desde que entrara naquela sala. Precisava correr para não perder ônibus e ter tempo para engolir o almoço antes de trabalhar. Enquanto andava apressadamente para sair do prédio em direção ao ponto de ônibus, Úrsula ainda estava a refletir sobre sua vida. Desde sempre se sentia desajustada onde quer que fosse. Em casa, passava a maior

parte do tempo em seu quarto, até mesmo para fazer as refeições. Notava que seus pais viam na filha uma completa estranha e ela retribuía o sentimento. Constatou que entre os amigos, era o mesmo: a instituição familiar estava em vertiginoso declínio. Úrsula parou para aguardar o fechamento do semáforo. Acesa a luz vermelha, Úrsula começou a atravessar sobre a faixa de pedestres. Quando é que meu pai vai parar de fingir que minha mãe não sabe que ele tem uma amante? Um carro que vinha em alta velocidade não parou nem mesmo após ter feito o corpo de Úrsula completar uma curva de 180° no ar.

O corpo estirado sobre o asfalto atraía a atenção de curiosos. Conforme o corpo esvaía-se em sangue, a respiração de Úrsula tornava-se mais escassa e esparsa. Sentia uma dor latente na boca – talvez eu tenha perdido alguns dentes - e uma pressão aguda na cabeça. O sangue que escorria do supercílio direito tingia parcialmente de vermelho a visão que tinha dos rostos a sua volta. No entanto, não sentia mais nenhuma dor. Lentamente, deixou de ouvir as exclamações dos pedestres que a observavam. O mundo vermelho e nítido foi esmaecendo, dando lugar a um borrão negro. Não havia mais pressa.

JANEIRO/FEVEREIRO DE 2012.



## Selected Poems

WANDERLEY CORINO NUNES FILHO<sup>1</sup>

### Life in duotone

Calma, calma... Não precisa ter  
[pressa. Sem precipitação, sem grande  
[agitação. Pra que se afobar quando já se  
[sabe a direção?  
Não há nada de novo, nada além do jogo  
[que tentamos viver jogar e burlar  
As peças posicionadas e as regras  
[ditadas... há como sabotar? Um pouco de  
[emoção nesse jogo sem ação.  
Como numa partida de xadrez destino e eu:  
[confronto entre reis. Como evitar o xeque-  
[-mate? Quem sabe, negociando um empate?

### Quero ser wireless (pá de cal)

Ai que bom seria se eu pudesse desplugar  
[o cabo de alimentação! Sem obedecer  
[aos teus comandos, testando minha  
[própria configuração.  
O amor que compartilhas não passa de um  
[‘cavalo-de-tróia’ como um ‘bug’ em meu  
[sistema ERRO FATAL! - estou em paranóia...  
Mas adquirir anti-corpos e criei este  
[firewall. Agora de molho, em quarentena.  
[Ctrl+alt+del: joguei uma pá de cal.  
Não adianta me procurar deixei de ser  
[hackeado. Redefini minhas preferências  
[versão beta: atualizado.

### A cobra que morde o próprio rabo

Não me lembro do começo Me perdi  
pelos meios E o fim, não sei se busco  
ou se evito.

1 Undergraduate student of English at University of  
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### Somewhere

and I'm here going somewhere dreams  
against fears a battle so unfair.

### Conto de fadas

Quando pequena mamãe me dizia: “-Viva  
[um conto de fadas! Não fique pra titia!”  
Então cresci e muito esperei pelo  
[príncipe no cavalo pra ser o meu rei  
E o príncipe se me viu, não sei Só sei que  
[do cavalo um coice eu levei  
De coração partido Cicatrizes por todo o  
[lado Sacodi a poeira Deixei pra lado esse  
fado  
Mas eis outro príncipe que não me  
[esnobou Peguei meu melhor e no  
[calabouço trancou  
Não sou idiota como a Julieta Matei o  
[Romeu que me fazia de besta  
Quando pequena mamãe me dizia: “-Viva  
[um conto de fadas! Não fique pra titia!”  
Quando pequena mamãe me dizia: “-Viva  
[um conto de fadas!” Mas fiquei pra titia  
...e fui feliz pra sempre...

### Sentimentolices

eu digo sentimentos e você: “tolices!” me  
[deixe só com minhas sen.ti.men.to.li.ces

## Sobre um reino e uma janela

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**I**  
**M**uitas coisas eu jamais suportei em toda minha vida. Como por exemplo, aquela arte – se assim posso dizer – que os homens mais praticam e pelo qual vivem se digladiando por ninharias, às vezes nem isso. Lutam por um poder que na realidade não existe... Sempre haverá alguém mais forte que nós, por mais tolos que sejamos, sabemos perfeitamente disso. No entanto cometemos uma série de crimes por pura vaidade, por orgulho. Orgulho este que nos corrói e não bastando isto, também corrompe o outro. Matar, os senhores devem estar se perguntando se é o que eu quero dizer com toda essa idiotice até então. Matar... Qualquer animal estúpido pode matar, não é isso a que me refiro. Contar-vos-ei alguns casos para que podeis compreender um pouco da minha sina.

Sempre fui um sujeito covarde. Cauteloso seria um bom atenuante, mas diante das lembranças que me perseguem, dos dias exaustivos, porém de intensa monotonia, tentarei ser demasiado honesto. Parece até piada... Honesto... pfff... E quando é que eu fui sincero até o momento? Provavelmente o que escrevo a vós, não passa de alienações de um homem demente e vil. E o que me importa? Devem estar rindo de minha falácia como todos os outros já fizeram outrora. Na minha infância aprendi a ficar calado. Quem pouco ou nada fala não deve sofrer as dores da vida, foi o que eu pensei quando eu

era bem pequeno. Talvez não com toda essa complexidade, mas eu pensei e logo vi que me enganara.

Alguns dizem que as pessoas têm pleno poder sobre o seu próprio destino e se elas têm uma vida relativamente ruim ou boa é porque escolheram este ou aquele caminho. Outros dizem que o meio condiciona o nosso comportamento e a vida na sociedade. Não acredito em nenhum desses pensamentos. Ora, o livre-arbítrio é um gracejo; como que podemos comparar dois indivíduos, sendo um deles rico e o outro pobre? Um obviamente teria vantagem sobre o outro e conseqüentemente seria menos suscetível a criminalidade, por exemplo. E por outro lado o contexto social não pode ser único fator determinante para o caráter do ser, caso o contrário não veríamos pessoas medíocres pertencentes a uma classe abastada ou então gênios cuja origem é as massas. Pois bem, acredito que cada um possui uma essência que influenciada por fatores externos formam juntos a nossa identidade. Na escola e em casa aprendemos o silêncio; as coisas que pensamos devem permanecer trancafiadas em nossas mentes, enquanto isso, devemos reproduzir o que os demais dizem. A questão é que todos possuem características, dons, que nos são dados a partir do nascimento aleatoriamente e o que mais repudio é o dom de discursar.

Discurso é coisa de gente importante, os senhores devem estar exclaman-

do indignados. Uma ova! Esses malditos usam esse recurso a seu favor, oprimindo, humilhando, cuspidos na cara dos mais fracos, independente de suas posições sociais! E por que achais que tanto os odeio? A resposta é simples: Sou um sujeito naturalmente fraco. Um pobre diabo que além de não ter atingido nenhum objetivo na vida, é um inválido esperando no leito a morte chegar! Achais que por acaso os criticaria se pertencesse a seu grupo? Com certeza chegaram a um consenso que eu estou definitivamente discorrendo sobre os políticos, juizes, reis, ministros, governadores... Não é isso apenas! Os vermes como nós também possuem essa capacidade, no entanto em diferentes níveis.

Classifico os diversos discursos de poder em três, semelhantes à retórica aristotélica, com algumas divergências. O primeiro é o de cunho mais intelectual, no qual o indivíduo convence utilizando argumentos lógicos, o chamado “*Logos*”. O segundo tipo, denominado “*Pathos*” envolve as emoções no discurso, onde o orador conquista o coração do público, apelando para os seus sentimentos. Este eu chamo vulgarmente de “*demagogia*”, discurso mais recorrente no âmbito da política partidária e moralista. Por último eu considero o uso da coerção, da violência para persuadir e obrigar determinada pessoa a tomar certa atitude pelo medo. Para Aristóteles o terceiro meio de persuasão da retórica seria o “*Ethos*” pelo qual o sujeito formaria seu caráter ao outro, mostrando-lhe que tem autoridade suficiente para falar do assunto em pauta. Todavia, meus caros, não estamos apenas no âmbito da fala ou da escrita. O discurso compreenderia a

representação e transformação do mundo pelo ser e, portanto, o contexto social a que pertencemos constrói a nossa imagem perante os membros da sociedade.

Qualquer tipo de discurso de poder que utilizemos estabelecerá uma imagem de nós mesmos nas respectivas situações em que nos encontremos. E não necessariamente o homem discursará através de somente um dos tipos que a pouco expus, podendo usar dois ou até mesmo os três ao mesmo tempo. Existem homens que já nascem com habilidades discursivas, ou seja, possuem o dom de dominar, manipular pessoas. Posso, por exemplo, ter grande habilidade no discurso lógico, mas ter pouca competência no discurso emocional ou coercivo. Na vida, com a convivência com outros seres humanos, aprendemos mesmo que minimamente, cada um desses discursos, já que a relação dos homens é simplesmente uma disputa de poder, onde o mais hábil e o mais *abençoado*, seja pelas características físicas ou pela posição social, consegue ascender de nível ou se manter nele.

Do meu apartamento através da janela, consigo ver os transeuntes na rua. Nunca tiverdes o desejo de entrar em suas vidas? Pelo comportamento, pela vestimenta e pelos traços físicos eu tento imaginar para onde essa pessoa está indo, o que ela fará, quais são os seus traumas. Isso nada mais é do que o passatempo de um velho louco. Observem aquele ser miúdo ali de uniforme... Deve estar voltando da escola; possui um olhar triste e abatido; a camisa suja, abarrotada e seus traços rústicos revelam sua origem social. Seu nome é Miguel. Doze anos, menino

taciturno, tem medo de se expressar. Tem problemas em casa. Outro menino que também tem problemas familiares o espanca praticamente todos os dias. Isso faz sentido para os senhores? Ambos vêm de um contexto semelhante, mas o que faz um tão diferente do outro? O menino que agride tem características que o fazem ser dominador, ele sabe inconscientemente desse fato e o utiliza em seu benefício. E sabem o que ele ganha com isso? Absolutamente nada! Miguel, como eu, é naturalmente fraco, não consegue utilizar direito a maldita ferramenta dos opressores, demagogos e intelectuais esnobes, que é a linguagem.

Vou tomar os meus medicamentos, os senhores, por favor me dêem licença.

## II

Muito bem. Estou aqui há um bom tempo e nada aconteceu na rua... Aliás, peço desculpas pelas minhas mentiras... Não conheço nenhum Miguel e inventei essa história toda. Parem de me censurar, pois foi inevitável. Queria achar um argumento numa coisa prática. Há! E para que? Para convencê-los, senhores. Caso desse certo eu abriria uma igreja ou formaria um partido político. É isso que me mata aos poucos...

Esperem! Que barulho foi esse? Ouço gritos, tumulto, batida! Dois carros acabam de se colidir. Nada muito grave... Somente uns arranhões. Dois homens discutem. Cada um com seu argumento:

— *Olha só o que você fez!*

— *A culpa é toda sua, seu infeliz!*

Após tanta filosofia e demonstração de civilidade, um deles parte para

cima do outro, desferindo-lhe um soco. A briga se inicia, o mais forte vence. Lançam justificativas como a velha URSS e os EUA e guerreiam; cai o muro de Berlim e junto com ele o corpo do derrotado. O público ao redor incita o conflito. Querem sangue. Confesso que também apreciei o combate. Só faltou um balde de pipoca. Que pena que eu apostei no homem errado. Justo o que eu achei que ganharia a briga, perdeu. Não sejam moralistas! Cada um toma seu partido! Os que consideraram que o homem X tinha razão torceram por ele e do mesmo modo com o homem Y. Isso em algumas circunstâncias. E os que apoiaram Hitler ou Stalin? Devo choramingar pelos mortos? Não vale a pena resgatar um passado que não vivenciei, entretanto, podemos pensar que os alemães ou os russos não tiveram muita escolha senão obedecer, não estou certo? Com a vigência de determinado pensamento as pessoas não puderam escolher suas posições. Nem nos dias de hoje temos liberdade plena na hora de escolha. E se pensarmos melhor as pequenas coisas de nosso cotidiano não nos distanciam muito de tempos obscuros como aqueles.

O que faríeis na situação? Eu? Acredito que gaguejaria de medo e tomaria um soco na fuça. Não sou bom na violência, muito menos na demagogia. Este último é o tipo que mais abomino: Ai, “O meio ambiente”; “a liberdade”; “a igualdade”; “o respeito”; “a honra” e blá-blá-blá. Com dezenas de palavras de efeito milhares de homens vão para a guerra por espontânea vontade. Emocionados, homens miseráveis doam quase todo o seu dinheiro a instituições desprezíveis. Queremos provar

para nós mesmos e para o outro o quanto somos melhores. Nunca vistes um sujeito ignóbil dando bagatelas aos indigentes? Ele não o faz por um sentimento sincero e sim por vaidade, uma vez que visa mostrar a todos que é um ser virtuoso. Dessa maneira construímos o nosso caráter, a fim de persuadir o próximo para que o diferente se torne igual e as oposições entre o “bem” e o “mal” se tornem cada vez mais nítidas. Eu sou o bem e o outro é o mal, assim se separam as distintas idéias de mundo e se atritam pessoas, famílias, religiões, partidos, nações, julgando-se detentoras da verdade. Bom... Chega de tolices. Contarei um pouco da minha vida... Apos-to que muitos compartilham da mesma experiência que eu e possivelmente me achem um fraco, lamentoso. Eu nunca o neguei, caros senhores, isto é fato. Contarei brevemente para que não vos chateie. Eis a história de um verme.

### III

**D**a minha infância nada tenho a dizer. Os anos passaram voando e quando percebi já estava fora do casulo inóspito que é a juventude. Ainda era jovem. Aos dezoito anos sentei-me na sala de espera de uma entrevista de emprego. Quem não tem berço tem que fazer por onde. Órfão desde os catorze, vivendo sob a tutela do tio alcoólatra e vagabundo, tive que procurar trabalho ao atingir a maioridade, se não falar dos bicos que fiz a partir dos quinze. Peguei emprestada uma camisa branca, uma calça preta, e os sapatos do meu tio e fui à busca de sustento e independência.

Esperei por uma hora aproximadamente, até que deram a mim e aos de-

mais candidatos um teste de conhecimentos gerais. Não me sai mal e após a prova os bem sucedidos foram conduzidos a outra sala onde fariam finalmente a entrevista. Chegou a minha vez e falei sobre minhas experiências que totalizavam uma insignificância. O analista ouviu tedioso e pediu para que o próximo falasse. Este era um moço alto e magro com o semblante grosseiro e sério, mas ao falar mudou totalmente seu jeito, mostrando graça e simpatia. Falou de toda a sua vida, de seus amigos, parentes, do que gostava de fazer e absolutamente nada de suas experiências profissionais. Enfatizava sempre suas qualidades pessoais. Assim eu observei que os candidatos contratados eram sempre os retóricos, manipuladores da linguagem. Muitos eram arrogantes e até grosseiros para com o entrevistador, porém quanto mais o eram parecia que este os apreciava. Enquanto isso, os fracos e os feios, que revelaram polidez e certa modéstia, foram eliminados, independente de seus atributos e experiências. Pareceu-me tudo aquilo uma campanha política: Discursos comoventes conquistam a aderência do povo. Além do mais, um candidato não pode ser monstruosamente feio, uma vez que um sujeito asqueroso provocaria náuseas e péssima impressão à imagem da empresa ou da nação.

Voltei para casa. Passaram-se duas semanas e não consegui arranjar trabalho algum. Meu tio, cansado da minha parasitagem, decidiu intervir ainda mais na minha vida. Possuía alguns amigos que trabalhavam numa loja e estes me indicaram para o meu primeiro emprego como estoquista. Não era um mar de rosas, no

entanto me acostumei com o serviço que pouco dispunha de interação com outras pessoas. Carregava, empilhava, mandava recados sem muitas dificuldades. O problema não era o trabalho em si, mas sim meus caríssimos colegas... O estoque em sua maioria era composto por gente bastante ignorante que só falava em vulgaridades. Entre eles falavam de uma maneira agressiva, como se estivessem brigando sempre, portanto me sentia deslocado naquele lugar de gente estranha e rude. Parecia um inseto perto deles... Mal notavam minha presença e nunca tentaram conversar comigo; a não ser bem no comecinho quando fizeram perguntas básicas do tipo: *Qual é o seu nome?; Quantos anos você tem?; Já trabalhou nisso antes?* E quando percebiam que eu estava ali, debochavam do meu jeito e do meu físico que não era apropriado de forma alguma para aquela ocupação, dizendo em bom tom: *Olha só o frangote! Não tá aguentando não, filho? Vai trabalhar no escritório, que é mais a sua cara!* Bem que eu gostaria mesmo de trabalhar fora daquele palco de horrores... As pessoas não vivem, elas atuam. É tudo pura politicagem!

Prestava muita atenção na conversa e no trabalho dos meus colegas. Ficava admirado com o trabalho dos vendedores. Não era gente muito inteligente, mas apreciava o modo como falavam bonito e tratavam bem os clientes da loja. Eram muito diferentes dos ignorantes do estoque. E neste mesmo momento, após ter perdido dois anos da minha vida naquela latrina, eu também observava que quanto mais eu ralava duro mais eu era esmagado. Sabia também que ninguém dava a mínima para o meu esforço e tendo

conhecimento da minha fraqueza e falta de ação, eles me davam cada vez mais tarefas. Os outros auxiliares conversavam, tomavam café, passeavam pela loja, pois sabiam que eu faria tudo calado sem dar um pio sequer. Estava rodeado de gente corrupta e gananciosa. Precisava sair dali. Contudo eu gostava da loja e sempre tive fé no mérito, isto é, que um dia ascenderia para um cargo melhor e menos venenoso quando finalmente notassem a minha dedicação para com a empresa.

Perdi minhas esperanças quando eu completei quatro anos de serviço naquele inferno e continuava na mesma posição, com o mesmo salário, acrescentado de alguns reajustes ínfimos. Ao meu redor os colegas já não eram mais os mesmos. Tinham arranjado emprego em outra parte ou então ainda pior: mudaram para um cargo superior dentro da própria loja! Consumia uma tremenda raiva dentro de mim, mas nada podia fazer. Precisava do dinheiro por mais miserável que fosse e o meu moralismo não me permitia reagir de nenhum modo. E sabia que essas pessoas estúpidas não progrediram por mérito. Faziam piadinhas, contavam histórias, riam alto, bajulavam... Tudo isso me dava nojo!

Certo dia a loja mudou de gerente. Era uma senhora de seus quarenta e cinco anos que agora nos comandava e como todo chefe sua origem era desconhecida para nós. Em outras palavras, fora indicada para aquele cargo sem nunca ter trabalhado ali. Assim que me viu criou grande simpatia por mim, não uma atração física, – como os senhores devem estar imaginando – mas um sentimento de compaixão, amizade com que o ser

humano raramente demonstra de maneira sincera. Seu nome era Glória e logo gostou do meu jeito. Às vezes temos umas reações esquisitas mesmo. Ao avistar determinado indivíduo pela primeira vez podemos ter uma série de emoções para com ele, como paixão, simpatia, dó e até mesmo ódio. Algum tempo se passou e decidi para meu próprio bem que a adularia. Fazendo uma aliança perfeita com essa mulher consegui finalmente mudar de estoquista para vendedor e posteriormente para subgerente da loja!

Agora sim eu era respeitado. Com o salário novo pude alugar uma casa só para mim e abandonar a pocilga onde vivia com meu tio. Era uma casa bem pequena, o dinheiro que ganhava também não era muito, no entanto eu tinha algo que eu nunca sonhara em ter: poder. A excessão da gerente e daqueles pertencentes a mesma categoria que eu, cada um daqueles funcionariózinhos medíocres comiam na palma da minha mão. Podia esmagá-los da mesma forma que fizeram comigo! *“Impresráveis!” “Vagabundos!”* Palavras como estas formavam um vocabulário absolutamente normal no meu dia-a-dia. Tinha agora meu pequeno reino. Contudo, de que adiantava eu ser um rei no trabalho e toda vez que chegava em casa eu desabava em lágrimas. Precisava de alguém para ficar do meu lado, compartilhar sonhos comigo e com isso ser feliz. Precisava de uma família. Coisa que de fato eu nunca tive...

#### IV

**V**oltando do trabalho eu sempre passava por uma praça, cujas árvores e

os bancos de madeira eram meu refúgio. Ali sempre lia alguma coisa, desde jornais até literatura. Como podeis ver, apesar do meio repugnante onde fui criado, eu apreciava uma boa leitura, quebrando totalmente com a visão determinista que mencionei a pouco. Ainda não estava escuro quando de repente vi um vulto e quando percebi se tratava de uma mulher sentada ao meu lado. A primeira instância eu não entendi por que aquele ser fizera tal ato, uma vez que os demais assentos se encontravam inteiramente livres. Voltei a ler, mas de súbito tive uma sensação que a criatura me olhava de forma fixa. Tornei meus olhos para ela e no mesmo momento baixou o rosto timidamente, desviando o olhar. Foi aí que eu vi o seu rosto puro e meigo, os olhos grandes e encantadores traziam um sentimento de tristeza; seus trajes revelavam simplicidade, o que a tornava ainda mais bela. Eu empalidecera e comecei a suar frio de nervoso. Percebendo o meu nítido transtorno ela se virou para mim:

— *D-desculpe, senhor... Eu estou lhe incomodando?* — perguntou hesitante.

Quando falou comigo eu travei. Não conseguia dizer uma só palavra, talvez de medo ou timidez. Após um breve momento de silêncio eu fiz um esforço e disse:

— *N-n-não... De modo algum.*

Afinal qual era a dificuldade nisso? Não fora eu vendedor e agora não comandava um porção de subalternos? Enganava as massas com discursos demagogos e os fazia levar produtos caríssimos ao qual não tinham dinheiro para comprar. Cada vez mais eu via os clientes se endividando e mesmo cheio de dívidas compravam



mais e mais. Num tempo anterior sentiria asco de mim mesmo por ludibriar essas pessoas, porém, cego pelo despotismo e pelo lucro – que na realidade nem me pertencia – eu fazia com muito prazer. Na verdade, agia conforme as leis do sistema, ou seja, não tinha escolha... Além disso, lidava com gente grosseira, arrogante e falsa, mas como seria lidar com uma mulher? Nunca tivera essa experiência e neste instante ela veio como um tapa na minha cara. Precisava falar com ela! Nem que fossem os assuntos mais torpes e esquisitos, eu queria criar uma imagem positiva de mim mesmo para ela, nem que fosse uma mentira.

Por fim não consegui mentir e fui eu mesmo: fraco e desajeitado. Ao menos fui sincero. Achei que seria um tanto inapropriado se a abordasse perguntando seu nome, entretanto o tempo se passava e tive medo de que fosse embora e que nunca mais a visse. Falei a primeira coisa que veio na minha mente:

— *Moça... Por que você se sentou ao meu lado?*

Eu mesmo fiquei espantado com a frase grosseira que acabara de pronunciar. Encabulada, ela fez menção de se levantar, mas eu a impedi.

— *Não! Quero dizer... Não quis ofendê-la. É que mal posso acreditar que... Err...*

Não consegui terminar a fala, estava trêmulo. Seus olhos tristes agora mostravam grande comoção e seu rosto pálido corou quando eu a interpelei. Entendeu tudo o que eu não disse, como se compreendesse meu olhar igualmente triste. O silêncio se interrompeu e quando eu percebi nós dois conversávamos como duas crian-

ças sobre nossos gostos, hábitos, manias e também sobre nossas histórias. Livia era o seu nome. Vivia apenas com a mãe e trabalhava como balconista em uma loja de acessórios femininos. Também não suportava suas colegas esnobes, muito menos das senhoras que compravam por lá. Não possuía amigos, a única pessoa com quem se importava era sua mãe, mas cuja doença avançara a tal ponto que não viveria mais do que um ano. Portanto Livia ficaria sozinha. Sempre foi sozinha e quando me viu naquele dia finalmente encontrou alguém como ela. Não preciso dizer mais o que aconteceu neste instante. Já se subentende... Passaram-se alguns anos e nós simplesmente nos casamos...

Não gosto dessa parte da história e desse modo contarei o mais breve possível. Não importam os detalhes! O desfecho é o mais importante... É a hora em que o fraco deixa de existir para se tornar forte.

Enfim... Alugamos uma casa maior para nós e para o bebê que estava para vir. Éramos iguais, IGUAIS, eu pensei e nada poderia nos afetar, pois amávamos um ao outro. Como qualquer casal as brigas surgiram no começo, contudo foram apaziguadas e nosso filho nasceu lindo e sadio. Aquele pequenino ser nos uniria ainda mais e já não éramos mais dois infelizes deslocados no mundo. Tínhamos uma família estruturada, meu reino, meu maior tesouro.

Os anos de casado não fizeram bem para mim... Fui promovido a gerente de outra loja e lá pratiquei ainda mais a minha tirania sobre os meus servos. Criou-se em mim um sentimento de crueldade e superioridade em relação aos

demais, já não era mais um homem e sim um monstro. Com minha querida Livia o processo não foi diferente. De rainha ela virou uma mera camponesa maltrapilha. Chegando em casa eu agia como um déspota, reclamando da vida medíocre que levávamos e principalmente do maldito choro do bebê que esperneava toda vez que eu entrava pela porta da frente. Todos ao meu redor passaram a me odiar. Até ele, tão pequeno já me detestava. Cumpram minhas ordens porque não tinham escolha. Eu queria impor meu pensamento sobre ou outros e logo reparei que eu e minha esposa éramos demasiadamente diferentes e eu não podia suportar aquilo. Percebi que o olhar de Livia, assim como o meu, mudara totalmente. No fundo ela conspirava, algum dia se libertaria da minha coerção e esse dia não demorou muito para acontecer.

Retornei ao meu reino familiar e como de costume, o bebê chorava e eu dizia grosserias a minha esposa. Ouvindo o barulho infernal e observando o ambiente caótico em sua volta, seus olhos apáticos se arregalaram e Livia deu um grito ensurdecedor que ecoou por toda a casa. Fiquei desorientado e ela correu para a cozinha trazendo junto a si uma faca para se vingar de toda a humilhação que eu a tinha feito passar.

*Você vai morrer seu desgraçado!!!* — berrou, se atirando contra mim.

Tentei desculpar-me, segurá-la, mas tudo foi em vão. A raiva tinha dominado o seu caráter dócil e agora ela se rebelava contra o rei. No instinto lhe dei um golpe no estômago, o que fez ela cair enco-

lhida, chorando de ódio. Nada podia fazer, eu era muito mais forte... Não acreditei no que fizera... Tudo agora fazia sentido! Que diabo era esse que tinha o poder de trucidar os outros e a si próprio?! Pedi perdão de joelhos, chorei, supliquei para que me desse outra chance. Ela com os lábios dizia que sim, mas seus olhos amargurados me diziam “adeus”.

Uma semana se passou desde o incidente e Livia caiu em profunda depressão. Já não tinha mais forças para viver... Certo dia pressenti que algo de ruim aconteceria. Sai um pouco mais cedo da loja e voltei a casa, mas era tarde demais... Abri a porta que dava para a sala de estar e estranhamente não ouvi o choro do bebê. Era um silêncio aterrador e o medo tomou conta de minha alma. Entrei no quarto e meus temores haviam se concretizado... Horrorizado cai de joelhos ao ver o corpo inerte de Livia pendurado por um lençol. Na cama jazia uma criança morta, estrangulada... Ao seu lado uma carta escrita por ela destinada a mim. Não vou revelar-lhes o seu conteúdo! Minha esposa e meu filho estavam mortos! Isso já basta senhores! Desci o corpo cuidadosamente e o pus sobre a cama. Passei pela última vez meus dedos sobre seus cabelos... Eu que causara minha própria desgraça! Tenho plena consciência que Livia fez aquilo porque não suportava mais o meu egoísmo e esta seria a única maneira de me derrotar! Eu estava sozinho de novo... Não me restava mais nada... Ela sabia que eu era fraco demais e que não poderia fazer o mesmo. Aquilo tudo seria pior que a própria morte...

## V

**E** depois? Como seria a vida do rei após a queda? A vida monótona e alienada se estendeu por longos anos. De que adianta contar o que vem em seguida? Não casei nem tive mais filhos. Entre a vida e a morte eu vaguei pelas ruas. Já não era mais um homem e sim um ser desalmado que não vive o presente nem projeta o futuro. As lembranças me corroem lentamente... Não entendo a natureza humana. Não fui honesto convosco. Disse que não pertencia ao grupo dos fortes... Na verdade não existe classificação nenhuma! Todos são fracos e fortes em relação a alguém, ferimos e somos feridos, violentamos e somos violentados. Eu que sempre me achei fraco e tinha repugnância dos outros que exerciam tirania, me tornei o próprio tirano, um corrupto! Não julgo mais ninguém... Todos são podres! A questão é a oportunidade de se parecer melhor para o outro. Quando ela surge, nós a agarramos e nos tornamos ainda mais podres.

Gosto de ver as pessoas do meu apartamento, andando, conversando, rin-

do e chorando... Gosto de analisar suas vidas. Tento imaginar qual futuro lhes aguarda. Passo o dia ora lendo livros ou vendo os transeuntes na rua. Tento achar explicações para o meu destino, para os seres humanos, enfim, para o inexplicável. Já estou velho e a vista daqui de cima me parece cada vez mais atraente. Desejo um dia ter forças para que num impulso desesperador eu termine estirado em alguma calçada. Morreria como um indigente, um nada. Quem dera eu ser uma árvore, tranquila, calada. Talvez eu não sofresse as dores da vida. Se Deus existe por que não me cede a morte?

Todos os dias histórias como a minha se repetem em diferentes lugares, envolvendo diferentes pessoas. A vida é uma eterna repetição... Os vermes nos governam, sempre nos governaram. Nada mais justo... Eu e os senhores somos iguais a eles. Não sejam hipócritas! Não quero pensar em mais nada. Encerrarei este discurso. Espero ter vos convencido... Não suporto mais essa maldita existência!

# Translation

## Between Verisimilitude and Identity: The Translation of Geographic References in Films for Children

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**Abstract:** Translations are necessary, sometimes creative, but they can also be misleading. This essay will show how name of cities were translated from English to Portuguese in three different movies - *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), *Surf's Up* (2007) and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). This essay brings an analysis of the relation of identity and verisimilitude of these translations with the story shown and the real world references, whether it is well built or faulty.

**Keywords:** translation, geographic references, films for children.

The world changes all the time. People are always creating means to express themselves and to be understood. In the nineteenth century cinema was created. In the beginning, films had no sound; just actors' actions were seen. There was no need for translation. Those who had access to cinema would understand the scenes, expressions and actions. After some development and improvement music was used. The aim of affirming a nationality and culture made the films begin to have more than music sounding. Legends were gradually adopted and inserted, they needed to be translated, as 'the mass' public would not understand a foreign language. When actors had their voices inserted in the films we came to the era of "Spoken Cinema", which increased the necessity of translation. These changes were represented, for example, in the French movie *The Artist* (2009).

Adults are the main public for films, directly or indirectly. Movies for children, although called "for children", are made, dubbed, translated by adults and chosen by other adults as the movie to be watched by their kids. In the whole process we have the adulthood interference or mediation. Therefore, we have a process of affirmation of identity, through the clothes, cultural or even geographic references presented in movies. Such indirect information can be perceived by teenagers and adults, people who might have a more developed critical view and knowledge, but the same would not happen with a child.

The first child films that have gone over a larger number of boundaries were produced by Walt Disney Studios. According to Disney website, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the "first full length animated feature", launched in 1937. It was successfully watched and criticized all over the world, and after that, more films were produced

and launched. Most of them are medieval “fairy tales” adaptations. “The Index Translationum on the UNESCO website mentions Disney, Blyton and Verne as the most translated authors of children’s books. The ubiquitous Walt Disney tops the list.” (Ghesquiere, 2006:30) Most of these children stories that came from literature to full screen feature were mediated by Walt Disney Studios, but we also have other companies as Sony Pictures Animation. Usually, these products are translated from English to Portuguese, and rarely bring problems as regarding dubbing.

In translation studies, the *domestication* approach will tend to find similar or equivalent national references on translating foreign ones; the *foreignization*, on the other hand, will use the same reference made in the original movie. These different approaches can be a symbol of affirmation towards one identity (bearing in mind the idea of identity as a compound of language, territory and culture altogether). Most Brazilian Studios are carioca and their translations prime for *domestication* rather than *foreignization*. *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), *Surf’s Up* (2007) and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), for example, have geographic references made towards the USA, but the Brazilian version changes them to Brazilian references – carioca references are predominant. So, there is an attempt to affirm the Brazilian identity through a foreign film. It is one possible strategy, but it must be carefully made. The translator working with the film, his/her ‘text’, should reflect on the public’s world knowledge and ref-

erences, besides the dubbing studios’ ideals aims and rules.

*Lilo & Stitch* is a scientific-fiction/family film created by Walt Disney Studios, launched in 2002, which is a story of a Hawaiian girl, Lilo, who thinks that has a dog, Stitch, but in fact, he is an alien that falls on Earth (in Hawaii to be more precise). Nani, Lilo’s old sister, buys Stitch to the latter after her decision. At night, at Lilo’s home, on the first day she got Stitch, he builds a city and a bridge with books and toys and destroys it latter. The image of the bridge, its color and structure besides how Lilo calls it is of great importance. In the English-dubbed version Lilo calls it “San Francisco”.

San Francisco is located in California, USA, where there is a bridge known in the whole world by its red structure, as we can see in the film image of the bridge build by Stitch.



1. Stitch’s San Francisco Bridge



2. San Francisco Bridge.

These pictures are really similar, despite one being a drawing, and the other, a picture. What this makes clear is the use of real-world references in the film. References about the Earth are always produced. Here it is related to American geography as we have Hawaii and San Francisco which might be known by Lilo, as she is American. The references are even reinforced by the images in the movie, which makes them verisimilar and coherent in relation to the movie story and its development.

According to Aristotle's *Poetic*, the verisimilitude is the impression of truth that a work might have. It must be carefully constructed attending to a necessity of the text, in such decorous manner that might be seen as truth, being linked with the whole text without failure. In this sense the English-dubbed version is verisimilar.

But what about the Brazilian version? The Brazilian dubbed version changes the "San Francisco" spoken reference to "Ponte Rio-Niteroi", which is a *domestication* of the text. The Studio wanted to affirm Brazilian nationality through one 'region' (Rio de Janeiro) despite the original source. Is the domestication verisimilar? Is it supported by the images and not interfering in the story coherence? No, it is not verisimilar and not even supported by the images presented in the movie. Below, there is a picture of "Rio-Niteroi" Bridge. It is very different from San Francisco's Bridge build by Stitch. It has no red structure, there are just lampposts.

Although this alteration does not interfere in the story structure and comprehension, it can cause a strange feel-



3. Rio-Niteroi Bridge.

ing to Brazilian children that know the Rio-Niteroi Bridge and have reached an age and knowledge to compare it critically. On trying to *domesticate* foreign references and to reaffirm nationality through it, the translation was unfortunate, disrespecting the film scenes and the public's critical view towards the studio attempt of emphasizing their region.

A second analysis will approach *Surf's Up*, a film launched by the producer Sony Pictures Animation in 2007. Cody Maverick is the protagonist, a penguin surfer which wants to perform on Hawaiian Islands. He lives in "Shiverpool", a creative name that makes references to "Liverpool", and as it is located in Antarctica, in the movie, the reference has an association with bad weather – "Shiver". When Cody arrives in Hawaii, he meets "Chicken Joe" who says that he is from "Sheboygan", located in the American state Wisconsin. After greetings, an image of "Chicken Joe" in Sheboygan appears. That first reference has influences which would only be perceived by those who know English, Liverpool and the meaning that "Shiverpool" creates. The second one has a real-world value, but it is not a world-famous city. Those who





Chicken Joe in Sheybogan, Wiscosin.

does not live or know Wisconsin may not know the city by its image presented in the movie. However, in Sheboygan, Chicken Joe is surfing, so we can see the wave and some trees.

The Brazilian dubbing tends to *domesticate* these territorial names used. So, instead of calling the first reference as “Shiverpool”, the Portuguese dubs calls Cody’s hometown as “Frio de Janeiro”. It is intriguing to observe that we still have a creative use of language towards name of cities and, also the mentioning of the hard weather from Antarctica – shiver, “frio”. Beyond that, the dubbing Studio preferred to reaffirm Brazilian identity by their carioca identity and the mentioning of “Rio de Janeiro”. This change shows how creativity can bring different possibilities of translation towards a geographic reference, which might help children perceive the vividness of language and how we can adapt it for different purposes, even for amusement or humor, without interfering within the film story,

coherence, structure or comprehension. Despite this good strategy of *domestication* in translation, the second reference is “Sheybogan” translated as “pantanal”. It could be done without harm to the public, but the vegetation illustrated in the fourth picture is not similar to Brazilian pantanal. There aren’t opened seas and waves in pantanal as it would be thought of with such image. Although it does not interfere in the story development, it may affirm to children a faulty image of elements (landscape and vegetation) about their own country – what is commonly used by people on stating their identity. Children that have never been to this place or even seen it might create a wrong idea of how Brazilian vegetation is. This is still a domestication of the text, but it is misled and harmful as can bring to children wrong ideas and images of their own place.

Finally, *The Princess and the Frog* is a Disney adaption for full screen of Grimm Brothers’ adaptation of the “The



Frog Prince” fairy tale. It is animated and spread around the world, by Cinemas or DVDs, for children. In Brazil, it was translated by the carioca studio “Delart”. In the film, there are USA geographic references, such as “New Orleans”, “San Francisco” and non-USA references, as “Maldonia” (the Prince’s Kingdom).


It is possible to say that there are *foreignization* on “New Orleans” and “Maldonia” references, as the last is not translated to possible equivalents connected with Brazilian identity and the first one have an adaptation of the first word “New” to “Nova”, but Orleans remains in its foreign form – half *domesticated*, half *foreign*, in some sense. San Francisco appears in the story when a firefly called Ray meets Tiana, Prince Naveen and Louis. When the insect hears Tiana and Naveen tongue, in the original version, he asks them: “Are you from San Francisco?” On the other hand, the Brazilian dub has it translated as “Are you from Copacabana?” The references are quite different. The English version affirms the American identity by using its own territorial references on dubbing, which might be known and recognized by American children. The Brazilian version tries to reach Brazilian public and establish an effective communication and identification through a carioca reference. Even if this is not known by children, it might be known by the parents who might explain it or be entertained with it. The choice of Rio de Janeiro references has to do with the Studio’s identity and location as carioca.

Independently of a range of interests that led this translational decision,

the changes made did not affect the story verisimilitude as, at first, the question made by “Ray” is answered negatively and, afterwards, his interlocutors explain where they are from – which does not affect the rest of the film development. Concerning the public – children – this change will not affect the story comprehension. This might just catch the public’s attention and create a possible ‘identification’ with this reference.

This shows the important role and influence translation have on its public. Translations are necessary and important for those who want to amuse themselves with foreign entertainment such as movies. But the translator and Dubbing Studios, as a mediator, a bridge in this connection, must be concerned with and bear in mind verisimilitude, identity and the translation’s influence and impact on the public in order to avoid faulty identity affirmations or misunderstandings. As the example from *Lilo and Stitch* and Sheboygan’s from *Surf’s Up* shows, the affirmation of national identity of a target country through the image and translation of films from a source country, concerning references which are not similar, may be harmful, in a sense it presents to children from this “target country” a faulty connection of name of geographic references from their country to images from other places which are not similar. This may confuse children who already know these references, as a child that knows Rio-Niteroi Bridge can possibly doubt her/his own knowledge or question the existence of more than one “Rio-Niteroi Bridge”. And those who have never

been to this place may create an erroneous idea of how it looks like, faithfully believing in such association. On one hand, a translational decision besides being difficult and a creative act can be faulty influence; on the other hand, it can bring to the public an affirmation of a country or a good time on humorous associations as that of “Shiverpool”/“Frio de Janeiro”

showing the vividness and playfulness of language through references which neither interfere in the story development or verisimilitude nor create a misleading association of images, landscapes and to names of real geographic references. And if this does not have a positive impact on the public at least it does not mislead them. 



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# Language and Education

## Homeschooling: Why It Should be Considered

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**Abstract:** The number of families adopting home education to their children is rising around the world. Still, this method of education faces lots of critics and even the prohibition of some countries. This work intends to clarify why home education should be taken as a possible alternative of instruction and why the state should not be against it. Based on previous academic researches, expert reviews and official documents, this article analyzes some polemic points of homeschooling and the benefits of this method, being useful for parents, teachers and interested in education in general.

**Keywords:** democracy; education; homeschooling; parenting; state

### Introduction

In this article I shall defend the right of parents to choose the educational model they think is most appropriate and profitable for their children. Based on previous academic researches, expert reviews and official documents, I intend to go against the dominant thinking that the school institution is the only reasonable option, undoing some prejudice concerning homeschooling and showing its advantages and challenges for today. The main purpose of this work is not to establish homeschooling as the best and only way of education, but to claim that its execution is a perfectly possible alternative and that its right should be guaranteed and not obstructed by the state.

Although home education was a common form of education until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, today homeschooling is seen by common sense as a dangerous path to go through. According to Daniel Monk (2004:12), school attendance today is perceived as indispensable to childhood experience, so home education would be the robbery of childhood and not just another form of education. But to label homeschooling as injurious to children is an oversimplification of the issue and to impose a universal concept of what is the best for children.

### Positions against home education and their vulnerabilities

The homeschooling trend emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in North America and it has since been spreading to other parts of the world. Today, USA, UK, Belgium, Austria, Ireland, Italy, France, Portugal, Switzerland, Canada, Australia and South Afri-

ca are some of the nations that permit the practice of children being taught by their parents or another person in the family circle as alternative to traditional school institutions, with different levels of restrictions or regulating conditions. But countries like Brazil, Germany, Greece, Cuba and Turkey still deprive their people of making that choice.

The main reasons for this positioning against home education is generally based on the idea that attendance to a school is a right of all children and that homeschooled children suffer with the lack of socialization. Also, Paula Rothermel (2005:74) calls our attention to the fact that home educators are often stereotyped as eccentric, ignorant, fanatical religious or hippy by “concerned professionals and others who make statements based upon their beliefs rather than research”. This prejudiced view caused by the lack of information is also one of the reasons for homeschooling to be frowned upon.

The fact is that Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human per-

sonality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

In other words, every child has the right to education, not to school attendance, and the choice of which method would be better for s/he should be of parents. By banning home education, the state takes to itself the parents’ authority to choose the appropriate education for the children. Monk (2004:7) reminds us that sometimes “the parental right to home educate is not simply a private matter of individual choice but has a broader political significance to the extent that it is an essential part of democracy”. In a world post-WWII, protecting individuals from the state is extremely necessary to avoid the emergence of totalitarian regimes, such as the Soviet regime or the Nazi regime, which had a centralized control of education.

Socialization is also a very important issue because if a child is not adequately socialized, s/he won’t be able to make contributions to community. According to Anthony Giddens (2006:163), “socialization is the process whereby the helpless infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable person, skilled in the ways of the culture into which he or

she was born.” Banning homeschooling because it is harmful to children’s socialization is the same that declaring that only institutional schools are reasonable agents of socialization, which is a fallacy. When a child is home educated s/he will not be restrict to a school environment, with people of her/is age only, but s/he should be encouraged to have contact with people of all ages and social contexts. This contact can be made in the familiar environment, in the neighborhood, in associations, in sports centers and even in daily activities places, such as a supermarket or a bank. This different form of socialization is very profitable for children if done properly, because children will learn the rules and traditions of their community actively and closely to their families. Thus, to be in touch with others would not be a sudden rupture for the children, but a natural and serene process.

Regarding prejudice against homeschoolers and their stereotypes, Rothermel’s research (2005: 79-81) about motives for home education gives us important data. The research is based on the analysis of questionnaires answered by 419 home education families in the UK. The question “What motivated you to home educate?” was answered by a third of the parents (30.77%) with *disappointment with education and schools*. Other parents (29.17%) said it was because of *ideology or they always intended to home educate*. Parents also cited *bullying* (25.32%) and their *child’s depression or stress caused by a school experience* (24.04%) as a motivation to homeschooling. Other answers appeared, such as *standards of morality &*

*faith, distrust societies belief/values, we want to be with our children, child shy/demanding, not suited to school*, and others. In the end, Rothermel divides the motivations in two groups: those relating to experiences with school and those related to family ideology. These answers indicate a great concern of homeschooling parents with their child welfare and their character formation. This kind of parents cannot be dealt as eccentric or ignorant by having these assumptions when choosing their children’s education. Also it is important to notice what Rothermel claims in her article: homeschoolers are not a homogeneous group and religious families or New-Age families did not necessarily home educate their children because of their religious beliefs or spiritual leanings but both groups have the desire to have control over their children’s education, which particularly is remarkable in a world where parents and children are increasingly distant from each other due to the lack of quality time together.

## Others advantages of homeschooling

Homeschooling is also advantageous due to other reasons. The curricular freedom is one of the most cited benefits, because it enables the teaching of different subjects using empiric methods, with a flexibility that is not found in a schoolroom. At school children are required to reach a common pattern of knowledge by the same methods and at the same time, which ignores each child as an individual with different characteristics and poten-

tials. According to homeschoolers, it is the curriculum that must adapt to the needs of the student, and not the way round. In this way, it is easier to personalize a homeschooled child curriculum because s/he receives an individual instruction that respects her/his own rhythm, which makes of it a great method to educate children with special needs.

According to Schebella (2010), ex-pedagogical director of ANED (Associação Nacional de Educação Domiciliar), home education also makes the learning process more natural, because it occurs without changing children's daily routine, *locus* or role of the involved subjects. Parents are already recognized by children as authorities. When they become responsible for teaching, it is not a complete break in the natural order, but a continuity of the process. In this view, children's home, a usual and secure place, becomes the "place of the knowledge", allowing parents to adapt the instruction according to the pupil's routine and necessities. In homeschooling all the family is involved in the education process, nearing its members while transmitting to children the notion of routine and its rules, responsibility and the differences of roles of each one in the family according to their activities. Thus, homeschooled children are prepared by their own families to deal with life in a society. It is necessary to affirm that the familiar relations are essential to form the children's character, but it is not exclusive and, of course, parents should present to their children other situations of socialization, as previously mentioned.

By providing an investigative attitude, homeschooling is seen as a promoter of auto didacticism because, gradually, homeschooled children cease to see their parents as their only instructors and seek knowledge by themselves, achieving the real interdependence of adult's age, as stated by Schebella (2010). This inclination for research develops the capacity of intellectual production, which is desirable in every society. Martin-Chang (2011), author of a Canadian study about homeschooling, claims that children homeschooled by a structured program outperform their public school colleagues. She concludes in an interview at Concordia University website that "structured homeschooling may offer opportunities for academic performance beyond those typically experienced in public school."


Another benefit of home education is that it could be in accordance to parents' philosophical and ideological views. The fact that parents decide what kind of view their children will receive is frowned upon by some critics, because it would be an imposition and would not permit children to choose their own world view. But this argument reminds us of what Monk (2004:3) says about "how the rights claims of parents and children can be used to mask public interests". Schebella (2010) alleges that the teaching process is always partial, because it invariably transmits the values and principles of the teacher or of the educational system. In other words, both home and school system of education will transmit values, the difference is on *who* is going to determine what will be transmitted. Of course homes-

choolers defend that this task belongs to parents, inquiring that if it is dangerous allow parents transmit their own views to their own children, what would make it less dangerous to let this task to a school or the state? By homeschooling, these parents allege they can avoid problems such as a premature sexual education or political indoctrination to their children, which is a very reasonable point if we have in mind what the American Convention on Human Rights (1969) has settled in its Article 12 (4): "Parents or guardians, as the case may be, have the right to provide for the religious and moral education of their children or wards that is in accord with their own convictions".

## Conclusion

The increase of homeschooling nowadays is a fact coped in different forms by countries. While some of them allow the practice of homeschooling and even elaborate laws to improve the implementation of this method, others forbid it, depriving parents to choose the kind of

education they think is most appropriate for their children. The issue is not about denying the application of traditional schooling, but to guarantee the parents' right of choice, as it is said in Article 26 (3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

This work has addressed some important points of homeschooling method and has shown us that its implementation is possible. What is not possible when it comes to education is to establish a fixed formula and apply it in a generalized way. Each child is unique, with different needs and cultural backgrounds, and the kind of education chosen must respect that. It means that child's peculiarities will define the type of education that is best suited to her/his formation of intellect and character. It is important to highlight that homeschooling is not the solution for the chaotic situation of public education in most countries. As any kind of education, what will make of homeschooling a success is the commitment and dedication of those involved in this process. 



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# Learning American English: Difficulties in Pronunciation

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**Abstract:** When learning the English language, one of the major problems that a Brazilian student faces is the difficulty in pronouncing the words correctly. This happens because of the different use of the articulatory system by each language: the American English has much more sounds than the Brazilian Portuguese, being eleven vowels and twenty-four consonants against seven vowels and nineteen consonants. This contrast happens because the words in English have fewer syllables than the ones in Portuguese, so there must be a greater variety of sounds for them to be distinguished. Another issue that makes the learning process of English difficult for a Brazilian student is the correlation between pronunciation and writing, since there is almost no correlation between them in English, whereas in Portuguese it is almost total. There are also differences in the accent and rhythm of each language: while Portuguese has only three types of stressed syllable and its rhythm is syllable-timed, English has at least five types of stressed syllable and its rhythm is stress-timed. The purpose of this article is to identify some phonological differences between the languages; to explain the difficulties that a Brazilian student has in the learning process and to give some suggestions for the improvement of it.

**Keywords:** pronunciation, ESL, phoneme, English teaching, phonology, difficulties

## Introduction

Every language has its features according to its origin and history. Both English and Portuguese have come from the same stock: Indo-European, but, due to their different trajectories, now they differ a lot from each other, with the exception of a few words that are alike.

The differences that occur between these languages not only do happen in structure and vocabulary, but also in phonetics and phonology. Each language has a different usage of the articulatory system and, therefore, they have specific phonemes. This fact is one of the reasons why the major problems in learning a language remain in the pronunciation.

A person who speaks only one language believes that the sounds produced by him or her are the only ones possible. This idea interferes in the learning process of the student, because one will be based on his or her own phonemes and, therefore, will not recognize the sounds of the foreign language the way they actually are.

Although English and Portuguese have some similarity in vocabulary – mainly in writing –, pronunciation is very different in each language. While Portuguese has

seven vowels and nineteen consonants, American English – which is the language variety that will be used in this article – has eleven vowels and twenty-four consonants. This contrast happens because the words in English have fewer syllables than the ones in Portuguese, so there must be a greater variety of sounds for them to be distinguished.

Another contrast between the languages is the correlation between pronunciation and writing: in Portuguese, the oral interpretation of each word is clear, that is, the pronunciation of the written language is very similar to the oral one. In English, this correlation does not happen: it is and very irregular and not clear, as we can see, for example, with the grapheme “i”, that can represent six different sounds, as in the words *machine*; *bit*; *bite*; *noise*; *pencil* and *fruit* (Schütz, 2008).

There are also differences in the accent and rhythm of each language: Portuguese has only three types of stressed syllable and its rhythm is syllable-timed, in which each syllable is pronounced clearly. English, however, has at least five types of stressed syllable and its rhythm is stress-timed, which results on a compactness of the syllables.

Due to all those phonological differences between the languages, the learning process of English as a foreign language in Brazil is difficult and it takes a long time for the Brazilian learner to recognize all the differences. The purpose of this article is to identify some phonological differences between the languages; to explain the difficulties that a Brazilian student has in the learning process

and to give some suggestions for the improvement of it.

The references that will be used for this article are Schütz (2008), Junior (1985), Gimson (1970), Jones (1966), Avery (1995) and Mazurkiewicz (1976).

## 1. Differences between languages and difficulties in the learning process of English

### 1.1 Correlation between writing and pronunciation

According to Junior (1985), the writing system is derived from speech. In fact, children usually learn the pronunciation of words long before the spelling. Junior adds that “languages often exist for hundreds of years before they are reduced to writing” (p. 218) and “all widely used spelling systems are more or less irregular, and it must be admitted that English spelling may well be the most irregular of them all” (p. 219).

The oral interpretation of the words spelled in English is highly unclear. Its written system exists for more than a thousand years and, although the pronunciation of English has changed, its writing has not, making the spelling increasingly irregular (Gimson, p. 2). Besides that, the developers of English written form did not want this language to have a phonetic regularity:

they have been much concerned with having a spelling that would reveal something of the history of words and their relationship to other words. For example, the b in *debt* /dɛt/ serves as an indication that it is derived from the Latin *debitum*, though it results in an irregular spelling. (Junior, p. 219).

Avery (1995) gives us some examples of this irregularity in the spelling system, mentioning, for example, that the same sound may be represented by different letters, such as *two*, *threw* and *shoe*, which have all the sound /u:/. One sound can also be represented by combinations of letters, such as “*gh*” and “*ph*”, which have the /f/ sound. Another irregularity is that different sounds can be represented by the same letter, such as the letter *a*, which has five vowel sounds, as we can see in *make*, *math*, *all*, *any* and *sofa*.

However, in Portuguese, the pronunciation of the written language is very similar to the oral one. For example, there are seven phonemes and five letters that represent the sounds. It makes the correlation clear, constant and regular.

Therefore, an ESL (English as a Second Language) Brazilian student finds a great difficulty when learning how to spell and to read words in English, since one comes from a very regular spelling language to a very irregular one. That is one of the reasons why pronunciation is so important during the learning process of English: if one tries to study only through reading, one will not learn the right pronunciation of the words, due to its irregularities. According to Mazurkiewics (1976), English has a sound-spelling correlation of 12 to 13 percent, which is a very low percentage, in fact, the lowest one.

## 1.2 The vowels of English and Portuguese

According to Schütz (2008), English has eleven vowels and Portuguese has only sev-

en. It happens because English has a large number of words with only one syllable; it is a very compact language. Therefore, it requires a great number of vowel phonemes, so it would distinguish one word from another through pronunciation.

This great quantity of vowel sounds requires hearing accuracy, so the speaker would be able to recognize and produce the sounds correctly, which is very difficult for Brazilian learners because of the discrepancy between the languages when it comes to quantity of vowel sounds. “The higher the number of vowels, the more subtle the difference among them will be” (Schütz, 2008).

A usual mistake made by ESL students is the substitution of one vowel for another. Junior (1985) states that the causes of it are that (i) the learner pronounces the letters the way they would be pronounced in one’s native language; (ii) the irregular spelling of English deceives the student; (iii) one cannot identify nor reproduce two different sounds either because one does not have them or there is no distinction between them in one’s native language.

According to Schütz (2008), a mistake that is made by Brazilian learners is the non-distinction between sounds, such as the phonemes / i: / and / ɪ /, that are produced by the learners as / i /, so there would not be any differences between words such as *leave* and *live*. The phonemes / æ / and / ε / are both perceived as / ε /, so the pronunciation of the words *bad* and *bed* would be noticed as the same. / u: / and / ʊ / are pronounced as / u /, so there would not be any distinction between *fool* and *full*.

### 1.3 The consonants of English and Portuguese

Schütz states that English has twenty-four consonants and Portuguese has nineteen. Again, the former language has more phonemes than the last one and it also causes difficulties for the Brazilian learner to pronounce them all, since Portuguese does not have some of English consonants, so the ESL student would make the replacement of one consonant for another.

Schütz says that one of the mistakes that is made by the learners is, for example, the lack of aspiration of the voiceless stops / p /, / t / and / k /, since there is no such device in Portuguese. It may cause misunderstanding, because these sounds without proper aspiration could be perceived as / b /, / d / and / g / by the native speaker of English.

Another mistake made by Brazilian learners that is highlighted by Schütz is the pronunciation of the sounds / t / and / d / before / i : / or / ɪ /: in most part of Brazil, there are no / tɪ / or / dɪ / sounds, so the speakers tend to pronounce / tʃɪ / and / dʒɪ /, causing misunderstanding and neutralizing the contrast between words like *tick* and *chick*.

Another very common error committed by ESL students that Schütz indicates is the tendency to add a supporting vowel to the end of words that end with stops, affricates and fricatives, such as *like* [laɪk] and *word* [wɜːd], which are pronounced as [ˈlaɪki] and [ˈwɜːdʒɪ]. As we can see, a syllable is added to the term and it can cause misunderstanding in words like *Ed* [ɛd], which would be pronounced as *edge* [ɛdʒ]. It happens because these kinds of words do not exist in Portuguese,

so the use of the supporting vowels makes it more comfortable for the ESL Brazilian student to pronounce them.

The phonemes / ð / and / θ / also do not exist in Portuguese, so the speaker tries to replace the first one by / d / and the second one by / f /, / s / or / t /. It also causes miscomprehension of words like *math* [mæθ] and *think* [θɪŋk], which may be pronounced as *Matt* [mæt] and *sink* [sɪŋk].

Schütz also cites that Portuguese does not always have the retroflex / r /, so it is usually replaced by the phoneme / x / in word-initial position. This substitution neutralizes the contrast between words like *hair* [hɛər] and *rare* [rɛər].

### 1.4 Word-Stress, Sentence-Stress and Rhythm

In English, the most important syllables of a word stand out among the unimportant ones. Hence, stress is a very important feature when learning it. If a word is pronounced with the wrong stress, it is very hard for people to understand what was said (Junior, 1985).

Junior (1985) adds that, when a syllable is unstressed, its vowel usually has one of the following sounds: / ɪ /, / ʊ / or / ə /. The most neutral and frequent vowel is the schwa / ə /, because it is automatically produced by speakers, since their speech organs are relaxed, so it is easier to be made. It happens because native speakers do not think that it is worth making effort in the pronunciation of unstressed syllables. Since there are more unstressed than stressed syllables, the sounds / ɪ /, / ʊ / and / ə / are the most frequent in English.

Junior cites a common error committed by ESL learners, which is the pronunciation of unstressed vowels the way they are spelled, that is, instead of pronouncing [əpærəntli] (*apparently*), it is said [æpærəntli], for example.

In English, the stress of a sentence is as important as of a word. According to Schütz, it is a *stress-timed* language, that is:

(Its) rhythm is based on stressed syllables of certain words that occur at apparently irregular intervals when we look at the written sentence. The rows of in-between unstressed syllables tend to be compressed and some syllables can almost disappear. This means that the amount of time it takes to say a sentence in English depends on the number of syllables that receive the primary sentence stress (Schütz, 2008).

In contrast, Portuguese is a *syllable-timed* language, in which:

(Its) rhythm of speech is based on the syllable, taking each syllable a similar amount of time to be pronounced. Therefore, the amount of time to say a given sentence depends on the number of syllables, and contractions rarely occur. [...] each syllable is distinctively and clearly pronounced, timing the flow of the language (Schütz, 2008).

Junior (1985) illustrates the difficulties of obtaining a good rhythm in English, dividing them into five parts: (i) giving proper emphasis to stressed syllables, and making them recur rather regularly within

a thought group; (ii) weakening unstressed words and syllables, and obscuring the vowels in most of them; (iii) organizing words properly into thought groups by means of pauses; (iv) blending the final sound of each word and syllable with the initial sound of the one following within the same thought group; (v) fitting the entire sentence into a normal intonation pattern.

## Conclusion

After this reflection about the differences in pronunciation between Portuguese and English, many difficulties in the learning process of an ESL Brazilian student were found and commented. These problems happen due to the different use of the speech organs that each language makes and to the dissimilar features of them. There are many English phonemes that do not exist in Portuguese, making the acquisition of them very hard for the Brazilian learner, and, therefore, causing the phenomenon of vowel and consonant substitution, which causes misunderstanding in the communication.

Another contrast that was cited in this article was the correlation between writing and pronunciation, which is very irregular in English and regular in Portuguese. A person who studies the former language only through reading will probably have many problems in pronunciation. In order to avoid this issue, there should not be an early contact with an English text; the learner should always be in touch with the oral form of the language through a teacher, a friend and, especially, a native English speaker. It would help the



student to understand and to pronounce well the words that one reads. Besides, one would also learn the right pronunciation of the term, decreasing the mistakes caused by vowel and consonant substitution. It demands practice and attention to the native speaker's speech.

Rhythm, word-stress and sentence-stress were also discussed in this article. These features are very important to English: there are no boundaries between the syllables, so this language is set through its rhythm and stress. On the other hand, Portuguese has the syllables

clearly separated, so a Brazilian learner has difficulty to speak English the way native speakers do. Again, it is crucial to listening to an inborn English speaker, so one would be more familiar with it.

For the ones who are teaching English, it is very important to pay attention to the students' pronunciation, correcting their mistakes since the beginning, so it would be easier for them to face those common problems when they meet them. A teacher should not let a student speak wrongly; he or she has to insist on the right pronunciation.

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# Is there a Space for English Literature in Brazilian High School Curriculums?

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**Abstract:** Literature has a wide and complex role in the upbringing of high schools students, and Literatures of English-speaking countries can help improving this formation. This paper has the purpose of discussing the problem of the literary text in class, focusing the presence or absence of the foreign literatures. Other important issues are the role of teachers, the problem of the subject, the problematic of cultural knowledge and the reading practice. The object of study is the government policies and textbooks.

**Keywords:** Literature, Teaching, Foreign literatures.

After some years of hard study at University, a lot of English students in Brazil feel disappointed about the use of English Literature in their careers. This situation is not exclusive of English but it is more relevant, considering the importance and necessity of this language. Society as a whole agrees about it; however, the curriculums are not open to Literature from the English speaking countries.

In this paper my intention is to show that it is important and possible to include English Literature in High Schools Curriculums without causing any problem to the subjects and contents that are already established. To defend this perspective I will bring some ideas and considerations of William Cereja, from his book *Ensino de Literatura*. Also, I will present some examples of common textbooks used in classrooms. In the end the intention is not to overvalue English or its role but to propose a way of improving the upbringing of students in Literature and maybe help the language learning process, concerning cultural aspects.

William Cereja (2005) devotes his book to a discussion towards possible approaches to the teaching of literature. His reflection includes the concept of *dialogismo* which is taken from Bakhtin's thought. His justifications can be summarized in this excerpt:

Through the dialogue among texts of different times, authors, languages and cultures, students and teachers would be drowned in the possibility of understanding the past and the present, or the presence of present in a text from another time. (2005: 8) [my translation]<sup>2</sup>

## Reading Situation

One thing cannot be ignored in the teaching situation nowadays. The presence or absence of other languages' cultures and the literature teaching are important details, but the state school in Brazil still faces a precarious and worrying environment.

<sup>2</sup> Pelo diálogo entre textos de diferentes épocas, autores, línguas e culturas, alunos e professores estariam mergulhados na possibilidade de compreender o passado e o presente, ou a presença do presente num texto de outra época.

And even if data proves an increase in the indicators about reading, for example, we know that a lot of students avoid the reading practice. So, we have the distance between students and the books. Although in the last few years the government has given the schools some more “attractive” books, sometimes these books do not reach the students because of the difficulty in managing schools libraries, among other reasons.

If we insist on going deeper into this set of problems, we find the discussion about the literary culture which “we have” or “do not have” or “we are constructing”. About this, Soares (2004) has given good ideas, developing concepts as *letramento literário*. Thereby the “literary culture problem” is something that has direct relation with the historical context – mainly the last century – and political policies.

## Role of Teachers

Another interesting point that Cereja takes from his practical research done in schools – public and private – in São Paulo city is that teachers have an important role indicating and giving direction to the choice of students about books and reading habits. He observed 4 schools and one of the questions which guided his research was “When you read literary works, are they in general...?” and 67,5% of total answered “The ones that teachers recommend”. From this the author indicates: “Firstly, I highlight the role of schools as a formation agent of readers and of literary taste.” (2005: 22) [my translation]<sup>3</sup>

The conclusion here is that even if teachers have problems motivating students to read, their responsibility and role are still relevant. And as Candido (2002) points about the role of literature at schools in terms of *formation*, teachers have to be aware of their space creating a repertoire of reading, because in this process they can totally “conquer” students or “distance” them away from the already distant books.

## The Subject Problem

It is impossible to discuss the possibility to include foreign literatures in high schools without contextualizing the problem of the role of Literature – which in the last few years has taken space. Since the period of military dictatorship, the government policies began to focus on the practical and technological intention of the teaching. This proposal corresponded to the development of Brazilian economy. After some time, in this decade, the government decided to change the policies radically. Literature, Portuguese Language, Foreign Languages, Spanish, Art and Physical Education are included in a big area called “Languages, Codes and their Technologies”. As we see in Perrone-Moisés (2006) the concept of Literature is losing space, the discussions are vague and Literature, strangely, was put in the “reading” category. These and other points have direct consequences in the teaching practice as they regulate the production of textbooks, the attitude of teachers and give direction to important national tests such as ENEM.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Primeiramente, destaca-se o papel da escola como agente formador de leitores e do gosto literário.

<sup>4</sup> Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio.

The situation that is presented is that Literature itself is being forgotten and reduced in curriculums. Perrone-Moisés argues that this is not only a Brazilian problem, situating also the French and Portuguese case. So, a question could remain: in the end, is this discussion worthless? – If Brazilian Literature is endangered, foreign literatures would be much more. Actually, our discussion is, due to this entire environment, more opportune and relevant. In a globalized world, which dictates educational policies, questions and problems as “global vs. local identity”, “cultural knowledge”, “wide formation of students”, surely the foreign literature dilemma is included.

### History or Literature teachers?

Following Cereja and looking closely at literature lessons, some problems are noticed, and each of them has implications in the teaching and learning process. We want to point a few: The focus on “History of Literature”. Teachers use the time of classes to talk about the periods, esthetics, authors, but the literary text is forgotten. This is not something new and teachers are aware of that. As the author says: “It is sure that although the literature lessons circle a didactic speech *about* the literary, almost always in them the literary text itself is barely explored and experienced by students.” (2005: 11) [my translation]<sup>5</sup> And this worry about teaching the historical background makes teachers more “History teachers” rather than Literature ones.

The conclusion is that this situation has to be changed, but it involves gov-

ernment policies, the development of textbooks, the formation of teachers and the practice of teaching itself. The inclusion of foreign literatures depends on this. Besides, Brazilian and Portuguese texts have also lost their space which has to be re-affirmed. Mainly considering the generic texts that have been substituting the literary texts: summaries, internet comments and interpretations, and *vestibular* focused approaches, only to mention some.

### An alternative way to start

Another forgotten situation is that the teaching of Foreign Literatures can also open doors to introduce some difficult books of Brazilian/Portuguese Literatures making them easier or more interesting to have contact with.

A simple example can make this idea clear. Some scholars as Helen Caldwell (2002) bring closer the important works *Dom Casmurro* by Machado de Assis and *Otelo* by William Shakespeare. Firstly, most teachers as we will see next neglect the knowledge produced in the academy circle. Actually, in many cases it is not their fault because the access to the studies is not total, but the internet has been turning it possible.

Anyway, the point that is relevant is that teachers could do this approximation which surely will improve the lesson and contribute to the view about the literary work. It would situate Machado in a tradition and clarify his influences not to overvalue the “origin”. And it also would show how the genius writer continues an important

5 É certo que, embora circule nas aulas de literatura um discurso didático sobre o literário, quase sempre nelas o texto literário propriamente dito é pouco trabalhado e vivenciado pelos alunos.

literary thematic (love and jealousy) in which area he left his great and expressive legacy. We could imagine some justifications to this situation. For instance, lack in the formation of the teacher, lack of interest, inadequacy of textbooks, difficulty to manage all the possible approaches to the teaching of Literature.

Actually, it is not impossible to insert this kind of study. In fact, some teachers are not used to working with comparative approach; however, an activity like this would improve and go deeper in the literature ways. And from this point, other arts like cinema could be included, making a huge net of connections that students would benefit from and their upbringing too. Indeed, a lot of important and relevant knowledge from the academy is neglected in the historic method, mainly considering studies about the texts themselves and their relations. So, almost all the comparative studies are put aside by teachers and textbooks, and the university research continues distant from schools.

## Culture and Relations

Following the ideas from Candido and Auerbach and other scholars, teachers and textbooks production cannot forget that the books have relation with the Literature tradition – not only with the historic and social events. This does not mean that the literary schools and esthetics teaching are essential, but that the world of culture and their relations and connections cannot be hidden. So,

the influences that authors and books receive are also important and relevant even more in the Brazilian panorama – a country that was colonized and it is still building its own culture.

About the cultural profits of teaching foreign literatures, Perrone-Moisés gives her contribution:

About the specialization in foreign literatures, it does not constitute necessarily a separation from Brazilian culture because this is the result of assimilation of many foreign subsidies (...) And the good literature is, by definition, universal. (2006: 28) [my translation]<sup>6</sup>

## A look in the Policies

Taking a look at the policies that the Brazilian government established for state teaching we can see the space that an intended “wide” formation gives to other nations’ literatures. The *Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio* (2006) make only one comment in the section that concerns the choice that teachers have to make about what they will teach. It says: “Nothing prevents, and it is desirable, that literary works of other nationalities – if this correspond to the necessities of the curriculum of your school – be also selected”. (2006: 74) [my translation]<sup>7</sup>

## Textbooks

Concerning the didactic material, a brief research of two common textbooks used in Brazil helps to discuss the present direction of the teaching. The first is the collection of books published by Cereja & Magalhães: *Português Língua-*

6 Quanto à especialização em literaturas estrangeiras, ela não constitui necessariamente um afastamento da cultura brasileira, porque esta é fruto da assimilação de muitos aportes estrangeiros (...) E porque a boa literatura é, por definição, universal.

7 Nada impede, e é desejável, que obras de outras nacionalidades, se isso responder às necessidades do currículo de sua escola, sejam também selecionadas.

*gens*: Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of 2010. These three books, one for each year of high school, substitute the only-one edition used for many years in state schools since the end of 90's. The other is a new work by Faraco & Moura – *Português Projetos*: only-one edition of 2009 – that is starting to be chosen by teachers now.

First of all, it is important to make a distinction between the citation of a book and a work, such as exercises or discussions made about the book or a chapter or even about an excerpt. In the two objects of analysis, the first and second textbooks of the collection of Cereja & Magalhães and the textbook of Faraco & Moura, the English-speaking origin books are just mentioned, indicated as a possible reading, or as other literary works related to some issue.

Beginning with the first volume of *Português Linguagens*, it mentions 16 books of English-speaking literature that go from the popular *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling and *The Da Vinci Code* of Dan Brown to the classical *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare and *Moll Flanders* of Daniel Defoe. The second volume has 22 references of books and some just of writers. Some examples of books are *Moby Dick* of Henry Melville, *Tom Jones* of Henry Fielding and some books and short-stories of Edgar Allan Poe; and as mentioned writers there are William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde, for example.

On the other hand, Faraco & Moura in their entire textbook make only two citations of English-speaking writers: *Hamlet* of William Shakespeare and *The Lord of the Rings* series of J. R. R. Tolkien.

These two situations clearly show the problem that we are trying to point and discuss here. There is an exaggeration about the importance or about the necessity for students to know in detail all the Brazilian and Portuguese literatures. The literary works find in classes a very small space, in most cases they just appear to provide exercises or to be an example of a literary esthetic. Considering that the textbooks lead and sometimes determine the way that the classes are given, we have a very poor educational proposal. It is evident in the collection of Cereja & Magalhães that Edgar Allan Poe has a privileged place, because the authors make different connections with Poe, mainly between the gothic esthetic and the short-story tradition. In fact, Poe appears more than any English-speaking writer even Shakespeare himself. And still there is a significant dependency on the French tradition and literature, as the poets and novelists of France appear a lot.


With Faraco & Moura the situation is more problematic because we do not even have citations. Shakespeare and Tolkien were genius but they do not represent themselves the entire English-speaking literary tradition. The authors deliberately put aside the whole tradition of foreign literature as it does not exist and they place the Brazilian and Portuguese literatures as independent and distant of any influence. The textbook has its good features as the inclusion of a contemporary view but this absence is symptomatic of an educational position that does not have to be accepted without a long discussion.

## Conclusion

In their methodology section, Cereja & Magalhães discuss the proposal of a dialogical teaching practice. About this “presence” of foreign literatures they say:

This dialogical perspective does not fit in the narrow limits of an extreme nationalistic conception of teaching that admits just the Brazilian or Luso-Brazilian literary text as an object of teaching. The dialogues in the areas of culture and literature transcend geographical and linguistics borders. It is not about depreciating our traditions, our culture, nor our ethnic and linguistic formation. On the contrary, it is to persecute the dialogues of our literature in itself or with other literatures. It is comprehend it better and respect it in its historicism, in its particular characteristics and its differences, in its movements of pure subservience and imitation or in its revolt about the foreign culture. (...) The studies are open also to incorporate texts of foreign writers which contributed to define the ways of our literature. (2010: 7) [my translation]<sup>8</sup>

Then the authors include an excerpt of the PCN+ as a way to reinforce this idea, but actually the text of the policy is dark and obscure making even more difficult to understand this desirable presence which is not real in the curriculums and textbooks. Their discussion is interesting as a new point of view, which intends to relate different literatures, realities and cultures. And finally they bring Bakhtin to affirm that the text has to be put in the “great temporality”. So we see that the issue is still open to discussions mainly considering the cultural impact, the role of teachers and textbooks and the space that the literary text has nowadays in the classrooms.

Finally this gap of reflections about this polemic topic again contributes to this current environment in which textbooks lead the classes, teachers do not think about their practice and its consequences and students have small significant contact with the literary text, national and foreign. In fact, the space for foreign literatures in high schools curriculums is just another – but crucial – detail in the complex problematic of literature teaching in Brazil. 

8 Essa perspectiva dialógica não cabe nos limites estreitos de uma concepção ufano-nacionalista de ensino, que admita apenas o texto literário nacional ou luso-brasileiro como objeto de ensino. Os diálogos no âmbito da literatura e da cultura transcendem fronteiras geográficas e linguísticas. Não se trata de desprestigiar nossas tradições, nossa cultura, nem nossa formação étnica e linguística. Ao contrário, perseguir os diálogos realizados por nossa literatura no interior dela mesma ou com outras literaturas é compreendê-la melhor e respeitá-la em sua historicidade, em suas particularidades e diferenças, em seus movimentos de pura subserviência e imitação ou de revolta em relação à cultura estrangeira. (...) Os estudos se abrem para incorporar também textos de autores estrangeiros que contribuíram para definir os rumos tomados por nossa literatura.

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