Prospero and Caliban Revisited:

Brazilian Critical Perspectives on World Literature in English

Gláucia Renate Gonçalves
José de Paiva dos Santos
Editors

Prospero and Caliban Revisited:
Brazilian Critical Perspectives
on World Literature in English

Faculdade de Letras da UFMG
Diretora: Graciela Ravetti
Vice-Diretora: Sueli Maria Coelho

Revisão: Gláucia R. Gonçalves

Projeto e Diagramação: Alda Lopes

Capa: Ramon Duarte

Ficha catalográfica elaborada pelos Bibliotecários da Faculdade de Letras/UFMG

P966

Prospero and Caliban Revisited : Brazilian Critical Perspectives on World Literature Perspectives in English / Gláucia Renate Gonçalves, José de Paiva dos Santos, editors. – Belo Horizonte : Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, 2020.
136 p.

ISBN: 978-65-87237-11-4.

Vários autores.

1. Crítica. 2. Literatura inglesa – História e crítica. 3. Literatura americana – História e crítica. 3. Literatura canadense – História e crítica. 4. Literatura irlandesa – História e crítica. I. Gonçalves, Gláucia Renate. II. Santos, José de Paiva dos. III. Título.

CDD : 809

Gláucia Renate Gonçalves
José de Paiva dos Santos
Editors

Prospero and Caliban Revisited: Brazilian Critical Perspectives on World Literature in English

Belo Horizonte
Faculdade de Letras da UFMG
2020

Acknowledgments

Our sincere thanks to the Graduate Program in Literary Studies (Poslit) and the College of Letters (FALE) at the Federal University of Minas Gerais for the support given to the Center for the Study of Literatures in English and for the publication of this collection.

Contents

Brazil and World Literatures in English: Introduction

Gláucia Renate Gonçalves
José de Paiva dos Santos

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you
> For learning me your language.
> (*The Tempest* I.ii.366-368)

To speak of world literature is to set literature in an international context, pointing to the flow of books in translation and also in their original languages. The concept itself is not new, and may even be said to predate the national literatures of modernity; Goethe already referred to a *Weltliteratur* in the beginning of the nineteenth century. When we use the term World Literature in English both in the title of this introduction and the title of the collection, far from suggesting a homogeneous body of works, what we have in mind are "worlds of world literature," to borrow David Damrosch's expression (2), written in a particular language. Damrosch's expression underscores heterogeneity and is well suited to describe a literary production that requires more and more skills, such as openness and comparativeness, from readers faced with diverse cultural paradigms.

Damrosch states that the two ways a work can "enter the realm of world literature" are "by bringing the world directly into the text itself" or "by circulating out into the world, finding readers in distant times, places and languages, often far beyond the author's own expectation" (86). His words offer a double cue for this collection of essays: first, one could sum up a long list of works that evoke parts of the world other than that of the writers, among which Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* is a well-known example

that we will explore below as we discuss the relationship between world literatures in English and Brazil. Second, the study of literatures written in English in Brazil attests that indeed those works circulate out from where they were written and have reached distant shores.

In Brazil, the study of the literature written in English initially encompassed only the literary production of the United Kingdom and of the United States of America; with the advent of Cultural Studies and Multiculturalism, however, the broadening of the canon gradually made way for works by 'minority' writers. Multiculturalism, in *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*,

> connotes either some mode of transnational interrelationships between the cultures of two or more countries, or it suggests in a more circumscribed manner the broader dimensions of multiple identities within the boundaries of a single nation. (Payne 462)

The meaning that has caught on most is the second one, in an attempt to account for diverse backgrounds and experiences within the national territory and, above all, to counterpoint the disputable notion of a cultural melting pot:

> the term's second usage has been basically an outgrowth of certain segments of American academic and educational interests in order to provide a kind of umbrella credibility for the study of ethnic diversity and pluralism by such varied groups as Afro-Americans, Chicanos and Chicanas, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and gays and lesbians, and for the expression of concern about the representation to the majority society of the cultural identities of race, gender, ethnicity, and sex, both currently and historically. (Payne 464)

If, on the one hand, multiculturalism favors the epistemological construction of identities, on the other hand, it constitutes a pedagogical, top down approach to this very construction. Caught between the extremes of being considered by some as a manifestation of liberalism and, on the other end of the spectrum, as a form of separatism, multiculturalism, despite its shortcomings, has effectively contributed to the widespread dissemination of works of literature that would otherwise not be the object of serious academic investigation.

Interestingly enough, the study of literatures in English outside English speaking countries seems to be precisely at the crossroads of the first and less known, or less employed meaning of multiculturalism, that is, the relationship among cultures from different countries, and the second one, namely, the literature of writers outside the mainstream. This is not to say, of course, that canonical works are no longer the object of study outside countries whose language is English. The canon continues to intrigue and earn the attention of researchers, but since the last decades of the twentieth century the interest in non-canonical works seems to increase at the same rate as research in world literature in English, as conference programs and the publication of critical works attest.

In a similar move, literature written in the English language is 'translated' across other cultures. Still read and studied in its original language, it is re-routed beyond the borders of the countries where it was produced and engages in dialogues that elicit novel forms of expression. So, in the same way that multiculturalism has made room for dissonant voices that made the canon be read in new ways, literatures in English too are read from a new light as they are 'uprooted' and travel abroad.

A case in point is Latin America and its relation with 'American' culture. The American Studies Association, founded in 1951, and the subsequent creation of departments of American Studies in the United States throughout the 1960s and 1970s contributed to an interdisciplinary approach to culture. While it is true that the field of American Studies can be considered by some as relatively more traditional or conservative in comparison, for instance, with the Cultural Studies as 'practiced' in other parts of the world, it is undeniable that the former promoted a reaching out to countries beyond the national borders as a result of the recognition that 'America' does not refer exclusively to the United States, as well as the recognition that the research developed abroad equally contributed to the field.

In the case of Brazil, the study of the literary production written in the English language has a long history, going as far back as the nineteenth century, when the school Colégio de Pedro II was founded.[1] In 1970 the Brazilian Association of University Professors of English – ABRAPUI was created to gather teachers, professors and graduate students in the field

[1] For more on the history of English Literature in Brazil, see *Historiografia Brasileira da Literatura Inglesa*, by Luiz Eduardo Oliveira.

of English. In its initial years, the association organized annual meetings dedicated specifically to literature, but after 1979 the annual conferences alternated between literature and language. After 2003, the meetings became biennial and started to gather researchers from both fields of study.

Abrapui's goal has been to stimulate debates on the teaching and the research of English and Literatures in English in the Brazilian academic circles. The association has invited more and more foreign scholars to participate in its conference's round tables and panels so as to further the exchange of critical views that will benefit both Brazilian and foreign scholars and graduate students. As a result international cooperation has thrived on the individual as well as on the institutional level.

The academic exchange and the investigation of world literature in English in Brazil is informed by what Cielo Festino has termed the aesthetics of difference, which she defines as the aesthetics that "on one level, renders visible not only the aesthetic aspect, but also the social aspect of literature and, on the other, helps to coexist with the different Other" ("em um nível, torna visível o aspecto não somente estético, mas também social da literatura e, em outro nível, contribui para a convivência com esse Outro diferente"; 314). As such, it sheds light on the cultural context of the foreign literary work as it concomitantly illuminates the culture of the reader. This process, however, requires a suspension of power relations in order to allow "readings in which the cultural context defines the aesthetics and, in turn, the aesthetics help to better formulate cultural themes" ("são leituras em que o contexto cultura define a estética e, por sua vez, a estética ajuda a melhor formular temas culturais"; Festino 325).

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* may seem distant in time from today's aesthetics of difference, but the play can nevertheless shed some light on it. The relationship between Prospero and Caliban has resonated in discussions of *The Tempest*'s representation of the contact between the Old World and the Americas.[2] The once colonial Brazil has outgrown its role as the subservient Caliban,[3] the one who only parroted and echoed the literature of Prospero, and yielded academics who are the emblems of an irreversible transnationalism. This tropical Caliban, not in an act of rebelliousness but moved by genuine inquisitiveness, takes a step back for

[2] For a detailed discussion of this aspect, see especially part three of Hulme and Sherman's *'The Tempest' and Its Travels*.

[3] We thank Amanda Pavani Fernandes for bringing up the analogy with Shakespeare made during a meeting of NELLI in March 2019.

the necessary critical perspective and probes into the world of Prospero. If there is any defiance at all, it may lie in the contemporary Caliban's audacity to visit Prospero's libraries and catalog material his own way.

Among the several possible explanations for the origin of the name 'Caliban' for Shakespeare's character, the reference to the word 'cannibal' serves well the present discussion. Who, after all, is the cannibal? Native Americans or the Europeans who 'cannibalized' the New World? Brazilians who 'consume' literature written in English or foreign media who constantly exposes Brazilians to images and the culture of English speaking countries? Regardless of the answer, the fact is that the study of literatures in English is now 'normalized' throughout Brazil, consolidated by global circulation of print and digital works that characterizes the contemporary world.

'Deformed' by a foreign gaze, the new Caliban is an apt allegory for the twenty-first century and the study of world literature in English in Brazil. The present collection includes essays that do not have a shared focus. The common denominator of these texts is the fact that they are all about literatures in English read and written about from a Brazilian perspective. Whether the object under investigation is the work of an English canonical poet or novels by a Canadian writer, the foreign literature is seen from a Brazilian critical gaze.

Another aspect the essays have in common is that their authors are members of NELLI – Núcleo de Estudos de Literaturas em Língua Inglesa, a center for the study of literatures in English founde at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Similar to Abrapui, though on a regional level, the purpose of the center is to gather professors and graduate students developing research in the 'minor' – at least in Brazil – field of world literature in English. Since its creation in 2018, the center has organized a series of small meetings to discuss the ongoing individual research of their members and reflect on the challenges and current state of the field.

The essays gathered in this collection comprise a range of authors, themes, as well as critical approaches, thereby reflecting the variety of research interests among the members of NELLI and scholars in Brazilian universities as a whole. For quite some time, Canada has figured as an important partner within the domain of literary criticism and academic exchange in Brazil. Three of the texts in this collection highlight this ongoing dialogue, as the essays by Amanda Pavani Fernandes, Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira, and Melissa Cristina Silva de Sá demonstrate. In "The Deterioration of the Utopian Simulacrum: Margaret Atwood's *The Heart*

Goes Last," Amanda discusses the intersections between utopian literature and science fiction. Employing Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum as critical reference, she examines the novel as an instance of the deterioration of the utopian impulse in contemporary dystopian novels. More than that, according to Amanda, the novel reveals, through the failure of the Consilience and Positron project, the inevitability of semiotic relations and the inscription of simulacra in world-building and history-making processes in the contemporary world.

Margaret Atwood is also the focus of Melissa Cristina Silva de Sá in "Storytelling and Survival in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." In this essay, she demonstrates how in both novels Atwood places storytelling, mythmaking and oral tales as crucial survival tools in post-apocalyptic, dystopian scenarios. Melissa's concern is the novels' depiction of the disastrous outcomes when storytelling or the sharing of personal experiences is replaced by exacerbated trust on scientific rational knowledge.

Focusing also on Margaret Atwood but from a different critical angle, Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira's essay "Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*: Empowering Displacements and the Reconfiguration of Canadian Women's Writing in the 1970s" examines the novel's role in what he calls the "reconfiguration of women's writings in the 1970's English-speaking Canada" (83). After an overview of the development of feminist thought in the aftermath of the publication of Virginia Wolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, Luiz demonstrates how *Lady Oracle*, through the comings and goings of the novel's protagonist Joan Foster, engages in questions dear to the Second Wave's feminist thinkers. For him, the novel's thematization of issues such as women's displacements as well as the subversion and resignification of signs and discourses, especially those associated with the public versus private domain, constitute the work's most important contribution to current feminist debates.

In the last decades, Black literature has also become a fertile field of research in Brazil, as attested by the numerous journal issues, round tables, and symposia devoted to the black diaspora in Brazil and around the world. This collection brings three essays analyzing works by black writers. In "Neoliberalism in *Behold the Dreamers*, by Imbolo Mbue: The Latest Menace to the American Dream," Cláudio Roberto Vieira Braga analyzes the work of a Cameroonian American novelist, Imbolo Mbue. His analysis discusses the representation of a theme cherished by several U.S. writers, namely, literary renderings of the American Dream. Cláudio argues that in

this novel Mbue provides a "diasporic gaze" (10) on the representation of the United States as the land of the self-made man, the place where hard-working individuals can achieve financial and personal success regardless of their place of origin. Cláudio's analysis shows how the financial crisis of 2007, as portrayed in the novel, discloses the sordid side of the American Dream, given that persons of African descent are affected differently by the country's economic disaster and neo-liberal policies. An interesting aspect of black diaspora Cláudio examines is the "diasporic return," namely, the fact that many immigrants end up returning to their country of origin, which is the case with the Jongas, the novel's protagonists.

Black experience is also the focus of Juliana Borges Oliveira de Morais's essay "Colors and Rainbows in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*." Yet, her concern here is more specifically related to African American women's long history of abuse and exclusion in North American society. Juliana's analysis centers on Ntozake Shange's use of color symbolism in the choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*, which in her view constitutes a clever device to draw attention to the diversity of black women's experiences; it is a way of fighting the various forms of essentialism that have contributed to silence women's voices and render their experiences irrelevant. More than that, Juliana claims that Shange's use of the rainbow and colors stands for hope as well amidst the various forms of adversities black women face daily to survive in a racist and sexist society.

In a similar note, Natália Fontes de Oliveira's essay "Motherhood and the Ethics of Care in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and *Sula*" discusses the complexities of black experience, this time around the issue of care among black women. Drawing from a variety of feminist thinkers, she examines the various nuances of the expression "ethics of care," with a special focus on how slavery and Jim Crow laws greatly altered the social and moral implications of this concept. In her essay, she demonstrates how in *A Mercy* and *Sula* Morrison thematizes this issue by portraying women characters struggling daily to choose between an ethics focused on solidarity, bonding, and trust, and an ethics centered on justice, separation, and individuality. For Natália, although Morrison's characters' actions may seem unethical sometimes, the reader needs to be aware of the harsh realities these black mothers have had to cope with to endure and guarantee their survival and also that of their loved ones.

Traditional works from the western canon, as represented here by John Milton and James Joyce, have also received critical attention in this collection. Drawing from theories of film adaptation, José Otaviano da Mata Machado argues in "John Huston's The Dead: Shedding Light and Casting Shadows on James Joyce's Short Story" that Huston's 1987 film rendition of James Joyce's short story "The Dead" goes beyond mere translation of a literary work into the language of film. For José, the film complements the short story in that it sometimes sheds light "on certain narrative aspects which are left shadowed in Joyce's work" (3), and other times, it shadows that which is conspicuous in the literary work. His comparative analysis of Hudson's adaptations of Joyce's text underlines his belief that to see the movie adaptation and the literary work as competing narratives is to miss the role each one plays in the creation of art and meaning.

In a similar comparative effort, in "The Brazilian Milton: Innovation, Recreative Spirit and Absence in Machado de Assis" Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade analyzes Machado de Assis's short story "The Devil's Church" in comparison with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. She argues that traces of Milton's masterpiece, in the form of allusions and indirect references, can be found in this text, a sign that the Brazilian writer was not only well read, but also in tune with important issues – such as religion, for instance – taking place in Europe and Brazil during his time. Her major claim is that Machado is not a simple imitator of the English bard. Rather, Milton's voice gains new meanings and nuances when transposed to Machado's literary universe. To strengthen her reading of Machado and Milton, Miriam resorts to Jacques Derrida's notion of logic of the supplement, which fits well in her analysis of the Brazilian writer's intertextual dialogue with the English poet. Miriam suggests that rather than imitation, what one sees in Machado is expansion and supplementation of meaning.

The essays that make up this collection are a sort of embodiment of a new Caliban. As Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman have argued, "a handful of literary characters seem to break free of their original text and become culturally available across a wide spectrum . . . But Caliban is perhaps the only literary character to achieve this status from the starting-point of being a *minor* character" (xiii). As a play that invokes traveling, *The Tempest* has 'spilled' Caliban upon our shore and invested him with the power of critical reading. In the preface to *'The Tempest' and Its Travels*, Hulme and Sherman ask "where, or what, is the island on which the play is set?" (xiv), to which we answer, it is here, it is everywhere. Like a Shakespearean

island, Brazil is where the voice of Caliban, represented by our indigenous critical standpoints, is heard loudly. With this collection of essays, we hope to show Prospero how fruitful dialogue can be. Echoing *The Tempest*, Caliban now utters: 'my profit on learning your language is not cursing you, but teaching you mine.'

Works Cited

Damrosch, David. *How to Read World Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Festino, Cielo G. "A Estética da Diferença e o Ensino das Literaturas de Língua Inglesa." *Revista Gragoatá*, vol. 19, no. 37, 2014, pp. 312-30.

Hulme, Peter and William H. Sherman, editors. *"The Tempest" and its Travels*. Reaktion Books, 2000.

Oliveira, Luiz Eduardo. *Historiografia Brasileira da Literatura Inglesa*. Pontes, 2015.

Payne, Michael and Jessica R. Barbera, editors. *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. 2nd ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Shakespeare, William. "The Tempest." *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Ed. Peter Alexander. Collins, 1985, pp. 1-26.

The Deterioration of the Utopian Simulacrum: Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*

Amanda Pavani Fernandes

The Heart Goes Last was published in 2015, one of the most recent science fictional dystopias written by Margaret Atwood. It follows the three volumes that compose the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013). The intersection between utopian literature and science fiction, of which Atwood's novel is an example, is a form of turning the mirror to one's reality. These works, in their extrapolation and structure, expose anxieties, conflicts and crises in representation in their postulated universes. In this article, I show the way the novel demonstrates, in its world-building and character ambiguities, a potential deterioration of the utopian impulse, using Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum as a critical tool for analysis.[1] *The Heart Goes Last* also displays varying degrees of construction of signs, with their possible takeover by the subject, be that subject a protagonist, a narrator, or readers themselves. The analysis of this novel is pertinent because it provides, from the lens of critical dystopia's theoretical framework, an isolated society with warped nostalgic values, in which citizens alternate prisoners, and vice-versa, in their daily routines. World building in the novel occurs over several instances of simulacra, as I discuss in the following paragraphs.

The story begins with couple Stan and Charmaine, who had been living in their car since they lost their home mortgage and were unable to find jobs suited to their education after an economic crisis. This crisis mirrors an actual one that took place in 2008, as mentioned by Coral Ann

[1] The theoretical development on the idea of Baudrillard's simulacrum is based on my doctorate thesis, "The simulacrum in contemporary science fiction: Atwood, Willis, Piercy, Collins, Cadigan" (2020).

Howells in her article "True Trash" (305). Charmaine works the day shift in a bar called PixieDust (a name whose structure is similar to *The Year of the Flood*'s Scales and Tails), while Stan spends his days unsuccessfully going to job interviews. One day, Charmaine sees a commercial for a new project that offered not only housing, but jobs, the Consilience Project: "Work with like-minded others! Help solve the nation's problem of joblessness and crime while solving your own! Accentuate the positive!" (31), the man in the commercial exclaims. Although Stan does not entirely trust a proposal that seems far too good to be true, Charmaine convinces him to give it a try.

At first, everything seems perfect, indeed: the Consilience Project is a small, isolated society that revolves around Positron prison:

> So many jobs could be spawned by them [prisons]: construction jobs, jobs in agriculture, if there was a farm attached: an ever-flowing cornucopia of jobs. Medium-size towns with large penitentiaries could maintain themselves, and the people inside such towns could live in middle-class comfort. And if every citizen were either a guard or a prisoner, the result would be full employment ...
>
> And since it was unrealistic to expect certified criminality from 50 percent of the population, the fair thing would be for everyone to take turns: one month in, one month out. (49)

After Stan and Charmaine agree that they will never leave the Consilience walls, they receive a small house fully furnished and some credits that they can use to purchase items from the Consilience catalogue. They are each assigned jobs both during their periods inside and outside Positron prison that are related to their previous experience – at that point, Charmaine is exceedingly happy, and they lead regular lives for a few years inside the system.

Sex, however, is a pervading drive in the novel, and it is the reason their experience in the supposed experiment starts to go awry. On a certain switchover day, Stan finds a note in his fridge, for a man named Max, that says "I'm starved for you," signed "Jasmine." Assuming it was a note between the alternates, who used their house when he and Charmaine were in prison, Stan starts fantasising about Jasmine, imagining her as everything that boring, pastel-flower-wearing Charmaine was not. Later, the reader discovers that Jasmine is, in fact, Charmaine, who had met Stan's alternate by accident and who had instantly begun an affair with him, in empty houses

throughout Consilience, every switchover day. With Max, whose real name is later revealed to be Phil, Charmaine discovers a sexual self that she sees as separate from her "wife self." While Stan tries to ambush and discover Jasmine on switchover days, he is eventually ambushed by Jocelyn, the alternate and Phil's wife. Howells compares the novel's sarcastic switch in couples with the dynamics between Helen, Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. More importantly, Atwood also subverts that comedic dynamic from the play in another parallel: as Titania is put under a spell to fall in love with the first thing she sees upon waking up, which causes her to fall in love with Bottom, so does Atwood in proposing a surgery that caused the same effect on her characters. For the couples in *The Heart Goes Last*, the switch seems to operate through a duality of pure x dirty. Victims of the Bottom surgery, so to say, become, on the other hand, blindly albeit blissfully happy – much like Titania during the first half of Shakespeare's play.

Although that moment in the novel is described as funny by Howells, in "he is trapped, often quite hilariously, in Jocelyn's sadistic games of kinky sex" (307), Stan is also described as terrified and powerless: "The source of his panic: Jocelyn, the walking Vise-Grip. She's got him shacked to her ankle. He's on her invisible leash" (113). At last, Jocelyn reveals to him that everything had been a farce, an elaborate plot to fake Stan's death. That way, Jocelyn would be able to send him outside, so he could blow the whistle on illegal practices happening inside the Project.

Such practices included, but were not limited to, individuals seen as undesirable being killed in prison, their organs trafficked for profit, along with a market for baby blood and the surgeries that could make a person devoted eternally to whomever one saw immediately after waking up. Meanwhile, Charmaine is kept at Positron until her loyalties are tested to their limit: she has to perform a Special Procedure (namely, euthanasia) on her husband, strapped to her table. The second half of the novel involves Stan waking up in a warehouse with a new identity. He is shipped outside Consilience disguised as an Elvis Presley-themed sex robot (a "prostibot") to Las Vegas, where he eventually manages to smuggle a flash drive with information on the inside, before Ed, the Consilience manager, can coerce Charmaine into emotional reassignment surgery.

Natalya Machnaigh Barker claims that the process of enframing in *The Heart Goes Last* shares a displacement of societal problems with government propaganda on the war on drugs, the focus of Barker's research

in the 1980s. As she states, "This [Ed's] statement positions the town of Consilience and the Project itself as representative of civilization. Strong word choices as festering, starving, and scavenging imply that those who opt to stay outside of the walls are reduced to an animalistic existence" (18), emphasizing the social consequences of an economic fallout and hinting that the solution to economic problems would be in social correction. She indicates the reinforcement of that dislocated framing in moral values, communal vigilance, and even aesthetic limitations, which are related to the idea of alienating utopian drives and impulses, merely escaping into a fragile illusion of security.

Anna de Vaul also addressed the dystopian traits in Atwood's novel in her essay. Focusing on Atwood's own discussion about the differences between a eutopia and a dystopia as a matter of perspective in discourse (in her non-fiction book *In Other Worlds*), she compares *The Heart Goes Last* to *The Handmaid's Tale*. For instance, she takes a close look at the moment Charmaine undergoes her "loyalty test," that is, when she is told to euthanize her own husband:

> When she is forced to repurpose Stan, her husband, she is manipulated into a form of Orwellian Doublethink as a form of reality control and constantly reminded that he died while heroically saving his co-workers and a bunch of chickens from an electrical fire — until she starts to think in those terms. (257)

De Vaul goes on to analyse how the vocabulary is turned from words with negative meanings to positive ones: Stan is going to be "repurposed", not "killed", and Charmaine purposely tries to avoid thinking the negative words in other to cope with what she did. More importantly, de Vaul and Howells indicate that the novel does not close with a happy ending that subverts that system. Although the Consilience Project is exposed, politicians and investors are protected and "darker Positron activities are being continued and replicated elsewhere, just as it is implied that the events of the novel have already begun in the real world" (de Vaul 262). Howells produces an in-depth analysis of Atwood's approach to several genre fictions. For Howells, Atwood's playful stretch on formulaic genre fiction comes "while she references the idioms and new technologies of contemporary culture, she seeks as always to engage readers with her seriously held ethical values, which are embedded in the texts themselves" (298). I have made a similar

point in the past, arguing that Atwood's discourse in *The Year of the Flood* often produces a sort of parody of coded discourses.

Like de Vaul and Barker, Howells comments on the 1950s aesthetic in the Consilience Project, which had been chosen because it was the one most associated with the feeling of happiness. She also discusses the emergence of sexual fantasies that are ironically inverted, as Stan discovers that the lustful Jasmine was in fact Charmaine. On the other hand, Howells advances the discussion on sex robots, indicating the hint of gothic horror they cause in characters, since "[t]he fetishized female body returns here, shadowed by its robotic double, where fantasies become more macabre and melodramatic" (307). This double, this ongoing simulacrum, is very present in Charmaine's response to the sex robot Ed orders for himself. That robot is commissioned to be as close to the "original" as feasible, so much so that Jocelyn refers to the robot as Charmaine herself: "'He was fairly mad at you, though,' Jocelyn continues in her detached voice. 'He sent you back to the shop. He ordered you to be destroyed,'" to which Charmaine exclaims, "Not actually me!" (294-95). Regarding these events, Howells comments that,

> In Atwood's parodic treatment, there is a continual slippage between horror and comedy, where Ed's project is subverted (thanks to a secret act of sabotage by Jocelyn) and the passive body of Charmaine's robotic double assumes a malevolent agency, threatening to castrate Ed the first time he indulges in his fantastic copulation. (308)

From her arguments and from the textual excerpts, it is possible to conclude that Atwood not only blurs genre fiction standards but also breaks expectations regarding characters, removing both Charmaine and Stan from the role of the heroic protagonist.

In fact, Atwood herself comments on the character of Charmaine in an interview. She relates the sense of nostalgia associated with the 1950s to a "longing for childhood," although this sort of attachment to a sense of past is complicated in Charmaine's past, only hinted at through the polyphonic mention of Grandma Win. Atwood elaborates on the impulse towards nostalgia, saying, "we are all susceptible to these feelings, just as we are all susceptible to a longing for a better 'future' world – the myth of inevitable progress. We have to constantly check our feelings against reality – or whatever semblance of it we can actually grasp with any certainty" (Tolan

456). Even though Atwood's remarks on her own oeuvre are not always a reliable perspective for analysis, in this case her premise of future myths and notions of reality is an adequate starting point for a more comprehensive analysis of the waning of the utopian impulse in *The Heart Goes Last*.

There is hardly any disagreement on whether *The Heart Goes Last* is a dystopian novel or not. The initial promise in Ed's propaganda, of a protected, middle-class existence, enchants Charmaine more than it does Stan, who follows her into the project because he had no better option. Amidst the variety of definitions on dystopia and utopia, Lyman Tower Sargent provides working concepts. On dystopia, he emphasizes that "the imperfect society, occurs primarily in the twentieth century because the imperfect perfection is most often brought about by technology" (157), and that dystopia and utopia share two defining traits: "First, the society described must not exist; second, the author must in some way evaluate that society" (157). This working definition is already a complicated one in *The Heart Goes Last*, since the narrator makes no effort to disguise that the society in the book is the United States, albeit a future version of it – although the location is rather explicit, the vagueness of the expression "near future" uproots that very concrete society, echoing Tom Moylan's and Rafaela Baccolini's comments on how critical dystopias are often closer to the readership. Secondly, to say that the "author must in some way evaluate that society" entails two problematic concepts: it might be more adequate to say that the narrator, not the author, evaluates the described society in order to avoid the complications and impracticalities of discussing authorial values or opinions. This takes the argument to the second issue: how can a critic identify narratorial criticism? In *The Heart Goes Last*, as I claim, criticism towards the Consilience Project is severely diluted in characters' perspectives, be it Stan's, Jocelyn's or Aurora's. Although *The Heart Goes Last* stretches some genre or conceptual boundaries, it can still be read as a contemporary sf dystopia.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the images related to the Consilience Project are heavily influenced by simulacra. Baudrillard discusses how the history "that is given back to us" is not in any way "real" history, but a sewed-on narrative, "our lost referential, that is to say our myth" (*Simulacra* 43). Not only that: this myth fed back to individuals is filtered by an attempt of representation that establishes in collective memory images that are identified as belonging to a certain era regardless of whether that is true. The hyperreality of History, in *The Heart Goes Last*, is most markedly

present in Ed's aesthetic choice for the town design: "Then they'd brought in some top designers to consult on an overall look and feel. The fifties was chosen for the visual and audio aspects, because it was the decade in which the most people had self-identified as being happy" (50). Implied in Ed's speech was the inference that a survey was conducted on the amount of happiness these near-future people associated with each historical period. In turn, that leads to the inference that the subjects of that survey would return to a shiny, hyperreal version of History from a time when the United States had just profited wildly from a World War and established very conservative social values and a sentiment of anti-communism. Not a single character sees as anti-capitalist the fact that all citizens receive equal houses, equal credits, equal transportation, and so on. A hypothesis could be that citizens are, at the same time, desperate for any sort of accommodation and that their notion of the fifties does not include economic and political awareness, but mostly jazz and early rock music, pleated skirts and Marylin Monroe movies.

The overt extrapolation of this very reduced and censored sense of culture within the Consilience Project in *The Heart Goes Last* is also related to what I called, in my master's dissertation parody of coded discourses. Analysing these extrapolations on science fiction, religious and mass media discourses in Suzanne Collins and Margaret Atwood, I suggested that these extrapolations carry within themselves a strong sense of irony: "such an exaggeration, along with the occasional deliberate usage of tropes from those registers, may cause the reader to notice their pervasiveness in 'real life,' a consequence of the satiric element in parody" (70). *The Heart Goes Last* shares with *The Year of the Flood* the ironic reflection on discourse patterns, mainly regarding sexual fantasies and the way culture and art appear throughout the novel.

Even before entering the Consilience Project, Charmaine watches movies from the 1950s and 1960s during her diner shift: "She can watch TV on the flatscreens, old Elvis Presley movies from the sixties, so consoling; or daytime sitcoms, though they aren't funny and anyway comedy is so cold and heartless" (20). The notion that Charmaine seeks consolation from television programming indicates, other than the rather obvious bleakness in her life, that she has a very specific demand from media: entertainment and escapism from her reality. Her attachment to models from "television happiness" frames her entire perception of the Consilience Project, that is, the models from the coded discourse of entertainment frame and direct her

perception of the events happening around her. It is possible to note this when she enters the project for the first time: "she can hardly believe her eyes: everything is so spruced up, it's like a picture. Like a town in a movie, a movie of years ago. Like the olden days, before anyone was born" (38). The takeover of media and their signs is evidenced in how Charmaine perceives her view of Consilience in such a way that it fits previous mediatic notions of happiness, safety and organization. As the narrator continues to point out Charmaine's romanticized view not only of the American past, but of the project, a possible effect on the reader is the realization of these existing models in current society, stressing the parody (through exaggeration and repetition) of the coded discourse of entertainment.

As mentioned previously, art is also very limited within the project walls:

> Music and movies are available on the same network, although, to avoid overexcitement, there is no pornography or undue violence, and no rock or hip-hop. However, there is not limitation on string quartets, Bing Crosby, Doris Day, the Mills Brothers, or show tunes from vintage Hollywood musicals. (53)

Stan, upon examining the selection, decides that it is "granny junk," but his exasperation at the limited options in art occurs because he misses sports, that is, the entertainment provided was not enough for him. Additionally, it should be noted that all art within Consilience is multimedia: no novels or books, paintings and so on of any kind are mentioned throughout the novel. Some inferences can be made in that sense regarding the following: the choice of media, the absence of "violence" in the chosen possibilities, and the possible conclusion for dystopias.

In the first place, the absence of non-multimedia forms of art in the dystopian setting indicates a potential view of multimedia art forms as mere entertainment. On a step to elaborating a "bad place," only multimedia entertainment exists, in the form of movies and old television shows. This usually leads to preconceived notions of hierarchical relations between media and art. I do not subscribe to any hierarchies between media, drawing from Linda Hutcheon's arguments in *A Theory of Adaptation*, and from her general comments on postmodern criticism: "Videogames, theme park rides, Web sites, graphic novels, song covers, operas, musicals, ballets, and radio and stage plays are thus as important to this theorizing as are the

more commonly discussed movies and novels" (xiv). However, the lack of novels or paintings in Consilience is not simply an indication of a narrative deference towards multimedia forms: these media are not missed by the characters. They do not long for Charles Dickens, Chaucer or Picasso, a characteristic that can be read as a sign that these media have exited the daily life of citizens completely even before Consilience, which can, in turn, suggest that this disappearance is a contemporary ongoing process.

In the second place, the lack of violence in the presented options marks other inferences, namely that violence in art and media in general spark violence in "real life."[2] Therefore, by abolishing representations of violence, violence itself would be removed from society. Utopias are often marked by the absence of violence or by controlled expressions of it. However, violence is not absent at all from the media choices in the Consilience network. A striking example is *Niagara*, the 1953 film directed by Henry Hathaway, which features murder, jealousy and adultery, mentioned both by Charmaine (234), as she dresses for Stan's fake funeral, and by Budge (250), as he lists clothing options for Marilyn prostibots. The black suit and scarf from the movie are related both to danger ("women in danger of being strangled should avoid any fashion accessories that tie around the neck" [233]) and to sexuality, once she sees herself in the mirror and compares her image to Monroe's: "Of course, she thinks, Marilyn's mouth was fuller than her own, and you could use very thick red lipstick then" (233). It is not really a matter of wiping out representations of violence, but of making sure that the representations that did make the cut were coherent with an aesthetic of veiled sexual fantasy. The removal of sports, pornography and hip hop was not a choice turned to societal improvement, but to fit a set of values from a very repressed and stiff noir aesthetics from the 1950s.

As a dystopia, *The Heart Goes Last* impresses readers in the eagerness shown by characters to become voluntary prisoners. Atwood's narrative exposes what is, in fact, a very common phenomenon during economic crises: security trumps freedom. Fredric Jameson discusses the issue at length, in his chapter "Journey into Fear" from *Archaeologies of the Future*:

> At any rate it seems clear enough that the earlier or more traditional Utopias are far more concerned with happiness than with freedom: unless, to be sure, one replaces this last in

[2] That assumption is often attributed to videogames, particularly the first-person shooter genre.

> the context of the specific unfreedoms of feudalism as such, without anachronistically attributing to them the anxieties of dictatorship and bureaucracy that haunt the bourgeois world. (194)

As Jameson comments, earlier utopias present centralized, homogenous structures; these representations are met with suspicion nowadays, after decades of individualist, anti-left (usually the only political view associated with totalitarianism) propaganda. That fear of totalization can be identified in the construction of contemporary dystopias, as closed systems, individual leaders, the absence of personalized commodities are all associated with communism and viewed with fear. These notions are strongest in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the 1950s. Moreover, it is necessary to understand the contextual nature of freedom in contemporary dystopias: freedom as a value and as a marker of happiness is a fairly recent theme. Jameson adds:

> In modern industrial times, in which the state has itself become a character or individual, freedom is redefined as release from the oppression of state power itself, a release that can take the form of existential pathos, as with the dilemmas of the individual rebel or anti-hero, but which now, after the end of individualism, seems to take the form of identification with small groups. (206)

Contemporary dystopias often portray totalitarian states as the source of oppression, as systems that must be destroyed for citizens to live full and free lives. Surely, these values come with western assumptions that the state is an archaic institution and freedom dictates (somewhat ironically) a self-regulation of societies. While one could expect the next step in that rationale to spark a multitude of anarchic utopias or anti-utopias (as Jameson, in fact, believes *1984* is and as Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is), these dystopias are often solved by the survival of a protagonist or subversion towards democratic representative governments.

The Consilience Project envisioned in Atwood's narrative, however, subverts these expectations. It only emerged in North America because of an economic crisis caused by financial speculation: "Then everything went to rat shit. Overnight, it felt like. . . . Someone had lied, someone had cheated, someone had shorted the market, someone had inflated the currency. Not enough jobs, too many people" (9). Needless to say, the crisis

in the narrative set in the late 21st century is strikingly similar to the 1929 crash, one of the main factors that contributed to North American foreign policies, including the fear of communism and reactionary moral values. This highlights, once again, an ironic representation of a cyclic history: regardless of technological developments, Atwood's humans also have not changed and they are, as a result, caught in a loop.

The project, then, emerges as a utopia of safety, of financial and professional security. It is sold as a collective struggle; Ed constantly emphasises how Consilience/Positron is an experiment, "An ultra, ultra important experiment . . . If it succeeds – and it *has* to succeed, and it *can* succeed if they all work together" (44), socializing the effort to make it work and presenting it as the salvation from the "savages" outside. The dystopia, in *The Heart Goes Last*, is, then, set in a historical loop of neoliberal policies that spark collective fear, leading to voluntary surrender to a totalitarian, albeit capitalist, regime, in which the effort is socialized, but power and profits are centralized in Ed, who is revealed as a greedy developer: he is behind the sale of human organs, baby blood and the prostibots.

Stan and Charmaine, faced with economically drastic problems, give up their "freedom" to attain safety, as Jameson mentions in the chapter on fear mentioned previously. Once they become part of the totality of Consilience/Positron, though, they discover rather dystopian practices inside their secure walls. The trajectory traced by them, however, does not validate the idea of individualistic heroism. In fact, one could argue that both characters display very little agency in the events in which they take part, and even that little agency is questionable.

Charmaine, like all Consilience citizens, applies for jobs based on her previous experience (but her employment would not be decided by herself). She decides to give in to the affair with Max mere seconds upon meeting him, instilling in her a sense of rebellion and impulsivity: "The next minute – how did it happen? – her pinafore apron was on the floor, her hair had come loose – had he done that? – and they were kissing" (68). As the plot unfolds, the reader discovers that Jocelyn had somewhat predicted that Charmaine and Max would be attracted to each other by claiming to know his nature (105). Later, as Charmaine believes to have killed Stan, the act of grieving widow she puts on was not created by her, but by Jocelyn, using her to infiltrate Ed's defences to get proof of his wrongdoings. She has hardly any agency throughout the story; the only incident in which she seems to have an actual choice in her life is in the very end of the novel.

Restored to her husband, in a nice, comfortable house, Charmaine believes she underwent the "Bottom surgery" to become sexually obsessed to whichever was the first thing she would see upon waking up (Stan, in her case). The narrator describes her joyful, domestic life, until she is visited by Jocelyn and she gives the wife a choice: to "be free but less secure. If you don't hear it, you'll be more secure, but less free" (378). After hearing that she had never undergone the surgery, Charmaine is angry for having lost the stable part of her life – she had felt happy knowing she could only love Stan forever: "She wants the helplessness, she wants…" (379), inserts the narrator. Charmaine wants to be removed of her choices; she wants the security of only being able to love one man and live one life over dealing with the various possibilities and responsibilities of making her own decisions. Not only is that hardly compliant with ideas of individualistic heroism in contemporary dystopias, but it also indicates an exhaustion of the concept of freedom as a utopia, sending the character into the previously discussed abstract, individual utopia of the private sphere. Of course, though, that exhaustion can resonate with the reader in a sense of pity or superiority for her character, so an alternative reading might be of Charmaine as a cautionary tale. The final exchange renders Charmaine's new-found responsibility for her life rather explicit: Atwood places in Jocelyn's speech a reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, emphasising that she is done manipulating or making choices for the other woman; this ending marks the beginning of Charmaine's burden to free will.

> "Take it or leave it," says Jocelyn. "I'm only the messenger. As they say in court, you're free to go. The world is all before you, where to choose."
> "How do you mean?" says Charmaine. (380)

The implications in Atwood's choice of ending indicate Charmaine's incapability of accounting for her own life. There is a waning of the ideal that was her life as she discovers that her devoted love was not fabricated – now, she would be aware of the weight of her choices. Her incapability of doing so may have been a result from her childhood, which, as Atwood said in her interview to Fiona Tolan, "had some very dark corners" (456), but it is also aligned with an exhaustion of the individual as the heroic measure of subjectivity. In *The Heart Goes Last*, therefore, this exhaustion of the individual seen in Charmaine is not replaced by affinities in small groups – she is merely paralyzed and doubtful of her feelings, instead of

rejoicing in her freedom. This portrayal exists outside of the general tenets of critical dystopias.

Stan, on the other hand, is completely transformed into a tool for Jocelyn's aims, not to mention his sexual submission to her. After having found the note from Charmaine to Max, his imagination creates an entire story about the lives the alternates were supposed to live; their lives, incidentally, would be much better than his with Charmaine, filled with the sexual alacrity that he longed for. As a matter of fact, Stan's imagination worsens his experience of his actual life in more than one occasion: the depth of his projections about Jasmine and Max is foreshadowed by the long, imaginary conversations he sustains with his brother. For instance, when he meets Connor before entering Consilience, he puts several imaginary phrases on his brother's mouth that the sibling might use to humiliate or diminish him: "He's in a weak position and he can hear what Con would say: 'You were crap with the Nerf gun, you'd shoot your face off.' Or worse: 'What'll you trade me? Time in the sack with the wife? She'd enjoy it. Hey! Joke!' ... So he doesn't try" (29). What does happen on the plot level is that Connor gives him some money and offers him a job; later, he tries to dissuade Stan from entering Consilience because he had heard about dangerous things going on inside. Stan, however, is so isolated in his own imaginary humiliation that he does not see the events as they unfold.

The same applies to his fantasy of Jasmine: "Stan rearranges Jasmine and Max in his head, this way and that, lace bra ripped asunder ... even though he has no idea what either of them looks like" (58), he begins. As time passes, he imagines entire personalities for Max and Jasmine – unaware of how his imagination runs with him, he is caught in Jocelyn's trap, sure as he was that he would be the one to ambush her with a sexual encounter. Ironically, like Charmaine, Stan's fantasies force him into a vulnerable position, from which Jocelyn controls him; he does not regain agency.

This digression into character agency, state representation and even art values in *The Heart Goes Last* is useful for a closer and final view on how simulacra are present in the narrative construction of Consilience/Positron and how the novel brings the reader to an unsettling position of distrust of signs in general. Baudrillard foresees that return to commonplace situations in science fiction, not because "the space is all mapped out," as some have argued, but because

> from then onward, something must change: the projection, the extrapolation, the sort of pantographic excess that constituted the charm of science fiction are all impossible. It is no longer possible to fabricate the unreal from the real, the imaginary from the givens of the real. The process will, rather, be the opposite: it will be to put decentered situations, models of simulation in place and to contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life. (*Simulacra* 124)

Baudrillard's proverbial "predictions" on the future of sf take shape in *The Heart Goes Last*: the projection, as it happens with speculative fiction within sf, is rather mundane: an economic crisis with a walled-in, protected town, within which nefarious deals involve the selling of blood, body parts and robots for sexual pleasure. The real, in the novel, is fabricated from a hyperreal version of 1950s aesthetics and moral values, with grotesque twists on the sexual tension, never resolved in the old movies, but potentialized in Stan and Jocelyn's warped imitation of Max and Charmaine's sexual encounters. A town is built and sold as a project revolving around recovering banal routines from the past, based on a sense of nostalgia for what was not lived. Art is either in a process of disappearance or has already disappeared, as postulated after analysing Stan's reactions to the entertainment system, not to mention the willing imprisonment. Positron prison also employs panoptic strategies of peer surveillance, which may cause a lasting sense of being watched. Charmaine believes, but is not sure, that she is watched as she performs every Special Procedure. The dystopian setting of the novel is built on simulacra of history, of art, and of vigilance.

Since these instances of simulacra support the systems of interpretation of one's surroundings in *The Heart Goes Last*, what are the implications for literary utopianisms? To view Atwood's novel as a critical dystopia, as defined by Moylan and Baccolini, is problematic, to say the least: its protagonists are not driven by personal defiance, individual trajectories filled with self-discovery and resistance, nor are there utopian enclaves or places to escape. They are used as pawns and left in an economically comfortable situation, and the ending leaves them empty-handed to deal with the demise of the Consilience Project. Baccolini and Moylan, however, indicate the variety within critical dystopias, arguing, "the new dystopias not only critique the present triumphal system but also explore

ways to transform it that go beyond compromised left-centrist solutions" (8); in the case of *The Heart Goes Last*, a convoluted plot exposes a false utopia from within, which can lead to the conclusion that an attempt at the utopian project has failed, that a reconstruction of society would not lie in that direction.

Baudrillard makes a similar claim about dialectical utopias: "the realized utopia is a new topos, which will provoke a new critique, then a new utopia. The installation of utopia passes through a (total) urbanism. And that is the complete process" (*Utopia Deferred* 32). In the bleakness of Charmaine's helplessness, as she faces the responsibility and multiplicity of her own choices, there is room for the dystopian hope of a new awareness: a future after exposing Ed, after discovering that she is not bound to Stan for the rest of her life. The simulacra imbued in the representation of Consilience/Positron are exposed, but not entirely destroyed; they remain both in the characters' minds and in the investors, who managed to escape unscathed after the scandal. That exposal, thus, holds a dystopian potential, but not a certainty, for an improved awareness, for different avenues of experience.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. Knopf Doubleday, 2011.

Atwood, Margaret. *MaddAddam*. Virago, 2013.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1984.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Heart Goes Last*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

Baccolini, Raffaella. "Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia, and Hope." *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming,* edited by Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 159-89.

Barker, Natalya Machnaigh. "Revising Justice: Punitory Thought and Action in the Work of Atwood, Jordan, and Oates." *Duke University Exemplary Master's Project*, 2016, dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/11977/Natalya%20Barker_MastersProject.pdf?sequence=4. Accessed 15 Jan. 2019.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, Michigan UP, 1994.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Utopia Deferred: Writings for* Utopie (1967-1978). Translated by Stuart Kendall, Semiotext(e), 2006.

de Vaul, Anna. "No Light Without Shadow: The Control of Language and Discourse in Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Fiction." *More After More: Essays Commemorating the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia*, edited by Ksenia Olkusz, Michal Klosinski, Krzysztof M. Maj, Facta Ficta Research Centre, 2016.

Howells, Coral Ann. "True Trash: Genre Fiction Revisited in Margaret Atwood's *Stone Mattress*, *The Heart Goes Last*, And *Hag-Seed*." *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2017, pp. 297-315.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future*: *The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.

Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Westview, 2000.

Moylan, Tom, and Raffaella Baccolini, editors. *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Routledge, 2003.

Pavani Fernandes, Amanda. "Illusions of Reality Uncovered in Parody of Science Fiction: *The Year of the Flood* and *The Hunger Games*." *Seminário de Pesquisa Discente do Pós-Lit/UFMG*, Belo Horizonte, December 1-4 2015, letras.ufmg.br/split/AnaisVSPLIT.pdf. Accessed 23 April 2019.

Pavani Fernandes, Amanda. *The Simulacrum in Coded Discourse Parody:* The Hunger Games *and* The Year of the Flood. 2016. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Master's thesis.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. "What is a Utopia?" *Morus: Utopia e Renascimento*, vol. 2, 2005, pp. 157-66.

Tolan, Fiona. "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood." *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2017, pp. 452-64.

Neoliberalism in *Behold the Dreamers*, by Imbolo Mbue: The Latest Menace to the American Dream

Cláudio Roberto Vieira Braga

What Is the American Dream After All?

In a broad sense, the analysis presented in this essay begins with the motivation to contribute to the ever-intriguing investigation concerning how literature captures the idea of human aspirations. On the way to specify such a wide-ranging goal, I have thought of how contemporary immigrants' writings approach this creatively, having the field of American literature in mind. At this point, Imbolo Mbue's debut novel *Behold the Dreamers*, published in 2016, came on the scene as an enlightening fictional account on the subject chosen. Mbue is a Cameroonian American author, native of the seaside town of Limbe, Cameroon, and a graduate of Rutgers and Columbia universities, currently living in New York City. With *Behold the Dreamers* elected as the focus of this study, it became necessary to review the concept of the American Dream, as well as presenting the main facts of the novel itself. These are necessary requirements to provide a comprehensible context for my examination of what characters, setting and plot reveal about human aspirations, described from the viewpoint of immigrants who have their life aspirations challenged by the conditions of the twenty-first century.

The notion of the American Dream pervades the history of the United States of America, as well as its philosophy and its political discourse, long before the phrase was coined. In literature, critics have pointed out the long-lasting presence of the dream. As Christopher Bollen writes, "one could argue that the American dream *is* the subject of every American novel, a sort of blurry-eyed national obsession with having it all and coming out on top, or in the case of most plot-driven literature, the

failures and breakdowns in that quasi-noble pursuit" (1). Famous literary works that portray the American Dream are F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Edward Albee's *The American Dream* (1960), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1964), to name just a few.

The tenets of the American Dream can be traced back to colonial times, comprising meanings that vary according to different perspectives and mutating throughout the centuries. In a sense, the origins of such idea could be related to the first waves of immigrants to North America. The Puritans, for instance, who began to immigrate in the early seventeenth century, thought they would be free to practice their religion in the new land. Among other things, they believed that prosperity on earth was to be pursued, but, as Jim Cullen points out, "Puritanism was not finally about money. For all its focus on the afterlife, it was also about making the world a better, more holy, place" (34). Therefore, they sought wealth, developing a sense of community and morality, but their final goal was to gain spiritual peace and eternal life. This early understanding of prosperity, which is anchored by religious aims, is one of the pillars that sustain the foundations of the American Dream. Additional founding pillars, as scholars have demonstrated, relate to aspects other than religion. For example, the American Dream is often associated with Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in 1776, which asserts equality among men, who would be endowed with the "unalienable rights" to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The religious argument is again found because it is the "Creator" who provides the rights; but now social and political pillars are added to the edifice of the American Dream, as the Declaration of Independence is the 'birth certificate' of the new nation.

Other perspectives regarding the American Dream continue to be revealed as time passes, such as the influential articles and pamphlets published by Benjamin Franklin in the eighteenth century. Franklin, considered by some the man who invented the American Dream (Powell 1), related American improvement to "men who had received a good Education in Europe" (Franklin qdt. in Powell 2). In the pamphlet, Franklin was advocating an education plan for the youth of Philadelphia, but his argument favoring education became national, seen as a means of developing the entire country, since literates would be able to access books and periodicals. Franklin is also known for encouraging Americans to pursue wealth through frugality and industry.

However, the nineteenth century shapes the notion of the American Dream more significantly, also making its contradictions more visible. This is a time when the idea behind the dream reveals a tension between its early stages and its future developments. On the east coast of the United States, a sense of freedom and individualism begins to take over and spread. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the influential fathers of Transcendentalism, consider that nature is superior to religion and materialism, being the greatest way to achieve freedom and self-knowledge, together with a reliance on intuition rather than rationality, individuality rather than conformity. On the other hand, the frontier being pushed westwards can also be related to the American Dream, since it was associated to free will, hard work, individuality, and the pursuit of happiness. Nevertheless, it is widely known that the conquest of the West resulted in the killing and displacement of Native-Americans, a greedy process that also prompted environmental harm in the Californian gold rush. The conquest is used as a pretext to explain the violence of the expansion process as if it were a matter of success. This is the context of the American Frontier, the rapid occupation of the West whose mindset called for an extreme form of individualism that replaced the community-oriented thought that once motivated American colonists. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his 1893 essay on the frontier, called it "that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil." The nineteenth century, therefore, witnesses the emergence of the conflict between the notion of American Dream that is idealized, including noble deeds and a sense of community, opposed to less noble intentions such as greedy conquest and selfishness, at the cost of violent genocide.

Still regarding the nineteenth century, it is relevant to note that, as the idea of the American Dream treads its path, the United States receives successive waves of newcomers. Europeans from Germany, Britain and Ireland continued to arrive. Africans, who were kidnaped in Africa, came to work as slaves and Asians, especially Chinese, also came. Most of those who did not come against their will were attracted by stories of success in a new land that could provide opportunities for everyone. These immigrants are absolutely part of the maintenance of the idea of the American Dream. As William Clark observes, they believe and embrace the American tradition of working hard for long hours.

In the twentieth century, James Truslow Adams coins the phrase 'American Dream' in *The Epic of America*, first published in 1931. Adams

states that it refers to a dream, "in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (402). This is only possible in a land of endless opportunities, and that is what The United States wants to be: the ideal place for hardworking citizens or immigrants that seek to improve their living conditions. By consequence, personal progress becomes the national progress.

The emblematic figure of the self-made man is an intrinsic part of this scenario. Despite being born in unfavorable conditions, he treads a path of social improvement. In fact, this notion of independent men who support themselves dates to the nineteenth century, when the philosophy of Transcendentalism contributes to expand this idea. In Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, the author describes the years he spent living alone on the shore of a pond. The opening lines announce, "I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months" (5). This idea of a self-confident, self-sufficient man, who can take care of himself alone, becomes central to the formation of an American identity, thus constituting another pillar that sustains the notion of the American Dream.

The twentieth century witnesses the notion of individual success being associated with financial gains that would lead to the possession and consumption of houses, cars, home appliances and other material goods. The pursuit of material comfort yields an environment that slowly replaces cooperation with competition and inaugurates a logic that assigns value to the single winner. Socially speaking, this is an unreasonable logic because a vast number of losers will never be number ones. Therefore, people fueled by this irrational hope will be frustrated. Again, the original community-oriented realization of the American Dream becomes distant in the past.

William Clark, for whom the "dream is and was unabashedly material" (3), agrees on the varied facets of the dream. Still, the author detects a focus on homeownership, education for one's children, and acquisition of material goods at the core of the realization of the American Dream, and asks, "Do the new immigrants have a chance of making it into the middle class?" (18). This intriguing question is a point of departure, as my research revolves around the relation between the new immigrants and the American Dream in the twenty-first century. How is the contemporary

view of the American Dream? How does present-day fiction represent it, especially Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*? Does the current social scenario offer new challenges in the pursuit of the dream? In addition, how do these challenges differ from the ones in the twentieth century?

Thinkers like Noam Chomsky and Robert Shiller corroborate the contemporary relevance of the American Dream, commenting on how it continues to be referred to publicly. Chomsky emphasizes, "The dream persists, fostered by propaganda. You hear it in every political speech: 'Vote for me and we'll get the dream back'. They all reiterate it in similar words" (loc. 69). For Shiller, politicians like Donald Trump visibly rely on people's hopes when structuring their speeches, referring to the purchase of a beautiful home and owning a roaring business, that is, material success (1). In my contention, the mismatch between the ideal American Dream that involves sense of community, freedom and equality of opportunity and its objective existence, mostly based on material success, is stronger than ever in the twenty-first century. This matter is going to be discussed in the light of Imbolo Mbue's literary representation.

An Immigrant Dreamer's Narrative

Behold the Dreamers focuses mainly on the stories of two families, which can be seen as paradigmatic portrayals of larger communities. The Edwardses are representations of the typical white upper-class American family, descendants of earlier European immigrants. The protagonists are the Jongas. The family stands for the contemporary experience of Cameroonians who immigrate, dispersed from their homeland to foreign regions, forming clusters in countries like the United States. These clusters are understood as diasporic, i.e., they are human communities abroad, the diasporas, as it has been widely theorized by William Safran, Robin Cohen, Stuart Hall, Khachig Tölölyan, and James Clifford.

My premise is that Mbue's Cameroonian characters, while living in diaspora, are forced to review life aspirations as they are confronted with the dilemmas of their diasporic condition in the host country. The Jongas' understanding of the American society and the American Dream is skillfully contrasted with the way of living and thinking of the Edwardses, in a manner that readers understand how their aspirations and frustrations are only apparently different, being, in fact, very similar. As chapters develop, Jende Jonga slowly modifies his initial takes on the American Dream, developing a peculiar immigrant perspective, as I am going to demonstrate.

Set mostly in New York City, Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* begins with a hopeful, optimistic environment: the Cameroonian immigrant couple Jende and Neni Jonga, who live in Harlem with their six-year-old son, are quite happy because Jende is hired as chauffeur by Clark Edwards, a chief executive officer at an investment bank. The story is strategically set in the fall of 2007, right before the global economic financial crisis that hits the world, beginning with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the bank where Clark works. Jende had managed to go to the United States a little before this, with the help of his cousin Winston, who paid for his tickets. Winston, who had arrived many years before, gained American citizenship by joining the army and managed to go to law school, having a middle-class life.

In his new job, Jende finds that Clark is demanding, and he must respond with absolute dedication. The two men spend many hours together in the car, and soon develop a friendship. Their conversations often disclose their views of life and their aspirations. Jende describes how he and his wife are determined to save money to buy a nice house and a car and how he plans to pay for the college degree of both his wife and son: "I believe I work hard, and one day I will have a good life here" (Mbue 46). Nevertheless, Clark notes that Jende describes his hometown in Cameroon as an especial place, where people live simple, enjoyable lives, prompting the CEO to ask the chauffer a disturbing question:

> "So why are you here?" "I am sorry, sir?", Why did you come to America if your town is so beautiful" Jende laughed, a brief uneasy laugh. "But sir," he said. "America is America." . . . Everyone wants to come to America. "Everyone. To be in this country, sir. To live in this country. Ah! It is the greatest thing in the world, Mr. Edwards." (39)

Jende presents this enthusiastic view of what it means to be in the United States, explaining that in his native town one must be born someone to be someone, that is, as a poor person, he could not aspire to social mobility in Cameroon. And when Clark asks him if he thinks the United States has something for him, he answers, "Ah, yes, sir, very much, sir!" . . . "America has something for everyone, sir. Look at Obama, sir" (40).

This is a view Jende brings with himself from his African country. A series of American narratives sent abroad contribute to a global view of the United States as a land of abundant opportunities for everyone, a

land where dreams come true. The rise of a black man like Barack Obama as a prominent politician, for instance, is received as a hopeful message by Africans and by every person with black skin in general. In addition, the novel brings other personal narratives of success told by Cameroonians who immigrated before Jende. The pictures they post have cars, homes and smiling faces in them; the stories they tell on the phone were also encouraging. No one talks about the adversities and sacrifices they go through once they are in the US territory. Jende's lawyer Bubakar also contributes to keep Jende and many others believing that they should do whatever it is necessary to stay in the US. Hired to help Jende obtain a green card and eventually become a citizen, Bubakar tells him and other clients stories of his own success on the American soil, telling his male clients how they must "persevere like a man" (321). He describes the house he owns in Canarsie, and brags about his son who is an engineer and his daughter who goes to medical school. Bubakar is a specialist in conceiving stories that could help immigrants to apply for asylum. This induces many African immigrants to keep trying, while the lawyer is paid for the services of hundreds of them. Manipulating, deceiving and taking advantage of others, Bubakar disseminates the narrative of an American Dream that supposedly worked for himself, profiting from many immigrant clients who will eventually be deported.

Jende's wife Neni, as the narrator describes, also constitutes an illustration of how the United States wins the reputation of land of opportunity. In Africa, she had always believed that the United States "was synonymous with happiness" (312). Before immigrating, her view of the US was shaped by positive narratives and images: "shows like The Fresh Prince of Bel Air and The Cosby Show had shown her that there was a place in the world where blacks had the same chance at prosperity as whites" (312). Hence, she arrives in New York strongly believing that she and Jende can succeed. In fact, William Clark, in *Immigrants and the American Dream: Remaking the Middle Class,* highlights how immigrants embrace "the opportunities offered by the American tradition of hard work, long hours, and often menial tasks" (4). This is in opposition to the native-born population's perception, who "may not resonate so fully with the American Dream, or even doubt its salience. Some of the native born are ready with an outright rejection of its mythology" (4).

William Clark is an author who tends to portray the bright side of the American Dream, focusing on stories of success, but his work shows

how the impact of the American Dream is stronger on immigrants. *Behold the Dreamers*, however, displays a careful plot construction that reveals gradually how delusions about the idea of succeeding in the USA are rooted in the minds of individuals abroad, people like Jende and Neni. Subsequently, the couple's positive perception is going to be challenged as the plot progresses. At first, in the car, Jende overhears Clark Edwards's conversations on the phone. Clark is mostly tense, saying things such as, "You think it's going to be that nice and clean, huh?" He said. "Somehow everyone's just going to walk away nice and clean from the burning building… No!" (Mbue 41). But Jende chooses to pretend he does not hear these comments, never asking what is happening because he does not feel he has the right to and because he chooses not to know.

Along with Jende's overhearing of what is to come next, Neni also finds out more about the dark side of the 'Edwardses' apparently perfect life. When she takes a temporary job in their summer home, she learns that Cindy Edwards lives an unfortunate life, despite the family's wealth and their sophisticated lifestyle. Neni witnesses the "elegant madam" taking pills and alcohol, attempting to cope with an unhappy routine, habitually away from her husband. Cindy is also unable to deal with her older son properly and has serious unresolved personal matters of the past. She has low self-esteem: "How could anyone have so much happiness and unhappiness skillfully wrapped up together?" (157), says Neni, unable to explain the contradictions of misery and wealth. Concurrently, Neni is very much impressed by the Edwardses' material possessions and lifestyle: the sumptuous house, the delicious food, the expensive designer clothes, the toys of their young son and the fancy dinner parties. These constitute a set of elements that make her mostly blind to the Edwardses' personal problems. Therefore, both Jende and Neni Jonga continue to hope that their own aspirations will come true steadfastly, ignoring the signs of failure around them.

Developing a New Gaze

The assertive viewpoint of the Jongas changes when the Lehman Brothers go bankrupt. This is the beginning of the severe financial crisis that spreads worldwide in 2007. Highly qualified, Clark Edwards finds a new job, but he is in serious disagreement with his wife, who does not like Jende. After a quarrel, she demands that Jende must be dismissed, and the chauffeur becomes unemployed at the peak of the economic crisis.

The context of such economic catastrophe seems to constitute a strategic setting chosen by Imbolo Mbue to expose how the lives of unqualified immigrants have gotten worse and how the notion of the American Dream becomes extremely fragile in the twenty-first century. Jende cannot find other jobs that pay the same. Now he is washing dishes many hours a day for less than half of the salary he used to earn as a chauffeur: "see how even some Americans are suffering . . . they are sleeping on the street, going to bed hungry, losing their jobs and houses every day in this… this economic crisis" (307), he tells Neni.

The new condition makes Jende rethink the sacrifices and indignities he has been through in order to stay in the US. The dishwashing jobs force him to work long hours with no day off. Soon his feet begin to hurt, and he develops a severe pain in his back. Without health insurance, he hesitates, but goes see a doctor who tells him that the pain is stress related. Then Jende looks around, pondering that the scarcity of jobs, severe as it is, will first affect undocumented African immigrants like himself:

> Too many people want to be chauffeurs now. Even people who used to be police and people with fine college degrees, they want to be chauffeurs. Everyone is losing jobs everywhere and looking for new jobs, anything to pay the bills. So tell me – if he, an American, a white man with papers, cannot get a new chauffeur job then what about me? (310)

This passage describes how Jende is becoming aware of what is taking place as he argues with his wife. Neni insists they must believe things will get better, despite all bad evidences. Simultaneously to the financial crisis that prompts disagreement in the family, Jende's condition as an illegal immigrant also deteriorates, as his asylum application is denied. His lawyer Bubakar convinces him to appeal and try to stay once more. However, Jende is now comparing the inferior place given to undocumented immigrants in the US, those who live in permanent fear of deportation, performing menial tasks, like himself, with other possibilities of succeeding, maybe in his hometown, where he knows better how things work.

In a conversation with his experienced cousin Winston, Jende endorses his new take on the possibility of attaining the American Dream. Both men agree that all the tension results in "you dying and leaving the bills for your children to pay" (322). Winston also speculates that:

> Even if Jende got papers, Winston went on, without a good education, and being a black African immigrant male, he might never be able to make enough money to afford to live the way he'd like to live, never mind having enough to own a home or to pay for his wife and children to go to college. He might never be able to have a really good night sleep. (322)

This conversation, among others, enlightens Jende. In fact, not having a college degree is another reason why he now believes the American Dream is unreachable for him. In Cameroon, he had interrupted his secondary education after Neni got pregnant. Now he faces the fact that he will never have a high income without a college degree in the United States, and with a family to raise, he will not be able to think of going to college. In other words, Jende realizes that the impossibility of succeeding was not simply due to the current crisis that was taking place, as Neni insists on believing; instead, his disadvantage had more profound roots.

Jende decides to return; he abruptly announces his decision to Neni simply coming home one day and telling that the family was going back to Cameroon. Shocked, Neni denies this idea drastically, as she keeps on believing things will be better. Nevertheless, Jende is assertive. Soon, affected by fierce disagreements, the Jongas start arguing. Neni believes that he forgets about the future of his family, that he is just being selfish. In return, her complaints sound like insults to Jende, as she seems insensitive to the hardships of his life now. In many of their quarrels, Jende discloses his new view of the idea behind the United States:

> …how she [Neni] had been sold the stupid nonsense about America being the greatest country in the world. Guess what, he would say to her in mock instruction, America is not all that; this country is full of lies and people who like to hear lies. If you want to know the truth, I'll tell you the truth; this country no longer has room for people like us. (332)

The post-2007 setting, together with a sequence of personal events, leads Jende to develop a down-to-earth perspective on his possibilities of succeeding in the USA. This immigrant awakening results in what I call a "diasporic gaze" on the American Dream. I depart from Walter Mignolo's idea that knowledge should be understood based on a locus of enunciation. In *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Mignolo argues that one thinks from where he or she is located.

Bringing this to the realm of human mobility is to make it more complex: one is going to modify his or her way of thinking on the move, that is, according to old and new loci of enunciations that are juxtaposed.

Thus, in post-2007 United States, Jende Jonga sees his take on the American Dream change from reachable to impossible. Not accidentally, Imbolo Mbue dedicates a significant part of her novel to detail why and how Jende changes his mind, which, in my opinion, emphasizes the development of a diasporic gaze on the American Dream. As seen, the character's diasporic gaze is prompted by the eruption of the massive financial crisis, an event that fuels a comparative understanding from the viewpoint of an outsider living a diasporic experience, consequently able to add more variables to the sides of a complex equation. Interestingly, it can be noted that Clark Edwards and other American characters in general do not share the same perception; one can speculate that they do not have the same comparative view, having always lived under an ideology that concentrates the responsibilities and the culpability of all things on the shoulders of the individual.

Concisely, the diasporic gaze is the new viewpoint that develops from the clash between hopes and dreams grown at home and harsh, unstable realities experienced in diaspora. *Behold the Dreamers* shows how some of the delusions about idealized foreign lands tend to be undone in a crisis, which serves the purpose of awakening dreaming immigrants. Some issues concerning foreign places can only be known and understood in loco. In addition, this clash between dream and reality found in the novel shows that the accomplishment of dreams does not depend solely on individual efforts, a premise found in the discourse of the American Dream, as the setting of Mbue's work portrays a society vulnerable to the instabilities of the market. Prior to this, it is useful to comment on the significance of immigrants' return, both in theory and in the literary representation, as the novel portrays it as the renewal of Jende's ability to dream.

The 'Turn' of the Migrant

The idea of a return to the homeland is controversial among theorists of immigration and Diaspora studies. Robin Cohen states that Diasporas usually develop a return movement, which gains collective approbation (274). More recently, reflecting on the new diasporas in the global context, Krishna Sen proposes the notion of "(re)turn", to explain the diasporic condition of privileged subjects:

> This '(re)turn' is very different from a simple search for roots. Operating on several levels, it indicates a 'return' to the homeland, not from the conventional site of nostalgia but from the more critical 'outsider' perspective of the imbibed host culture. It signifies the 'turn' of the migrant or 'native' to assert his/her bi-culturality and read the host culture from the ground of home, blurring the distinction between 'centre' or hostland and 'margin' or peripheral homeland. (228)

Behold the Dreamers portrays a type of diasporic return that resembles Sen's views. Ironically, the Jongas become privileged returnees, as their savings in American dollars will make them millionaires in Cameroon:

> With the new exchange rate at six hundred CFA francs to a dollar, he would be returning home with close to ten million CFA francs, enough to restart their life in a beautiful rental with a garage for his car and a maid so his wife could feel like a queen. He would have enough to start a business, which would enable him to someday build a spacious brick house and send Liomi to Baptist High School. (352)

This is one of the motivations that encourage the Jongas to go back home. Notably, the analysis of the situation is made by a more mature Jende who has, paraphrasing Sen, developed a more critical perspective of the host culture in which he lives. A type of new bi-cultural thinking arises as Jende carefully makes plans to open a new business in the homeland: his slogan would be "Jonga Enterprises: Bringing the Wisdom of Wall Street to Limbe" (353). Jende is more confident, even declining Winston's offer to manage the construction of a new hotel in Cameroon: "he had appreciated his cousin's help, but he wanted to run his own business, get to know what it was like to answer to no man. All his life it had been yes sir, yes madam. A time had to come for him to stand above others and hear yes, Mr Jonga" (353). This passage attests that Jende continues to dream, now wishing to become a business owner. In addition, his feet seem to be on the ground as he plans a viable enterprise: "…he'd have to start small . . . hire people to farm the eight acres of land his father had left him in Bimbia. He could sell the food in the Limbe market and ship some of it abroad . . . food, Winston said, would always be needed" (353).

One also notes, as Jende thinks and talks about his new plans, that there is a new world order that includes Cameroon, which appears to

be transformed by globalization. Jende and Winston are aware of some places in Limbe that sell global beer brands like Budweiser and Heineken and Motorola cell phones. This new context, which alludes to the blurring of the distinction between 'centre' or hostland and 'margin' or peripheral homeland, as Sen and other theorists put it, indicates that Cameroon, too, can be a land of opportunities in its own way.

Yet, Jende's development of a diasporic gaze and his wish to return do not seem to cause his wife Neni to change her mind. Neni simply cannot accept the end of the dream for herself and her family in the United States, passionately believing they should stay at all costs. Her stubbornness reflects the obsession with the American Dream; she considers marrying a US citizen and even putting their child up for adoption. In despair, she looks for help at a religious congregation. Once harmonious, the couple starts to quarrel constantly about it, but after some time she ends up packing to go back, still against her will. Neni as a character stands in opposition to Jende, which highlights the immigrant dilemma of believing or not believing in the dream, giving up or trying, and testing the limits of self-sacrifice and the meaning of perseverance.

The return of the Jongas to Cameroon at the end of *Behold the Dreamers* may disappoint or even shock readers unaccustomed to critical views of the American Dream and of the United States as the land of opportunity. When Jende Jonga concocts a viable plan to start a new life in his own homeland, the narrative indirectly hints at the impossibility of accomplishing the American Dream in a post-2007 United States, at least for immigrants like him. Moreover, the return of the Cameroonian family points to the existence of hopefulness and optimism, suggesting a fallacious hegemony of the United States as a type of global promised land, the only destination for those who desire better life conditions.

The Space-Time of *Behold the Dreamers*: the Latest Menace to the American Dream

In addition to the implications of the return, the analysis of *Behold the Dreamers* answered the initial questions that informed the present essay on the contemporary notion of the American Dream, revealing that the families portrayed pursue a certain type of American Dream, mostly made of material acquisitions, reaffirming its distance from the community-oriented notion of the American Dream. For instance, one can notice how the Edwardses, who are introduced in the narrative as winners who have

made their dream come true, find themselves in a frail state of existential emptiness, since wealth does not help them deal with unfortunate personal matters. Their older son Vince, who rejects his parents' lifestyle, moves to India. The younger Mighty is an unhappy child, cared by house cleaners and drivers who attempt to comfort a boy neglected by his parents. The instability of Cindy Edwards, at its peak, develops into despair and she asphyxiates herself accidentally. Her death, a turning point for Clark Edwards, symbolizes the final disintegration of the household. As it is preceded by a series of events that increase tensions in the plot, Cindy's death can lead readers to reexamine life purposes such as spending many years pursuing material comfort and then carrying the burden of sustaining the money-oriented lifestyle.

This was, in fact, an assessment that Clark Edwards was not able to make while working so many hours. He tends to take refuge in the image of himself as a provider for the family, doing what is expected from him. Perhaps attempting to highlight that the situation is partly a result of the system in which the family is inserted, the novel does not portray Clark as the insensitive CEO. He is a man who "looked as if he needed a hug, a cozy bed, and at least fifteen hours blocked out to do nothing but sleep" (160). Highly subjected to mental and emotional strain, he simply cannot comprehend what is happening to himself and to his family, his family. Above all, he is someone unable to escape from his professional imprisonment. Only after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and Cindy's death, when Clark is left alone with his younger son Mighty, he decides to move to Virginia and make a new start, hoping to have his parents around and to be closer to his son.

The Jongas, too, appreciate material comfort, especially Neni. Chibundu Onuzo properly notes that, "the Jongas are not simple Africans who eschew materialism and can teach the Edwardses how to live a contented life. Both Jende and Neni rejoice in the consumerism of America and grasp at all that capitalism has to offer" (1). Neni, as mentioned before, wishes to purchase a spacious house, a SUV, like the ones in the pictures of other Cameroonian immigrants. She is confident that Jende is going to have the money to afford her education and that of Liomi's. With a solid belief in the American Dream, she refuses to see the severity of the economic crisis, denying the solution of the return. Jende, among the characters discussed in this study, is the only one to develop a realistic understanding of the new situation, choosing the return, an action that relates to the message of

hope that closes *Behold the Dreamers*. Indeed, the novel's conclusion does not describe, but suggests an 'extraliterary happy-ending,' as readers are led to imagine positive perspectives for the Jongas in Cameroon. However, if read in terms of an unaccomplished American Dream, the novel's conclusion becomes unhappy: the main characters lose the hope to make it on American soil, after finding out about the flaws behind the idea of the American Dream, made worse in the oppressive post-2007 scenario.

This scenario may be the main innovation of *Behold the Dreamers* because it is what makes the contemporary menace to the American Dream distinct from other ones in the past, also portrayed in literature. Mbue describes with words the current macroeconomic structure that characterizes the American society, a ubiquitous environment of consumerism, dissatisfaction and struggle. It can be noted, for instance, how the Jongas and the Edwardses, despite cultural differences, have similar wishes, apprehensions, being equally subjected to the same uncertainties and suffering. In the narrative, both the rich and the poor are vulnerable to the instability of the macroeconomic structure, which appears to be a mere literary background in *Behold the dreamers*. I argue, however, that this setting has deeper significance; one way of thinking about it is to equate it with a villainous character of a tragedy, the type that harms other characters, commits evil actions and spreads chaos. I am going to call this "personified setting" the novel's neoliberal space-time. This is a dimension marked by an asphyxiating routine of long hours working in an extremely competitive milieu. In it, people are constantly threatened by joblessness, struggling to keep professional positions, affected by stress and anxiety that manifest in psychological collapses and physical disorders. Such permanent state of tension was made visible in this study. In order to understand how things evolved to the point that is portrayed in *Behold the Dreamers*, it is worthwhile to summarize the definition of neoliberalism and its consequences.

A dominant economic ideology since the 1980s, neoliberalism tends to advocate a free market approach to policymaking: promoting measures such as privatization, public spending cuts, and deregulation, according to Jon Stone: "It is generally antipathetic to the public sector and believes the private sector should play a greater role in the economy" (1). Promises such as economic growth were made at the time it was implemented, but they were not fulfilled, as asserted by Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Furceri in "Neoliberalism: Oversold?", a paper published in 2016, in the IMF's *Finance and Development*. Instead, the impacts recently observed

are the reduction of the welfare state, concentration of wealth, monopoly, and reduction of labor protection and lower incomes for workers. For Achille Mbembe, neoliberalism is also characterized by "the production of indifference; the frenzied codification of social life according to norms, categories, and numbers; and various operations of abstraction that claim to rationalize the world on the basis of corporate logic" (13). These aspects come close to what Christian Stark calls the "economization of all areas of life," meaning that in times of neoliberalism everything becomes "subjected to the logic of the market and its profit orientation" (50).

Almost a consensus, economists understand the 2007 financial crisis and its subsequent era as results of three decades of neoliberal economic policies that increased inequality in countries like the United States. On this basis, I conclude that Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* is a fierce literary representation of the human consequences of neoliberal policies in the United States. As a type of narrative climax, a poignant description of the panic generated by eruption of the crisis in chapter 27 of the novel expresses the magnitude of its consequences:

> The crisis was spreading around the world and people were losing secure jobs, losing life's savings, losing families, losing sanities . . . More jobs would be lost, with no hope of being found in the immediate future. The Dow would drop in titanic percentages. It would rise and fall and rise and fall, over and over, like a demonic wave. 400 (k)s would be cut in half, disappear as if stolen by maleficent aliens. Retirements would have to be postponed; visions of lazy days at the beach would vanish or be put on hold for up to a decade. College education funds would be withdrawn; many hands would never know the feel of a desired diploma. Dream homes would not be bought. Dream wedding plans would be reconsidered. Dream vacations would not be taken, no matter how many days had been worked in the past year, no matter how much respite was needed . . . all through the land, willows would weep for the end of many dreams. (184-85)

In this passage, Jende watches the news on TV and compares the financial crisis to the plague befallen over the Egyptians in the Old Testament, his own way to express the magnitude of the crisis. He also mentions the biblical reference to weeping willows found in the Psalms to illustrate the enormous suffering caused by the economic catastrophe. At

this point, he thanks God for having his job, only to lose his position as a chauffeur with Clark Edwards some weeks later and be impacted by the crisis like everyone else. Ultimately, it can be noted how *Behold the Dreamers* portrays people's shattered dreams through its paradigmatic characters.

In such circumstances, it becomes easier to grasp how the compelling construction of the neoliberal space-time in *Behold the Dreamers* renders the American Dream unattainable. A final point can be made taking into consideration Noam Chomsky's *Requiem for the American Dream: The 10 Principles of Concentration of Wealth & Power*. In this collection of interviews, conducted between 2011 and 2016, Chomsky clearly connects neoliberal policies to the collapse of the US welfare state and to American Dream itself. Chomsky elaborates on the current state of inequality that pervades the United States, explaining the strategies of the 0.1% super-wealthy dominant class to keep their privileges, which lead to an unprecedented concentration of wealth in the country. Examples of such strategies are the reduction of democracy, shaping of ideology, redesign of economy, and shifting the burden onto the poor and middle classes. Before devoting a chapter to each of the strategies, Chomsky writes a note on the American Dream: "The American Dream, like most dreams, has large elements of myth to it. Part of the nineteenth-century dream was the Horatio Alger story – 'we're dirt-poor but we're going to work hard and we'll find a way out', which was true to an extent" (loc. 65). To demonstrate how the American Dream was attainable in the past, Chomsky narrates the story of his own father who, coming from a poor village in Europe in 1913, gradually working himself up, ended up living a middle-class life in the US: "A lot of people could do that. It was possible for immigrants from Europe, in the early days, to achieve a level of wealth, privilege, freedom, and independence" (loc. 69). But today, the thinker reports, this is not true anymore, although the belief in the American dream continues to be sustained as a means of misleading people, instead of helping them face the reality that hinders class mobility.

Inequality, Chomsky asserts, is the result of thirty years of a shift in social and economic policies, in which the income of most of the population has stagnated: "A significant part of the American Dream is class mobility: You're born poor, you work hard, you get rich. The idea that it is possible for everyone to get a decent job, buy a home, get a car, have their children go to school… It's all collapsed" (loc. 83).

Chomsky's ratification of the unattainability of the American Dream echoes the points made in my analysis of the characters, setting

and plot of *Behold the Dreamers*. The shift in social and economic policies Chomsky mentions is the implementation of neoliberalism in the United States, which leads to a 'collapse', in Chomsky's terms, that is efficiently epitomized in Mbue's novel, as she portrays the violent human consequences of the 2007 financial crisis.

Works Cited

Adams, James Truslow. *The Epic of America*. Little Brown, 1931.

Bollen, Christopher. "Has US Literature Woken from the American Dream?" *The Guardian*, London, 20 April 2015, www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/apr/20/us-literature-the-american-dream. Accessed 15 Jan 2019.

Clark, William A. V. "Immigration and the American Dream." *The American Dream in Flux: Brazilian Immigrants' Experiences of Living, Working and 'Becoming' American*, edited by Anne Marie Spencer, Guilford Press, 2003, pp. 1-28.

Chomsky, Noam. "Note on the American Dream". *Requiem for the American Dream: The 10 Principles of Concentration of Wealth & Power*. Kindle ed, Seven Stories Press, 2017, Location 58-83.

Clifford, James. "Diaspora." *Journal of Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 3, no. 9, 1994, pp. 302-38.

Cohen, Robin. "Diasporas and the Nation-State: from Victims to Challengers." *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*, edited by Robin Cohen and Steven Vertovec, Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999, pp. 266-78.

Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford UP, 2003.

Franklin, Benjamin. "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania", National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 1747, excerpts, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/ideas/text4/franklinproposals.pdf. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-37.

Mbembe, Achille. *Crítica da Razão Negra*. Translated by Marta Lança, Antígona, 2016.

Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*. Princeton UP, 2000.

Onuzo, Chibundu. "Behold the Dreamers by Imbolo Mbue Review: an Impressive Debut." *The Guardian*, London, 04 August 2017, www.theguardian.com/ books/2017/aug/04/behold-the-dreamers-imbolo-mbue-review. Accessed 5 Sept. 2017.

Ostry, Jonathan, et al. "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" *Finance & Development Journal of the IMF*, June, 2016, pp. 38-41.

Powell, Jim. "Benjamin Franklin: The Man Who Invented the American Dream." *Foundation for Economic Education*, New York, April, 1997, https://fee.org/articles/benjamin-franklin-the-man-who-invented-the-american-dream/. Accessed 27 Feb 2019.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homelands and Return." *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies*. U of Toronto P, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, pp. 83-99.

Sen, Krishna. "The (Re)Turn of the Native: Diaspora, Transnationalism and the Re-Inscription of 'Home'." *Defining and Re-Defining Diaspora: from Theory to Reality*, edited by Marianne David and Javier Munoz-Basols, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011, pp. 227-50.

Shiller, Robert J. "The Transformation of the American Dream." *The New York Times*, New York, August p. BU3, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/ upshot/the-transformation-of-the-american-dream.html. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.

Stark, Christian J. "The Neoliberal Ideology, its Contradictions, the Consequences and Challenges for Social Work." *Ljetopis socijalnog rada*, Zagreb, Croatia, vol. 1, no. 25, 2018, pp. 39-63, www.researchgate.net/publication/326591018_The_ neoliberal_ideology_its_contradictions_the_consequences_and_challenges_for_social_work. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.

Stone, Jon. "Neoliberalism is Increasing Inequality and Stunting Economic Growth, IMF says." *Independent*, London, 27 May 2016, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/neoliberalism-is-increasing-inequality-and-stunting-economic-growth-the-imf-says-a7052416.html. Accessed 15 Jan. 2019.

Thoreau, Henry David. Walden. *University of Virginia American Studies Program*, Charlottesville, 26 December 2006 [1854], xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/ WALDEN/walden.html, Accessed 13 Sept. 2018.

Tölölyan, Khachig. "The Nation-State and its Others: in Lieu of a Preface." *Diaspora*: *a Journal of Transnational Studies*, Toronto, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, p. 5.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Frontier in American History." *University of Virginia American Studies Program*, Charlottesville, 30 September 1997 [1893], http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TURNER/. Accessed 23 Jan. 2019.

John Huston's *The Dead*: Shedding Light And Casting Shadows on James Joyce's Short Story

José Otaviano da Mata Machado

The studies of movie adaptations of literary works have been marked, throughout a considerable part of the twentieth century, by a certain despise for the film versions of novels. This is evident in a tendency displayed by several critics to measure "how good" an adaptation is by how "faithful" to "the original" it is. The "fixation with the issue of fidelity," as McFarlane (194) calls it, has led several critics to establish a "rank" or "hierarchy" in which the literary work always comes out on top, and the only chance left for the film adaptation to be well received by these critics is for the director to obsessively attempt to recreate the literary content in the language of cinema. This fixation, however, leads to the suppression of far more interesting possibilities in the realm of adaptation:

> The insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation. It tends to ignore the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts, perhaps a desirable – even inevitable – process in a rich culture; it fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. Awareness of such issues would be more useful than those many accounts of how films 'reduce' great novels. (McFarlane 10)

The issue seems to be even more severe when the source works consist of texts written by canonical authors. The case in question in the present article is the film adaptation of James Joyce's short story "The

Dead," directed by John Huston in 1987, homonymously called *The Dead*. Though critics have been able to acknowledge some of the merits of this adaptation, often they still recur in the same "fixation over fidelity." This becomes apparent either by the appraisal of a seeming "faithfulness" to the original work or by the criticism of the film's divergences with the short story. Two illustrative examples might be cited: Eric Meljac, although fairly complimentary in his critique of the adaptation, does reinforce somewhat regretfully how "Joyce's textual music," "despite his [Huston's] best efforts," cannot "be reproduced" in the film (Meljac 302); and Ann Pederson, in praising Huston's film, starts her text by claiming that "John Huston's last film, *The Dead*, is a **very faithful rendering** of Joyce's turn-of-the-century Irish dinner party" (Pederson 69, **my emphasis**).

There are, of course, critical approaches to the adaptation that manage to consider both works by their own merits – even if analyzed comparatively – without a concern for "fidelity." One such example is Luke Gibbons's article *"The Cracked Looking Glass" of Cinema: James Joyce, John Huston, and the Memory of "The Dead."* Not only does Gibbons manage to offer a very thorough and original comparative analysis, he also does so while consciously taking each work (the short story and the movie) as having their own merits. He offers his own critique of the "issue of fidelity", and presents a "solution" that, at least for Huston's *The Dead* is very helpful indeed:

> [t]he ultimate test of an adaptation of a literary work lies not in a scrupulous adherence to the "letter" of the original, but more to its "spirit," or spirits – if by that we mean the colloquy of voices or perspectives that frame the story, giving it its emotional and tonal coloring. (Gibbons 128)

Indeed, critics such as Brian McFarlane have already acknowledged the vast possibilities of the processes of adaptation. When attempting to propose a method of comparative analysis of adaptations, McFarlane calls attention to a categorization put forward by Geoffrey Wagner, which offers a valuable insight on the matter:

> Some writers have proposed strategies which seek to categorize adaptations so that fidelity to the original loses some of its privileged position. Geoffrey Wagner suggests three possible categories which are open to the film-maker and to the critic assessing his adaptation: he calls these

> (*a*) *transposition*, 'in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference'; (*b*) *commentary*, 'where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect . . . when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation'; and (*c*) *analogy*, 'which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art'. The critic, he implies, will need to understand which kind of adaptation he is dealing with if his commentary on an individual film is to be valuable. (McFarlane 10-11)

The present essay intends thus to evidence how the film adaptation of Joyce's "The Dead" might be read as a "commentary" on the original text – and even further, how both narratives in fact consist not of "aesthetic rivals" as proposed by Meljac, but as "complementary narratives." This goal will be achieved by presenting a comparative analysis of Huston's film and Joyce's story, while avoiding the "fixation with the issue of fidelity" and evidencing comparative elements that have not been particularly approached by other commentators thus far. My main focus will lie on the film scenes that seem to differ the most from the literary work. By analyzing these scenes and how they interact with the other elements in the short story, I intend to evidence how Huston's movie should not be read either as a "faithful rendering" or as a "rival narrative," but rather as a "complementary work," which manages to shed light on certain narrative aspects which are left shadowed in Joyce's work – and how some aspects that become evident in the short story are, in their turn, less conspicuous in the film. Therefore, both works seem to interact by casting light and shadows on each other, constituting complementary narratives.

"The Dead" is the final short story in Joyce's first published prose book, the collection *Dubliners*. The story portrays a typical turn-of-the-century Irish dinner party, in which Gabriel Conroy – the protagonist – is captured amidst his responsibilities as a young patriarch of the family, imbued with the task of giving the night's speech. The party is held by his two elder aunts, Kate and Julia Morkan, and his cousin, Mary Jane. The "Three Graces," as Gabriel calls them, are involved in Dublin's musical circle: Aunt Julia was a leading soprano, Aunt Kate gives piano lessons and Mary Jane is an organist with many pupils. The party was their "annual dance," to which family, friends and pupils attend. During the dinner party, Gabriel is

confronted with three frustrating encounters with women, namely: Lily, the housemaid at the Morkan's house, Molly Ivors, an Irish nationalist professor who is a colleague of Gabriel and, finally, at the end, his own wife, Gretta.

In the first part of the narrative, filled with dance and music, Gabriel is constantly worried about the speech he's chosen to deliver – for he is concerned that the "grade of culture" of the other guests "differs from his." He fears, for instance, that to quote lines from Robert Browning in his speech would be "above the heads of his hearers" (Joyce 126). Dinner eventually arrives and Gabriel performs his duty well.

After dinner and the merry-making when saying goodbye at the end of the night, Gabriel goes to a hotel with Gretta, when his wife's emotional outburst brings forth an epiphany upon Gabriel. Reminded of her youth by the events of the night, she recalls a man she once was in love with, Michael Furey, who she thinks "died for" her (Joyce 155). This leads Gabriel into a final epiphany, in which he reflects upon existential subjects, especially concerning the relationships between "the living and the dead." The narrative focus of the story, structured around a free indirect discourse in which the narrator hovers in and out of Gabriel's consciousness, creates an astoundingly immersive narrative that definitely stands out among the other stories in *Dubliners*, hinting at the high modernist narrative experiments of Joyce's later work.

John Huston's adaptation, *The Dead*, came out in 1987, featuring his daughter Anjelica Huston in the role of Gretta and Donal McCann as Gabriel Conroy. It was nominated for two Academy Awards and won 14 other awards. One specific scene of Huston's *The Dead* is rather illustrative and provides a metaphor for the analysis of the whole process of adaptation performed by the director which will be discussed in the present study. In Joyce's short story, the passage consists of Gabriel Conroy glancing up a staircase and seeing a "woman standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow" (Joyce 147) and not being able to see her face. The woman, he soon realizes, is his wife, Gretta, who listens attentively to a "distant music" – that turns out to be the Irish folk ballad *The Lass of Aughrim*, that was being sung by another guest of the party, Mr. Bartell D'Arcy. The realization triggers an internal monologue in the protagonist, made possible by Joyce's distinctive use of free indirect speech. Immersed in thoughts, Gabriel sees the image of his wife as a "symbol of something" – a symbol he cannot, at that time, interpret. "*Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter" (Joyce 148), he eventually concludes. The whole passage works

in the narrative's framework as a form of foreshadowing of Gabriel's final epiphany in the end of the story.

The scene proves itself to be quite difficult do adapt into film, since most of the action takes place inside Gabriel's mind while he gazes up at his wife. Huston's adaptation of the scene substitutes the free indirect speech internal monologue by a speechless scene, surrounded by the sound of the song "The Lass of Aughrim," in which the camera hovers alternatively between Gretta, who listens carefully to the music in the background with her eyes closed, and Gabriel, who gazes at his wife with admiration. The content of the internal monologue is absent from the film scene. However, there is still one more substantial difference in the film: while in the text Gretta's face is not visible and "the terracotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt" are, in the film her face is bathed by light, while the rest of her body is shadowed.

This difference may seem arbitrary at first, but it cannot be read as such. The fact that Gabriel cannot see her face in the text, but only her hips, foreshadows his stance towards Gretta in the next scenes of the short story: he is sexually aroused and sees her as an object of satisfaction, unable to see her true feelings, which only become evident to him when she unveils them in her final confession. These images of "shadows" in Joyce's short story are much too strong and recurrent to be "ignored" by Huston, and such an assumption would consist of an innocent reading of the director's work. The implications of Huston's photography in the scene itself will be discussed a little later, but for the time being I believe that this scene offers a metaphor for the process of adaptation performed by Huston in the whole movie. Joyce's free indirect discourse, in the short story, leads the narrative into several omissions, ellipses and misjudgments, for we only have access to the events through the biased filter of Gabriel's consciousness. What Huston's camera does in the literal level in the staircase scene – to shed light on a face that is covered by shadow in Joyce's story – actually mirrors the procedures of semiotic adaptation performed throughout the entire movie: to evidence through original script and dialogues created for the film by the screenwriter, Tony Huston (John Huston's brother), elements that are immersed in the "shadow" of Joyce's omissions and ellipsis. But it should be noted that while the film "sheds light" on some aspects, it also "casts shadows" on others, as evident in the staircase scene: while Gretta's skirt is illuminated in the short story, it is shadowed in the film. On the symbolic level, this "casting of shadows" is evident in the omission, in the film, of

certain aspects – scenes, dialogues, characters, inner monologues – that are evident in the short story. The analysis will start, then, by pointing out these omissions – these "shadows" that are cast by the movie onto the short story.

Casting Shadows

Before the exposition of the "shadowing" of certain elements of Joyce's text in Huston's adaptation, a consideration must be made regarding the nature of "omissions." It must be clear that by omitting some aspects, John Huston is in fact adapting and reproducing a high modernist tendency, which was best captured by Hemingway in his book on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*:

> If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. (Hemingway 116)

The use of omissions must be understood, then, as a narrative technique developed to, in fact, call the attention to the elements which are omitted – when performed well, as Hemingway warns. In Huston's adaptation, as the following paragraphs will evidence, there are examples of some interesting uses of omissions, and of some less well-devised ones.

Maybe the most obvious cases of "omission" in Huston's adaptation are the internal monologues featured in the short story by the use of free indirect speech. The difficulty of adapting such aspects to film – not only in Joyce's work – has already been discussed extensively.[1] When presenting his analysis of Huston's adaptation, Gibbons approaches the subject of adapting the "complex psyche of a character" as such:

> While recourse to voice-over, or related verbal devices, provides one obvious method of registering these narrative viewpoints, cinema is often most evocative when "the look" of a film, and its optical qualities, are used to convey these

[1] For a broad approach to this matter, see Stuart McDougal's *Made into Movies: From Literature to Film*.

> tonal effects. Through editing and camera movements, set design, pictorial composition, lighting, color-coding, costume, and other techniques, the visual architecture of a film may ventriloquize apparently absent voices, the image functioning as an echo-chamber of inner speech. (Gibbons 128)

Indeed, Huston makes an extensive use of such elements, relying heavily on his majestically recreated turn-of-the-century Irish house. This is particularly evident in two scenes: first, when Gabriel's frail aunt Julia is singing "Arrayed for the Bridal," the camera departs from the room and starts a short trip around the house, focusing on several household objects and memoirs, old photographs and portraits, cupboards, etc. These objects help convey something that in the short story is evident mostly through inner monologues: the multiple "dead" that surround those living in the house, such as Gabriel's mother and Patrick Morkan, his grandfather. Second, in the film's final sequence, during Gabriel's final interior monologue, the camera for the first time leaves the constraints of the indoor environment and ventures out into Ireland's winter landscape, reflecting and illustrating Gabriel's thoughts about the snow which is "general all over Ireland,, that is "falling faintly and faintly falling . . . upon all the living and the dead." (Joyce 157)

But despite these impressive scenes, much of the content held in the character's psyche's (especially Gabriel's) is left shadowed in Huston's adaptation – and by "shadowed" I do not mean necessarily absent, but at least less evident than in the literary work. An example might be found in the scene in which Gabriel's niece, Mary Jane, plays her "Academy piece," which seems quite modern and somewhat inaccessible to the audience – Gabriel himself describes the piece as having "no melody for him" or "for the other listeners," while "four young men" actually leave the room and only come back once the piece is finished (Joyce 131-32). In the book, the passage is described by the narrator by alternating between a point of view very close to Gabriel (like when he describes the piece as having "no melody") and another point of view which seems to wander around the room. The narrative focus shifts constantly between a realist description of the objects and a more psychological description of Gabriel's thoughts and memories. The following paragraph illustrates this aspect:

> Gabriel's eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower which Aunt Julie had worked in red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been taught for one year. His mother had worked for him as a birthday present a waistcoat of purple tabinet, with little foxes' heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons. It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan Family. Both she and Julia had always seems a little proud of their serious and matronly Sister. Her photograph stood before the pierglass. She held an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o'-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the names of her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate in Balbriggan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown. (Joyce 131)

In the excerpt, the shifting narrative is easily noticeable: the focus starts on the "objects" (the floor, the chandelier, the picture *Romeo and Juliet*) and then shifts into Gabriel's memories and thoughts about his aunts and mother. The thoughts about his mother wind up leading his focus to her photograph on display close to the pierglass, and the narrative focus then shifts back to the objects, by describing the photograph. Then, the narrative shifts once again to Gabriel's memories about his mother, her role in the family, and her "sullen opposition to his marriage." This paragraph presents an excellent example of the "shifting focus" of the story's free indirect discourse.

The reference to Shakespeare's play is not incidental, of course: it somehow foretells the final conflict between Gretta and Gabriel, in which

Gabriel is somewhat "downplayed" by the memory of Michael Furey, who supposedly died out of love for Gretta – much like the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*.

All these memories and thoughts raised by free indirect speech during Mary Jane's piece are absent from the film. Though the scene in which Aunt Julia sings "Arrayed for the Bridal," discussed previously, contemplates some of the "material" aspects of the excerpt (the portraits and the household objects), there is no mention to *Romeo and Juliet* or to Gabriel's mother in the film. Only by reading the short story do these aspects become evident. Of course, these omissions play a very interesting and important role in the film: by relying more on the visual elements made possible by the film medium, the movie presents a very "open-ended" passage. Instead of having access to Gabriel's family history through his memories, Huston seems to "let the objects speak", leaving up to the audience to "fill the gap" left in the omission.

Another inner monologue which is "shadowed" in the film is in the previously mentioned "staircase scene." In the short story, we have access to Gabriel's thoughts regarding Gretta while he gazes at her:

> [Gabriel] was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. But he could hear little save the noise of laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing.
>
> He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to a distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter. (Joyce 147-48)

In the excerpt, Gabriel is immersed in thoughts about the "grace and mystery" in Gretta's attitude, thinking about how she looks like a painting that he would call *Distant Music*, were he the painter. Gabriel's thoughts in this excerpt seem to dawn on him the first elements that will lead him to his final epiphany. Huston's movie, however, shadows these aspects, by only picturing the scene on the surface level, presenting a camera that alternates between Gabriel's surprised gaze and Gretta's dreamy face, while "The Lass of Aughrim" is played in its entirety in the background. Although this scene serves as a metaphor for the "shedding of light," as discussed previously, it also manages to cast some shadows on the original work. The lack of access to Gabriel's thoughts, as in the scene in which Mary Jane is playing the piano, leads to a more open-ended passage, in which the viewer is left to wonder and, through the actors facial and body expressions, attempt to interpret what is going on in their minds – especially Gabriel's.

This scene, however, also evidences how Huston's omissions are not always that interesting in the construction of the film narrative. As mentioned previously, the fact that Gabriel sees Gretta's face covered in shadows and sees only her skirt illuminated might be seen as a foreshadowing of his stance of sexual arousal towards her that is to follow in the short story:

> The blood went bounding along [Gabriel's] veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.
> She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. (Joyce 150)

The "staircase scene," in Huston's adaptation, seems to miss this point, by illuminating Gretta's face and shadowing her body. In fact, the building sexual tension of the short story is much softer and less obvious in the film. This particular omission doesn't seem to function specifically as a complementary instance, as do the previously discussed scenes. Going back to Hemingway's "Iceberg theory," this scene looks more like a "hollow place" than like "an iceberg" which is "only one-eighth . . . above water" (Hemingway 116).

Another example of omission that does not work well in the adaptation is the character of Molly Ivors. In the short story, Molly Ivors is an Irish nationalist and Gabriel's colleague at the University who was

friends with him for many years. In spite of their lasting friendship, their encounter in the story is marked by conflict. In one of the most memorable and discussed scenes in the short story, Miss Ivors confronts Gabriel about his contribution to *The Daily Express*, a British newspaper, and about his lack of allegiance to Ireland in general, calling him a "West Briton" – an Irish who supports English rule over the island.[2] Gabriel is, of course, strongly bothered and offended by the accusation, and tries to argue with Miss Ivors, to no use (Joyce 132-34).

A first reading seems to put Gabriel and Miss Ivors as solely opposing forces in the narrative – especially because Gabriel revolves her accusation over and over again in his mind, and even plans to provoke her during his speech. That consists of an effect of the narrative technique employed by Joyce, however, in which we – the readers – are led to see the world through Gabriel's critical eyes. Melissa Free warns us about this "trap" set by Joyce:

> Yet, rather than recognizing the traffic of thought in the modern consciousness of the colonized, conflicted, critical mind, scholars have denounced Gabriel as insufficiently modern, insufficiently feminist, insufficiently Irish, and insufficiently charitable. Nonetheless, Gabriel's defensive judgments that Joyce's free indirect discourse exposes are likely to mirror the reader's own judgments of Gabriel: By turning the psychic interior outward, but inconsistently and in third person, the narration tempts us to condemn judgment, but it also tempts us to judge. It is a temptation little noted and almost never resisted. (280)

So, a more careful reading evidences that, despite the conflict, the short story does convey Miss Ivors as an agreeable character, by describing she and Gabriel as "friends of many years' standing." Not only that, but Miss Ivors actually praises Gabriel's review published in *The Daily Express*, and he actually feels at ease when talking to her about "the University question" (Joyce 133).

[2] Melissa Free's "'Who is G. C.?': Misprizing Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's 'The Dead'" (2009) not only offers a genealogical perspective of the criticism about the text but also offers a unique point of view which attempts to put Gabriel's character under a more positive light than previous critics have done.

However, these positive aspects are shadowed in Huston's film adaptation. First of all, the lack of Gabriel's inner monologues keep from the viewer the fact that Miss Ivors and Gabriel are old friends whose careers parallel each other. She is introduced simply as an ideological "opponent" who confronts Gabriel about his nationalism. Not only that, but the conversation in which they talk "at ease" about the University issues and she praises his review is omitted from the film: we merely see them talking from a distance, while their conversation is silenced by the background music.

The shadowing of Molly Ivors's character is also visible in Gabriel's speech during mealtime. In the film, several parts of the speech are omitted, such as "[A] new generation is growing up in our midst, a generation actuated by new ideas and its enthusiasm, even when it is misdirected is, I believe, in the main sincere" (Joyce 143). This part, as Gabriel thinks to himself previously, would have been aimed at Molly Ivors, had she not left the party a little before dinner was served. These omissions seem to render Miss Ivors's character as rather one-sided in the film – as opposed to her interesting ambiguous role in the short story.

It should be noted that the although some omissions work better than others, they all evidence how the film and the short story work as "complementary narratives," for the parts that are "shadowed" in Huston's movie can be grasped in Joyce's text, where they are "illuminated." This complementarity, however, does not work only in one direction – that is, by the movie omitting aspects ("casting shadows") of the short story. In fact, the opposite phenomenon seems even more interesting to analyze: how does the director manage to "shed light" on aspects that are "shadowed" in the source text?

Shedding Light

As mentioned before, Huston's adaptation does not attempt to recreate Joyce's free indirect speech through most of the film, which leads to some of the "shadows" described previously. However, this choice not to recreate Joyce's narrative strategy also allows some aspects of the book to be "enlightened" by Huston's camera. This is especially true of some dialogues that, in the short story, are not transcribed literally, but rather have their content summarized by the narrator. Many of these dialogues are actually spelled out in the film, and new content is scripted for them, which allows for the viewer and reader to have a different perspective on the relationships of the characters in both the short story and the movie.

The conversation held over dinner about the opera at the Theatre Royal is an example of such dialogue. In the short story, we only have access to the dialogue through the narrator's voice, which only gives a short survey of the conversation:

> The subject of talk was the opera company which was then at the Theatre Royal. Mr. Bartell D'Arcy . . . praised very highly the leading contralto of the company but Miss Furlong thought she had a rather vulgar style of production. Freddy Malins said there was a negro chieftain singing in the second part of the Gaiety pantomime who had one of the finest tenor voices he had ever heard. (Joyce 141)

The dialogue, in the film, is presented literally, and offers much more information. Mr. D'Arcy, particularly, has a rather more prominent role, displaying through the scene a remarkable erudition in opera music, distilling his knowledge of singers, musicians and techniques. All the guests seem to be, in fact, very much versed in the topic. Although this is noticeable in the short story, it becomes blatant in the movie – or, it could be said, what is somewhat "shadowed," becomes "enlightened."

Apart from dialogues such as this, Huston also sheds light on the short story by means of creating a certain "cultural actualization," that is, he attempts to turn the work into something more accessible to contemporary audiences. One example of such technique is noticeable in the presentation of Molly Ivors's character: in the short story, we know that she is an Irish nationalist because of the content of her discourse, of the "large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar" which "bore on it an Irish device and motto" (Joyce 132) and because she bids Gabriel goodbye with an Irish expression (*Beannacht libh*) (Joyce 138). These elements, though very obvious to an early twentieth century reader (or to a contemporary literary critic), are perhaps not that self-evident to the contemporary lay reader. For that reason, Huston fills the film with more elements surrounding Molly Ivors's nationalism. The charge of "West Briton," for example, is explained in the film; when accused, Gabriel questions: "What do you mean a West Briton," to which Miss Ivors explains: "Someone who looks to England for our salvation, instead of depending on ourselves alone." Gabriel, of course, knows quite well what she means by "a West Briton;" however, such an explanation is actually intended for the contemporary viewers. The same happens in Molly Ivors's early departure: while in the short story she claims

that she has to leave before dinner and go home (Joyce 137), in the film she does so because she has to go to a "union meeting at Liberty," in which James Conelly (Irish republican and socialist leader) would be speaking, to which Gabriel retorts: "As you mean, the Republican meeting?". This whole dialogue – nonexistent in the book – serves to reinforce Molly's character as a nationalist Irish woman. The character, then, serves as an example of both "casting shadows" and "shedding light" in the process of adaptation. If on one hand, she is pictured in the film as "one-sided" in comparison to the short story – as mentioned in the previous section –, on the other hand the character goes, in Huston's film, through a process of cultural actualization, which might be read as an example of "shedding light" on Joyce's text.

Another aspect that is not obvious in the book which the film sheds light on is the date in which the dinner party takes place. Although there is a consensus in contemporary criticism in dating the story on Epiphany Day (January 6th) of 1904 (Prazeres 20), the elements in the short story that hint at this date are not so clear: we do know that it is early January, for New Year's Eve was somewhat recent (Joyce 130) and it is still winter. Not only is Epiphany Day one of the only festivities around this time, but also its motif – epiphany – is one of Joyce's most dear themes (Santos 92). But apart from these elements, we have no other evidence in the short story of the date. The film sheds light on this topic: when discussing Freddy Malins's drunk arrival at the party, Aunt Kate complains to Gabriel: "And his poor mother made him the pledge on New Year's Eve," to which Gabriel responds: "It's a wonder he lasted for 6 days, if he did." This puts the narrative six days after New Year's Eve; in other words, on Epiphany Day.

In a similar (and maybe one could say "symmetrical") manner to the shadows cast by the film on the Molly Ivors character, the character of Freddy Malins is "illuminated" by Huston's camera. A somewhat secondary character in the book, Malins, in the adaptation, is explored in much more depth. In the short story, Freddy Malins and his mother are two guests at the party. Freddy is described as a "young man of about forty," with "heavy-lidded eyes" and a disorderly "scanty hair" that makes him look sleepy (Joyce 130). His appearance is coherent with the role he has in the narrative; described as a drunkard (and perhaps even an alcoholic), he often works as a comic relief in the short story. His inebriation, then, is used by Joyce to a somewhat humorous effect, turning the character into some sort of "clown," or a symbol to Irish drunkenness. In the film, however,

the character displays features different from those shown in the source text. Malins's issues with alcohol feature, apart from humor, a darker, more tragic side; his troublesome relationship with his mother is more thoroughly developed and he even displays a religious side more ostensibly than in the short story.

In Freddy's first appearance in the film, Gabriel takes him to the bathroom to make him look more presentable. This scene is hinted at in the book (for when Freddy appears he is being "piloted" by Gabriel) (Joyce 130), but their actual conversation in the bathroom constitutes one of the rare moments in the short story when the narrative focus shifts away from Gabriel altogether (focusing rather on Gretta, involved in a conversation with the hostesses). The film, then, operates once again the "shedding of light" into a moment "shadowed" in the short story. And this shedding of light also starts to develop the Freddy Malins character in the film, for he is presented as somewhat afraid of and worried about his mother, and his drunkenness (at this moment) is not presented as humorous, but rather, as somewhat unnerving. Alone with Freddy, Gabriel attempts to bring the man to his senses, but almost to no avail, for Malins is just too drunk to follow his commands properly.

Freddy's relationship with his mother is also developed more thoroughly in the film. While in the book the moment in which mother and son are involved in a dialogue is presented in one single sentence by the narrator ("When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure of the window," 135), the film reserves a scene for the dialogue. In this conversation with his mother, Freddy is reprehended for being late and drunk, and, as an excuse, says he was "at a committee meeting" (once again reinforcing the topic of Irish nationalism) – to which Mrs. Malins bitterly replies that the meeting must have been held at "Mullingham's Pub." Once again, Freddy Malins' alcohol issues are not humorous, but rather tragic, for they cause his quarrel with his mother.

Another aspect regarding Freddy Malins that is shadowed by the short story and illuminated by the adaptation is his name: in Joyce's text, although most characters and the narrator call him "Freddy," Mr. Browne calls him "Teddy" not once or twice, but three times. In the film, a passage is added into the narrative in which Freddy is angered and retorts at Mr. Browne: "Why do you insist on calling me Teddy? My name is Freddy, as you well know!", to which Mr. Browne, also aggressively, responds:

"Theodore Alfred Malins. First things first, I say. Theodore, Teddy." Not only does the dialogue attempt to "explain" an aspect left unexplored in the short story, but it also presents yet another moment in which drunkenness is not featured humorously: Freddy and Mr. Browne, both drunk, argue violently, creating a heavy atmosphere around the table, only disrupted when someone changes subject.

Complementary Narratives

By casting shadows and shedding lights on Joyce's original work, John Huston does not attempt simply to "transpose" the short story into film. He rather chooses to *comment* on the original source, providing his own unique reading, which, in a sense, complements the reader's reception of the narrative. While the short story allows for a unique glimpse into the inner contradictory judgments of Gabriel Conroy, through its use of free indirect speech, the film pulls the reader a little further back and allows him to look more closely to other characters who surround the protagonist. While in Joyce we see Molly Ivors as a fundamental and complex character, in Huston Freddy Malins comes forward from the background and enacts the controversial issues that surround alcoholism in Ireland. If Joyce's work offered an acid and critical panorama of Irish life to his contemporaries in *Dubliners,* Huston's *The Dead* brings this panorama closer to the director's own contemporaries.

Hence, it becomes evident how Joyce's "The Dead" and Huston's *The Dead* should not be read as "aesthetic rivals," as proposed by Meljac. Rather, by "shedding light" and "casting shadows" on each other, much like the "staircase scene" discussed in the introduction – by focusing, omitting and presenting different aspects of the narrative, the two works are actually complementary narratives, that enhance in meaning the aesthetic experience for the attentive reader who is willing to read both.

Works Cited

Free, Melissa. "'Who is G. C.?': Misprizing Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's 'The Dead'." *Joyce Studies Annual 2009*, edited by Moshe Gold & Philip Sicker, Fordham UP, 2009, pp. 277-303.

Gibbons, Luke. "'The Cracked Looking Glass' of Cinema: James Joyce, John Huston, and the Memory of 'The Dead'." *Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2002, pp. 127-48.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. Scribner, 2002.

Joyce, James. "The Dead." *The Complete Novels of James Joyce: Dubliners – A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man – Ulysses – Finnegans Wake*. Wordsworth, 2012, pp. 123-157.

McDougal, Stuart Y. *Made into Movies: From Literature to Film*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford UP, 1996.

Meljac, Eric Paul. "Dead Silence: James Joyce's 'The Dead' and John Huston's Adaptation as Aesthetic Rivals." *Literature-Film Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2009, pp. 295-304.

Pederson, Ann. "Uncovering 'The Dead': A Study of Adaptation." *Literature Film Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1993, pp. 60-70.

Prazeres, Armando Sérgio dos. "'Os Vivos e os Mortos': uma tradução epifânica de John Huston para James Joyce." *Bloomsday: Ensaios 2011/2012*, edited by Ana Graça Canan and Marcelo da Silva Amorim, EDUFRN, 2012, pp. 19-30.

Santos, Marcel de Lima. "James Joyce and *Ulysses*: The Writers' Writer." *Bloomsday: Ensaios 2011/2012*, edited by Ana Graça Canan and Marcelo da Silva Amorim, EDUFRN, 2012, pp. 91-104.

The Dead. Directed by John Huston, Lionsgate, 2009.

Colors and Rainbows in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*

Juliana Borges Oliveira de Morais

"Somebody/anybody
Sing a black girl's song
Bring her out
To know herself
. . . . . .
she doesn't know the sound
of her own voice
her infinite beauty."
(Lady in brown in *For Colored Girls* 4)

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf, first published in 1975 by playwright and poet Ntozake Shange, may be regarded as experimental in many different ways, such as in its form: perhaps a play in which the dialogues are poems; or maybe poetry to be performed; or perchance a "choreopoem," in Shange's own words, as she describes the genre on the book's first page.

According to Jessica Bomarito and Jeffrey W Hunter, Shange's choreopoem may be defined as a poetic monologue that is incorporated into a dramatic performance (451). Bearing this definition in mind, the poetic monologue that constitutes *For Colored Girls* is incorporated by seven women speakers whose voices are intercalated throughout the performance. The intercalation of voices on stage builds the image of intertwined experiences of sisterhood, as these women support and try to understand one another throughout the course of each other's accounts.

The poems/dances in this unique literary genre are performed by means of a colorful symbolism: each of the seven speakers is dressed in a different color, resulting ultimately in a human rainbow. Not only do

the women speakers portray a color to the audience, but are also invited to meet an array of different colors of the human experience as they get to know each other's stories.

Shange, in her preface, states that the play deals, especially, with "the global misogyny that we, women, face" (3). That is so because the stories speak to a myriad of female experiences, such as to the silent endurance of many women. A solo voice, according to Shange, becomes many (10). More specifically, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf* is aimed at "colored girls." The lady in brown says: "this is for colored girls who have considered suicide but moved to the ends of their own rainbows" (6). It is, therefore, intended to reach African-American women in their journeys of womanhood, reminding them of the necessity to claim for voice and of self-knowledge, as well as appraisal.

It is my claim that, even though colors as metaphors have already been widely used in texts by African-American writers, in twentieth century African-American women's writings, such as in Shange's *For Colored Girls*, the metaphors gain different nuances. Besides conveying the idea of absence of voice or of invisibilization, indeed a paradox when dealing with colors, colors also seem to refer to other matters, which are paramount to contemporary feminisms, such as the acknowledgment of the presence of heterogeneity within communities, and the possibility of change despite the marginalization black women suffer by mainstream society. It is my intention, therefore, to briefly discuss the employment of colors in *For Colored Girls* as metaphors that point to the acknowledgement of heterogeneity among these African-American women, as well as to the possibility of hope for them, who are both speakers and ideal/ intended spectators/readers in Shange's work.

Colors: A Claim for Uniqueness and Collectivity

Colors as metaphors have been recurrently employed in literature by African-American writers. One example may be noticed in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, published in 1952. In this novel, one finds a significant color metaphor when the character Lucius Brockway, an old janitor, refers to the most important color of the factory he works for as being the "optic white" (217). He states that this shade of white is obtained by means of a very careful mixture of colors, so that the outcome is a white that is "optic and right" (217). The color white of the paint in *Invisible Man* draws attention to the invisibility of the color black (as well as other colors) in mainstream

society: even though black is in the paint mixture, it is nevertheless turned invisible by the ideology of race represented in the novel.

In *For Colored Girls who have considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf,* the use of color metaphors addresses issues related to race as well, but also to gender. In fact, African-American women writers of the twentieth century oftentimes present colors in such a way that multiple identity constituents are encompassed, such as race, gender class and so on. In the poem "A Room Full of Sisters," for example, by Mona Lake Jones, the colors that are mentioned call the attention to matters of race and gender. In relation to the latter, the poem points to the issue of heterogeneity among African-American women:

> A room full of sisters, like jewels
> in a crown: vanilla, cinnamon, and
> dark chocolate brown. (lines 1-3)

The speaker describes a room in which African American women share experiences. These women are described in different shades of brown, symbolizing their uniqueness and the fact that they have different stories, even though they are united by their "Black history" (line 23) as well as their "African faces" (line 14).

The refusal to describe African-American women as a homogeneous representation may also be noticed in the novel *The Women of Brewster Place*, by Gloria Naylor, published in 1982. In Naylor's work, each woman of Brewster Place is also presented in different shades of brown, highlighting that "Brewster Place rejoiced of . . . multi-colored 'Afric' children" (4). The women are described as having "nutmeg arms," "ebony legs," among other colors (4), pointing as well to the idea of heterogeneity among African-American women. Interestingly enough, the novel is divided into seven stories, being the last one an encounter of the women characters previously described.

Referring back to Jones's "A Room Full of Sisters," colors are also conveyed in the poem by reference to women's clothes:

> They were wearing purple, royal blue,
> and all shades of red;
> some had elegant hats on their heads.
> With sparkling eyes and shiny lips,
> they moved through the room swaying
> their hips ... (lines 8-13)

In this regard, Jones's poem resembles Shange's approach to colors in *For Colored Girls* because the speakers in the choreopoem are also dressed in different colors. Clothing, therefore, becomes a device in common for the expression of difference.

In *For Colored Girls* each of the seven women speakers is represented by a color: brown, yellow, purple, red, green, blue and orange, and each of these women enact different experiences on stage. Some speakers embody more than one experience in such a way that the number seven, symbolic in itself, is somewhat multiplied by the number of performances. Furthermore, the combination of the speakers when they take part in the choruses also changes, such as the order of each of their appearances on stage. Therefore, the idea conveyed to the reader/audience is that there are so many different experiences as there are different colors in a rainbow, as well as there may be various combinations of these colors. Consequently, homogeneity becomes an impossible idea to be conceived.

Regarding colors as metaphors it may be said, therefore, that such as in Jones's and Naylor's works, Shange suggests that the "colored girls" portrayed are not a unified whole; their experiences are varied, such as represented by their many hues, even though they are sisters: they are part of the very same rainbow.

Heterogeneity is a relevant concept because it precludes essentialism, which is, according to Avtar Brah, "a notion of ultimate essence that transcends historical and cultural boundaries" (95). Considering black feminist criticism, avoiding essentialism has been paramount, especially after the sixties. In order to avoid an essentialist idea of women and works by women, Barbara Smith's "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," published in the seventies, calls for the acknowledgment of a black women's tradition, which, according to her, was not taken into account by the movement at the time. Later on, Patricia Hill Collins's *Black feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, published in 2000, also highlights the importance of acknowledging a black feminist agenda, which poses a challenge to a supposedly universal one.

A paradox, however, is pointed out by the feminist critic Uma Narayan, who explains that, in the attempt to avoid universal essentialist generalizations about women, there has been a tendency among scholars to make "culture-specific essentialist generalizations" (81). One culture-specific essentialism would be to define attributes of African-American

women, for example. Narayan states that a consequence of essentialist approaches would be that:

> although often motivated by the injunction to attend to differences among women seriously, such moves fracture the universalist category "woman" only slightly, because culture-specific essentialist generalizations differ from universalistic generalizations in degree or scope, and not in kind. (81-82)

Therefore, although a universal concept of woman is misleading because there are distinct plights among women influenced by race and class, and so forth, cultural essentialisms are just as damaging because they still essentialize women to some degree.

It is noteworthy to point out that Shange's approach to colored girls goes beyond the acknowledgement of the existence of colored women as a distinct group within white mainstream society; her work reveals the absence of homogeneity within the label "colored" as well. Furthermore, by means of these women's constant movement on stage, Shange reinforces a representation which is by no means static. In her work the colored girls and their performances are both heterogeneous and fluid, suggesting that they are not dictated by labels and/or pre-assumptions.

New Colors for New Rainbows: Voice and Hope

The rainbow traditionally has the following seven colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. In Shange's work, however, indigo is removed and the color brown is inserted into this rainbow that is formed by the seven women speakers. It is noteworthy to point out that it is not the color black that is inserted into the rainbow, as one could have expected. By doing that, Shange calls the reader's attention to her very choice. The color brown becomes a metatheatrical device that makes one speculate about its significance. One possible interpretation could be that Shange invites readers/audience to have new understandings of themselves as colored women, emphasizing that mainstream ideologies oftentimes do not contribute to happiness or fulfillment.

In *For Colored Girls*, there are no lines in which the speakers directly challenge the fact of being defined as black, but it is exactly the absence of this particular color in the rainbow which is formed on stage that calls the attention to that matter in the work. Shange seems to call attention first and foremost to self-awareness. The rainbow in Shange's work becomes

not only a metaphor for heterogeneity among African-American women, but also a metaphor for a new way of perceiving any labels, colors.

Brown can be regarded as an attempt at self-referral in the rainbow that is presented on stage. The lady in brown does, in fact, perform the poem who talks about wanting "her stuff back" (50). The speaker states that she wants the right to define her own self, not having to let go of her cultural luggage or personal experiences and choices.

The theme of self-definition is also reflected in the choreopoem by a glimpse of autobiographical data. It is known that Ntozake Shange, born Paulette L. Williams, chooses to be called Ntozake because of the significance of the latter word: 'her own things.' This piece of information is inserted into the choreopoem, in one of the speeches by the lady in green: "this is mine/ntozake 'her own things'/that's my name/now give me my stuff" (50).

Self-definition is a rich issue in the work insofar as it not only points to self-awareness but also to homogeneity. Shange's work can in fact be seen as a step further in relation to the so-called second wave (mainstream) feminism – which begins in the sixties and is radical in scope, claiming for self-assertion, independence, work, reproductive rights – and mostly as a contribution to so-called third wave feminism – which begins in the eighties and in which diversity and "feminisms" instead of any "universal feminism" are acknowledged.

Shange not only acknowledges the existence of "colored girls" in the midst of a white mainstream society, calling attention to diversity and giving voice to African-American women, but also acknowledges difference within this very community: each colored girl makes different statements toward self-definition in the choreopoem. As a result, Shange's *For Colored Girls* can be seen as a contemporary work bearing in mind Feminist theory – a work ahead of its time.

The title of the choreopoem, *For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, suggests that colored girls may sometimes feel disempowered "when the rainbow is enough" to such an extent that suicide becomes even a possibility. However, the new color that is added suggests that the rainbow, as we know it, does not have to be enough. There are other possibilities. Hope becomes, therefore, an important message in the play.

Symbolism of the Rainbow in *For Colored Girls*

Having discussed the matter of avoiding essentialism and the rainbow as a metaphor of hope in Change's choreopoem, in this final section of my essay I briefly engage in symbolisms of the rainbow, according to different traditions. The rainbow carries a number of significations and in *For Colored Girls* it seems to be influenced by the confluence of Judeo-Christian, Greek, and African traditions. These traditions work together in order to convey the idea of hope as an overall message of the choreopoem. To begin with, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the rainbow symbolizes God's covenant to men, following the episode of the flood, which is narrated in the book of Genesis. After the flood, the Lord says to Noah, who had been assigned to build the ark:

> I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said: this [the rainbow] is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. (*Holy Bible,* Gen. 9.11-13)

The rainbow becomes, from that moment on, a symbol of God's faithfulness to humankind and a sign of hope.

In Shange's choreopoem the idea of hope is present in the symbolism of the rainbow bearing in mind the many possibilities that are conveyed as the poetic play progresses (possibilities of voice for colored women; and possibilities of change and of survival). The symbolism of hope is also present in the poem due to the healing process that takes place while the speakers intercalate their experiences. The lady in red states, at one point: "I found god in myself & I loved her / I loved her fiercely" (63). As the play unfolds, one woman helps the other to understand oneself and to effectively enjoy who they are.

These women learn to see God in themselves and in each other in such a way that a divine bond is created between them, of which the rainbow is a token. Finally, the seven colors working together on stage also work as a token of hope for the colored girls who are spectators/readers. In other words, the stage becomes a sky in which a rainbow of hope and of cleansing is formed. Shange's work, therefore, reflects the Judeo-Christian

tradition in its symbolism of the rainbow because of the message of hope and of bonding that it conveyed by the performers.

As far as the Greek tradition is concerned, the rainbow is personified by a goddess herself, Iris. In some languages, such as in Portuguese, the word for rainbow makes a direct reference to the Greek tradition: *arco-íris*: the 'Iris-bow.' Iris is not only a personification of the rainbow, but is also understood to be a messenger of the gods, mainly of Zeus. She embodies the symbolism of a path (Daly 79) between the gods and the humans, as well as between the clouds and the sea. She is, therefore, a tool for carrying messages/word from gods. In effect, in *For Colored Girls* one may say that just as Iris symbolizes a path, the colored girls on stage also work as paths for the messages they convey to their intended audience. The speakers, like Iris, carry messages to the spectator/reader.

Finally, concerning African traditions, *For Colored Girls* seems to rescue African oral traditions in more than one way: first by the importance that is given to performance in order to have meaning conveyed, recalling the paramount importance of the performer and his/her performance so oral tradition is perpetuated, and also in the symbolism of the rainbow, as understood especially by the Bantu tradition. To begin with, in African oral traditions symbolisms are considered to be ways by which the human being can make the "invisible world" tangible. In that sense, Raul Ruiz de Asúa Altuna claims that in African oral cultures, symbols are used not only to express experiences, but mostly to give meaning to events in life (88). In African traditions, the symbol is not a mere figure of speech, but something tangible: it is seen as a reflection of the invisible and a sign of the sacred. All symbolisms, thus, are sacred for revealing what cannot be seen.

In Bantu tradition, the rainbow, known as Hongolo, is considered to be a kind of deity, a *nkisi*, immediately inferior in rank to the supreme god, *nzambi* (Altuna 45). Interestingly enough, *nkisis* are messengers of god, resembling Iris in the Greek tradition. In Bantu tradition, the rainbow is also directly related to the idea of transformation because of its association with the cycle of the water, its ascending and descending movements, which is a transformation of states, and also with a sacred serpent, which is regarded to know the depths of the earth, being responsible for transformations.

Not only in Bantu tradition is the rainbow charged with symbolism. Other African traditions and religious practices present almost the same symbolism as far as the rainbow is concerned. For example, in voodoo, a religious practice that comes from Benin, West Africa, and was brought to

the Americas due to the slave trade and reshaped because of the process of colonization, the rainbow is also present. It is considered to be a deity, called Damballah Wedo, and is related to a snake as well (Kail 92). According to Tony M. Kail, the practices of several African groups, such as Yoruba, Congo and Fon, among others, evolved into voodoo (89). Today it is practiced mainly in Haiti, first site of African slaves in the slave trade and a country in which voodoo is considered to be the major religion, but also throughout the Americas, due to the African diaspora. In the United States, it is practiced in homes and temples.

The rainbow as symbol of transformation is also found in other works by twentieth-century woman writers of the African diaspora, such as in *Ponciá Vicêncio*, by Conceição Evaristo, a widely known Afro-Brazilian writer. In the novel, the protagonist, a girl named Ponciá, is afraid of the rainbow for the fear that if she passes beneath it she will become a boy, a belief that is passed on to her by the community. The third person narrator states: "in that afternoon, Ponciá Vicêncio looked at the rainbow and felt somewhat afraid. It had been a good time since she had last seen the snake of the sky"[1] (14, my translation). The reference to the Bantu tradition is suggested not only by the fear of transformation from one sex to another, but also by the mention of the rainbow as a serpent. Ponciá, in the end of the novel, sees a *hangolo* (rainbow), in Portuguese *angorô*, diluting in the sky. The transformations that Ponciá goes through, from girl to woman, are foreshadowed by the symbolism of the rainbow. In *For Colored Girls* there is a confluence of traditions in the symbolism of the rainbow: it suggests that transformations are possible by means of reclaiming one's voice, such as what happens in Evaristo's novel, as well as it points to hope and the presence of the sacred in each of the girls' lives.

Finally, it is my conclusion that colors as metaphors highlight several meanings conveyed in the play, such as a claim against essentialism among African-American women; a claim for voice; and possibilities of hope and change. What is more, the symbolism of the rainbow is an important metaphor in the choreopoem, being influenced by different traditions, such as the Judeo-Christian, the Greek and African ones.

[1] "Naquela tarde, Ponciá Vicêncio olhava o arco-íris e sentia um certo temor. Fazia tempo que ela não via a cobra celeste" (Evaristo14).

Works Cited

Altuna, Raul Ruiz de Asúa. *Cultura tradicional banto*. SAP, 1985.

Bomarito, Jessica, and Jeffrey W. Hunter. *Feminism in Literature: a Gale Critical Companion*. Vol. 4, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2000.

Daly, Kathleen N. *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z*. 3rd ed., Chelsea House, 2009.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Kindle ed., Vintage, 1995.

Evaristo, Conceição. *Ponciá Vicêncio*. Mazza Edições, 2003.

Holy Bible. King James Version, Oxford UP, 2003.

Jones, Mona Lake. "A Room Full of Sisters." *The Color of Culture*, Impact Communications, 1993, p. 18.

Kail, Tony M. *Magico-Religious Groups and Ritualistic Activities: a Guide for First Responders*. CRC Press, 2008.

Kay, Jackie. "Race, Racist, Racism." *Darling: New and Selected Poems*. Bloodaxe Books, 2007, pp. 128-30.

Narayan, Uma. "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: a Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism." *Decentering the Center: Phylosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World*, edited by Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, Indiana UP, 2000, pp. 80-99.

Naylor, Gloria. *The Women of Brewster Place*. Penguin Books, 1982.

Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls who have considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*. Macmillan, 1989.

Smith, Barbara. "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* organized by Vincent Leitch, Norton, 2001, pp. 2302-315.

Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*: Empowering Displacements and the Reconfiguration of Canadian Women's Writing in the 1970s[1]

Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira

Concerning gender studies on women, Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own* proposes one of the first breaks with patriarchal models that restricted women's representation in literature, with the idea of literary production as an almost exclusive monopoly of men. Due to the appropriation and resignification of most of Woolf's ideas by many of the activists and theorists of the Second Wave Feminism, from the 1960s into the early 1980s (Bonnici 235), those ideas will echo throughout the 1970s in Canada as one of the driving elements of Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976), mostly epitomized by more promising models for women's writings, *different* from men's, which until then preponderated, even in most literary works produced by women.

This essay first aims at analyzing why the fact that novels with women writers as protagonists have crucial importance in the reconfiguration of women's writing in the 1970s English-speaking Canada so as to better comprehend how the Western female literary tradition was attacked and effaced, almost reducing it to bare traces. Secondly, a brief appreciation the protagonist's national, transnational, and psychological displacements, whose effects seem to subvert and resignify restrictive meanings in the public sphere/private sphere binarism, is another objective in the present analysis. To that effect, I will rely on concepts developed by Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showalter, Mary Eagleton, Toril Moi, Stuart Hall, Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Eva Hoffman.

[1] Translated by Marcos Pereira Feitosa.

By "women's writing" I mean women's writing of fiction, emphasizing issues the Second Wave Feminism proposed, prioritizing the rupture with patriarchal assumptions that always guided, hindered, or even blocked women's production. Without falling into the trap of considering either male or female production hierarchically superior to the other, my intent here is to acknowledge that, in order to mark these distinctions, women's contemporary writing should encompass certain alternatives, such as a positive representation by means of strong female characters, not dependent on male protagonists; as well as the introduction of a literature that focuses on specific or strictly female areas (birth-giving experiences, or rape, or being ignored by men) (Bonnici 28), in order to make it evident that, as Thomas Bonnici and Lúcia Osana Zolin highlight, one needs to destabilize paradigms, and disadvantageous long-established knowledge, essentialisms, homogenizations, and universalisms which have always served as pillars of current notions of tradition for the literary canon and literary historiographical discourse, and as criteria for values inherited and legitimized by patriarchal culture (Bonnici and Zolin 327).

Taking Back Women's Literary Tradition

Bonnici discusses considerations on "public" (male) and "private" (female) action spheres (206), which, in Plato's view, were already guided by the maxim that "men's virtue is to be able to conduct well the State, while women's virtue is to administer the house, look after the family, and always obey the husband." As the "private sphere," far from containing any positive meaning of "privacy" and "intimate and impenetrable space of the self," referred rather to household spaces (household chores, responsibilities towards the children's education, looking after the husband, and procreating for the Greek man), it is no surprise that artistic and literary production would be under the men-centered dominion of "public sphere." This ideology was absorbed by the Judeo-Christian world and shaped Western patriarchal society, perpetuating and "naturalizing" several sabotages against women, as perhaps done against the "founder" of Western women's literary tradition: Sappho of Lesbos.

Philosopher Will Durant points out a part of the unfair and prejudiced conceptions Western society developed about Sappho's life, reflected in playing down the importance of her pioneering literature and arts. According to Durant, Sappho was a beautiful young woman, delicate and artistically talented. As a young widow, she opened the first continued-

education school for women, where they could learn poetry, music, and dance. She falls in love with one of her students, Attis, and turns nearly mad when the latter accepts a young man's courting. The Judeo-Christian masculinity of posterity, as Durant (92) points out, took vengeance over Sappho, spreading or making up the story that she had died of the unrequited love of a man, rather than registering the true nature of the Greek poet's passion, whose object was another woman. Hence we have an oppressive and twisted patriarchal version of the life story of a woman who succeeded in male activities, affirming the effective taboo against the expression of love between two women, since homosexual love was also a male dominion, if we consider the triviality of homoerotic practices among men in Ancient Greece (Durant 106).

Hypatia of Alexandria, another Greek woman, who lived from 355 to 415 a.d., also ventured in the "public sphere": she was a philosopher, inventor, and director of the library of Alexandria in the Ancient Age; in sum, she was the first known woman "scientist". In 415 a.d., in a time of strongly fundamentalist Christianity, recently made official to the Roman Empire, and under Cyril, the "Patriarch" of Alexandria, Hypatia had to pay for her "audacity" to trespass the boundaries established for women: she was dragged through the streets and taken to a church, where she was tortured and killed; her body was cast into a fire. As a result, Hypatia became "a powerful feminist symbol and a figure of affirmation for intellectual endeavour in the face of ignorant prejudice" (Deakin).

Still in this same train of thought, the world-wide known atrocities Joan of Arc suffered for similar reasons can be adequately recalled here. She was a young mystic from countryside France who heard "heavenly voices" telling her that she would save France from England and she would crown the French king. It was a very turbulent and politically unstable moment in France, aggravated by King Charles VI's death in 1422. The mystical illiterate peasant girl was granted an unprecedented audience with the heir to the throne, who, in utter despair and complete lack of viable alternatives, gave her a sword, a banner, and the general command of the French armies. France won battles and Charles VII was crowned King, yet the Catholic Church decided to punish the young woman for daring to delve so deep into two eminently male areas: religion and military. She was accused of witchcraft and burned at the inquisitorial stake in 1430, even though the reluctant king she crowned feared a popular revolt, given the love and respect the people of France devoted to Joan.

Events like these are the clearest historic examples of which patriarchal versions were made up to make one believe a radical separation between the public and the private has always existed, but the more one studies this topic, the more it seems that a Cartesian separation of the two spheres never really existed, as many feminist theorists have claimed (Bonnici 78). Unfortunately, the problem was that women who dared transpose the established limits would perish, as in the notorious cases of Hypatia and Joan of Arc, just to name a few of them. Anyway, as to the violence and exclusion this 'separation' had always caused from the Third Wave of Feminism since 1990, many theoretical debates and political actions turned to destabilizing supposedly absolute values and the non-interchangeability between these two spheres (Bonnici 252-53).

Actually, such debates and actions are even more justified since 1990. If one considers the period from the fifteenth century (the time of Joan of Arc's ordeal) to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, very little had changed regarding women, as two fundamental English advocates for the female cause stated: Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1897) and John Stuart Mill (1906-1873). Wollstonecraft dwelt on the causes and effects of female oppression in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). A large part of her work reports that the education women received was very different from the one provided for men, i.e. one more form of subordination. Wollstonecraft takes a very critical stance concerning marriage and the different types of prejudice women from different social classes suffered. Most terrifyingly, the absurdities English women suffered up to the eighteenth century did not change much in the nineteenth century, as stated in *The Subjection of Women,* published in 1869 by John Stuart Mill, who always fought toward equal rights for women. In his work, one can find a profusion of references sketching the oppressive situation to which women were exposed until the nineteenth century, represented literarily in the works of many women writers.

In *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1929, Virginia Woolf brings about a large controversial repercussion in later feminist studies, denouncing the wide disparity found among women's emotional, material, and social conditions, and those of men in the Western patriarchal society. She also analyzes the style and characteristics of the few known English women writers of the past, emphasizing both the forced accommodation to a 'male' form of writing and the small subversive moments, which rather often moved these women writers.

Approaching a broad spectrum of themes such as women's education (more consistent, more like men's, and less sexist), sexuality (including sex and love between women, both as a fictional topic and as an individual/social practice) and gender, the large focus of Woolf's essay is to find that, if women do not conquer their financial independence and do not obtain "a room of their own," they will never be able to produce more autonomous literature, free from patriarchal shapes of expression, representing women. Nevertheless, Woolf's pioneering defense for better social, economic, political, and intellectual conditions for women, toward producing female writing in shapes different from those based on the dominant male production, is not unanimously backed by feminist critics, such as Elaine Showalter. Analyzing this rejection of Woolf, Toril Moi locates Showalter's nonconformity in Woolf's concept that every great writer must cherish an androgynous nature as a means to overcome binary male/female restrictions. For Showalter, that would only be one form Woolf found so as not to directly face more controversial issues in feminism in *A Room of One's Own*, which, in her view, was full of exaggerations, repetitions, parodies, and had a disturbingly unserious style, in addition to presenting multiple points of view. Woolf's use of several characters in that essay to give voice to the "self," for example, diverting the readers from the core of the issue directly, in Moi's view (2), often results in abrupt changes in the subject's position, without leaving one defined position to critics, but multiple perspectives for them to administer.

For Moi, however, reading *A Room of One's Own* and other works by Woolf, without considering everything Showalter despises and devalues in Woolf's work, would simply mean one should not read Woolf's work (Moi 3). Furthermore, Moi also finds an aspect I judge as very pragmatic in Showalter's criticism of Woolf: Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* makes it clear that every text must reflect the writer's experience so that, the more authentic the reader comprehends the writer's experience, the greater value that text will present. Moi explains that Showalter, hence, believes Virginia Woolf's text fails to transmit any direct experience to whoever reads it, especially because, as Woolf is an upper middle class woman, she was not sufficiently exposed to life's negative aspects in order to qualify as a good feminist writer (Moi 4).

In order to account for Showalter's views, Toril Moi finds they stem from Georg Lukács's humanist proletarianism, which does not at all go well with modernists' strategies such as Woolf's, or Joyce's, or Proust's,

for instance (Moi 6), especially for defending that the true great realism represents man and society as complete entities, rather than showing only one or another of its aspects. This implies this realism is three-dimensional, complete, and inclusive, so as to bestow characters and human relations with independent lives (qtd. in Moi 5).

Yet, in Woolf's defense, Moi states that, actually, long before Derrida theorized on *différance*, the English writer already practiced deconstructive writing unveiling the double nature of discourse, since, by means of consciously exploring the sensual and playful nature of language, Woolf rejects metaphysical essentialism subjacent to the patriarchal ideology. The issue here is that this metaphysical essentialism appeals to God, or the father, or the phallus, as the transcendental meaning (Moi 9). In addition, Woolf's novels and essays from the early twentieth century already illustrated the estrangement from symbolic language, especially for prioritizing this scarce 'logic' and 'rationality.' Nevertheless, this was only effectively analyzed and theorized decades later, by Lacan and Kristeva. Therefore, Virginia Woolf's concept of androgyny, setting an escape from fixed gender identities, indicates the denial of the essentialist dichotomy between male and female, and the perception of how deceiving it is to conceive an essentialist nature of identities. For Moi, Virginia Woolf was utterly convinced that the aim of the feminist struggle should be precisely the deconstruction of fatal binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. An affiliation to what I would call feminists' Lukácsian "totalizing realism," such as Showalter's, does not allow the latter to grasp Woolf's understanding of the feminist struggle, as Moi sees it. Yet, one should not simply criticize Showalter's position about Woolf without acknowledging the 'radiographic' reach of that analysis of women's writing tradition, such as when she conveys an opinion about her own book, *A Literature of Their Own*. Showalter affirms that her book constitutes an effort to describe women's literary tradition in novels, from the Brontë sisters generation to the present, in addition to showing in what manner the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture (9). She states that, generally, women are considered "sociologic chameleons" (9), absorbing into themselves the social class, the lifestyle, and the culture of their male peers. According to Showalter, it is thus possible to argue that women themselves formed a subculture within the greater society in which they are inserted, unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors imposed on the individual (9).

It becomes of great importance to consider women's literary tradition according to these broad aspects, but also in relation to the increasing degree of women's self-awareness, as well as in relation to how any given minority group ends up finding ways to express themselves facing a dominant society (Showalter 9). Thus, in Showalter's view, women's literary tradition is filled with influences, loans, and affinities; yet, women also face large 'gaps' in that process, so that generations of women have been deprived of history and perpetually urged to forge a collective sense of identity. Given the whole state of affairs, Showalter claims she intentionally looks not toward an innate sexual attitude, but to the ways in which the woman writer's self-awareness has been translated into a given form of literary expression at a given place and time. Thus, I felt urged to investigate novels by Atwood, Laurence, and Munro produced in the 1970s in order to better comprehend how this self-awareness Showalter pointed out determined paths of more empowering realization for female writers and their works, in the sense of a sort of production featuring certain distinctive characteristics of fiction produced before, both by men and women, following typically male models of producing literature and creating female representations in those works. In the present essay my analysis is limited to Atwood's *Lady Oracle*. Furthermore, Showalter also expresses concern about how this self-awareness has been changing and developing, as well as where it may lead (10).

Showalter states that, considering literary subcultures, such as African-American, Jewish, Canadian, English-Indian, or even from the United States, it is noteworthy how they unfold in three phases: i) the "feminine phase" (1840-1880), when women writers mimicked male esthetic patterns, internalizing their artistic patterns and their view of women's social roles, "the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in the 1880s" (Showalter 11); ii) the "feminist phase" (1880-1920), when women writers fought for equal rights with men, especially concerning vote and work; and iii) the "female phase", "from 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960" (11). Commenting on the importance of the latter, Constância Lima Duarte claims that "it is a phase in which a specific kind of women's writing was developed in literature, encompassing multiple receptivity, and great objectivity towards sexuality, politics, and women's role in postmodernity" (qtd. in Bonnici 236). In sum, Showalter not only analyzes the deep difference between female and male writing, but also states

that female literary tradition was practically disregarded by male authors and critics, which would bring about an urgent change in the literary canon (Bonnici 236).

Two other theoreticians who worked against women's exclusion or invisibility were Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, and Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*. Beauvoir draws attention to many psychological, social, economic, and biologic factors used to maintain the notion that men were the *Being* and women were the *Other*, 'naturalizing' many false assumptions that have always made it more difficult to question sexual roles traditionally attributed to women (Bonnici 235). Against such 'naturalization,' Beauvoir states a woman isn't born a woman, but rather becomes a woman. On the other hand, Kate Millett begins making use of terms such as patriarchy, culture, gender, sex, and sexual identity, reinforcing the importance of discussing these concepts toward female emancipation. Concerning literature, Kate Millett points out that literary production and themes have always been completely dictated by writers, disregarding the female, even addressing readers as if they were all men. This effort is then pressing so as to rescue female literary tradition, finally contributing to acknowledging this production in a space traditionally comprehended as being male.

Still in this regard, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that women writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson published works that are true palimpsests, whose surfaces hide or further complicate the less socially accepted levels of meaning (73). These writers can perform the difficult task of exerting a true female literary authority while simultaneously conforming to them, subverting patriarchal literary standards (Gilbert and Gubar 73). Similarly, among a myriad of acute perceptions of women's saga in the Western society to survive, endure, and resist varied forms of oppression, humiliation, exclusion, and objectification, in social, political and cultural spheres, and in the domain of autonomous fictional production, Gilbert and Gubar draw our attention to a very emblematic notion by asking: "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (3).

Thus, the critics conclude that "male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The male poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis" (Gilbert and Gubar 4), which has evolved and reduplicated into a series of ideas pervading literature and its production throughout Western History, endowing men with roles of fatherhood, production, origin, and protection, just to name a few, to such a superlative extent that the literary text may

be seen as "power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh" (Gilbert and Gubar 6). They continue: "In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (Gilbert and Gubar 6), leading women to the thorough effacement and exclusion from the entire process.

Emancipated Women's Writings and Empowering Displacements

In "Writing by Women," Coral Ann Howells uses the following subtitle as though it were an epigraph: "setting down her title," in a clear intertextual reference to the end of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, when the protagonist Morag finally seems to have found the time, the moment, and "a room of her own" to write *her* story, so that "setting down" transcends the mere sense of writing or registering on paper, and suggests a sense of 'planting a flag' for women in this 'lunar ground' of fiction writing and of literary representation.

As Howells explains in the beginning of her aforementioned essay, "setting down her title" points toward a key-issue in 1970s Canada: the double feature women's writing took up, as it comprehended both issues of writing produced by women, and their relation with political and social implications of the time. In this same stream of considerations, one cannot deny that, since the 1960s, Canadian literary production became more visible and important within Canada as well as abroad. Howells also points that, through the 1960s and 1970s, two fundamental factors converged and led to the boom Canadian literature witnessed: the rise of Canadian cultural nationalism and the flourishing of Second Wave Feminism in the United States. This convergence of factors brought about a cultural self-awareness in previously marginalized groups, such as women, multicultural communities, and native Americans, for example. It also redirected women's writing toward a new reading of earlier Canadian women writers, among whom nineteenth-century English-colony immigrant women writers stand out, such as Susanna Moodie, and her sister, Catherine Parr Traill, in a clear and candid fictional approach to patriarchal, sexual, and working life oppressions, and a smothering domestic environment, the so-called private sphere. Coral Howells claims that in the 1970s women writers started to struggle against being silenced by means of fictionalized popular narratives and everyday stories about them, in order to transform them into more dissident and authentic materials, portraying more faithfully

their emotional and psychological experiences. This awareness and the need to engage politically, socially and culturally was the main topic for the Canadian woman writer of the 1970s: Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, Carol Shields's *Small Ceremonies*, and Audrey Thomas's *Latakia* – all works of fiction with women writer protagonists, mirroring the new dimensions of women's creative strengths in Anglophone Canada (Howells 197).

Canada entered a whirl of changes in the 1960s and 1970s, from acknowledging alternative sexualities to the sudden replacement of slow, countryside, patriarchal lifestyles with the urban, cosmopolitan, global ethos. This generated fertile ground for a historic move away from white colonial heritage to take place, making way for the redefinition of Canada's contemporary postcolonial identity, as well as for remapping Canadian national space (Howells 197-98). The changes created the appropriate conditions to approximate women's topics and Canadian national identity issues. In addition, the once vast Canada grew "small" and less rural, less provincial, opening more and more to the world, in two-way migration fluxes, which reminds us of Eva Hoffman's thought that, whether one leaves or stays, we know it is easy to leave; we know we all live in a global village. Hoffman also states that a village does not depend on its location, but on what theoreticians call deterritorialization (44). In the same sequence, Hoffman concludes this deterritorialization implies concepts such as knowledge, action, information, and identity, more and more dissociated from a specific location or from a geographic or physical origin (44), reflecting what took place in Canada and various nations from the 1960s on with the phenomena of globalization, diasporas, and displacements.

Considering such scenario, feminism's devastating power stands out. According to Stuart Hall, feminism invaded and caused a turn in Cultural Studies in the 1960s, introducing a rupture. It reorganized the field in very concrete manners (Hall 208), so as to, as Adelaine Resende claims, widen the notion of power, accommodating not only what is public, but what is personal or private, issues of gender and sexuality, of subject and subjectivity (Resende 24). As a result, the spiral of overpowering social, political, and cultural changes Cultural Studies brought about, after World War II, and, later on, through the Second Wave of Feminism, also cast a new light on old phenomena, which were then reinterpreted, such as the relevance of the role of diasporas and displacements of individuals and groups, leading toward the criticism of their identities.

In *Cartografias Contemporâneas: Espaço, Corpo, Escrita*, Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, in a discussion of labor and complex issues of diasporas and displacements in contemporaneity, claims that Ricardo Piglia's discussion of literature is characterized by being a place through which the other can speak, i.e. a place of displacement toward the other, a movement toward another utterance, and hence Piglia endorses the importance of distance and displacement for literature in the third millennium (25). Almeida adds that regarding women, specifically, the implications of national and transnational displacements are, at times, seen as deeply influenced by male domination, be it, for instance, in the Jewish society of the past, or in contemporary situations in the Western world. She mentions James Clifford's thought that diasporic women end up becoming prey to patriarchal models, oppressive pasts, and ambiguous futures. Nevertheless, Almeida also claims that through "gender relations negotiation" (59), there may be a way out of the prison Clifford acknowledges for this group of diasporic women: "the feminine in transit, as equivalent to movement and errancy, is in an in-between-space" i.e., "not only a dual space, as Clifford indicates, but also a plural, multiple, diverse, and, at times, dubious and ambivalent one" (Almeida 59-60).

Now, coming back to the issue of women's writing, adopting strategies that break with male hegemony, Rachel Blau DuPlessis gives the third chapter of *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Woman Writers* the title "Breaking the Sentence: Breaking the Sequence", also making an intertextual appropriation of an emblematic empowering episode in *A Room of One's Own*. DuPlessis states that

> To break the sentence rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender – in short, any way in which dominant structures shape muted ones . . . To break the sequence mean[s] delegitimating the specific narrative and cultural orders of the nineteenth-century fiction – the emphasis on successful or failed romance, the subordination of quest to love, the death of the questing female, the insertion into family life. (32-35)

With all these concepts in mind, comparing them to the paths the protagonist in *Lady Oracle* takes, we turn to the analysis of her trajectory.

Joan Foster, the woman writer protagonist in *Lady Oracle,* is the daughter of a cold, cruel mother and of a cold absent medical doctor father, whom she only met at the age of five, when he returned from World War II. Curiously, the mother's personality and her obstinate rejection of her daughter are already indications underlying her dissatisfaction with the restrictive social roles of being a housewife and a mother. It is not difficult to conclude Joan's parents have a cold, conventional marriage. The extreme obesity of the girl Joan becomes one of the targets of her mother's constant sour criticism. Yet, far from succumbing to suffering and despair, Joan finds a means to use her obesity as a weapon to confront her mother and to feed her disgusts, while skillfully finding the means to make alliances with her schoolmates who might become bullies.

In this tense, hostile environment, her aunt Lou is the providential angel keeping her company, serving as a friend and mother model. She is a rather ill-regarded woman for being independent, single, having a rather absent boyfriend, and being a writer of books of advice and feminine issues, which were highly unusual for a countryside woman in Canada in the 1960s and 70s. Once, Aunt Lou took Joan to a religious meeting she attends at a rather odd church, where the religious ceremony was conducted by a psychic woman, who said Joan was very talented and had a spiritual gift. For this reason, she advised her to try automatic writing. So teenage Joan was exposed to two positive influences that would lead her to become a writer: her own aunt, who was a mother figure for her and a writer herself; and the psychic's suggestion. It is of noteworthy relevance to consider here that Joan Foster is from the very commencement of her life cast into a world of women, of which her mother and her aunt respectively play the roles of antagonist and friend, as her father had been away on account of taking part in the World War II for five years since she was born. Even after he returned, he continued being absent from Joan's life and formation. Surprisingly, though, if her father was a weak figure and consequently did not represent a "patriarchal" threat to her, her mother had always been the representative of oppression, deception, trauma, and even violence in her life:

> "Sometimes I think you haven't got a brain in your head", my mother used to say. When I was crying, for some invalid reason or other. To her mind, tears were an evidence of stupidity. I'll give you something to cry about. That's nothing to cry about. Don't cry over spilled milk (Atwood 75).

Anyway, provided that the father was absent, and her mother was cold and unsympathetic, Aunt Lou filled such a maternal gap. It is then also of great importance to mark that even being a minor character in the novel, the psychic woman from Aunt Lou's church has always praised Joan's gifts and encouraged her to become a writer, with a little help from Beyond. So, the first time Joan tries to do automatic writing, she gets frightened and decides no longer to do it. However, later on, as an adult, she tries automatic writing once again, successfully, and that will play a decisive role in Joan's occupation as a writer, and what is outstanding in this feature is that Joan's talent for writing will stem out of a mere suggestion of a psychic woman, almost unknown to her, and will have hardly any affiliation, if none, to the Western male tradition and privilege of producing literature.

With her Aunt Lou's premature death, Joan has the right to an inheritance of 200 dollars, but she needs to lose about 46 kilograms as a condition for that. She then starts a strict diet and manages to lose a bit of weight, even with her mother's sabotage, spreading fattening delicacies around the house to put her off her aim. Almost at the end of Chapter 11, in part 2, a very emblematic scene takes place, offering motivation for Joan to start changing her life path. It all starts when her mother says: "Eat, eat, that's all you can do. You are revolting, really revolting. If I were you, I would be ashamed to leave the house" (117). The problem is this observation made no sense, in addition to widely revealing the despise Joan's mother had for her, since she had already lost 40 kilos. So Joan retorts that, when she lost six more kilos, she would go to her aunt's attorney's office, claim her inheritance, and she would live alone, which brought about a spurt of fury in her mother, saying: "God will not forgive you! God will not forgive you!" (120) She took a knife from the kitchen counter and stabbed Joan's arm, above her elbow. They are both paralyzed for a moment, until Joan says she will make some tea and offers it to her mother as well; she takes it. A small meaningless dialogue follows: her mother says she will later go to the grocery store, but she believes Joan doesn't want to come along; however, Joan says it would be great for them to do it together. Joan was actually terrified, but she makes a compromise. Since the cut was superficial, she deals with her wound herself and decides to leave her parents' house that night for good. Then, the protagonist's displacements begin throughout Canada and the world.

It is important to reinforce that the structure of the novel is very fragmented, as if it reflected on various pieces of life experiences Joan

has in different places, until her identity presents a greater integrality and maturity. Thus, the first chapter begins narrating the protagonist's "death" she brought upon herself, while she is in Terremoto, a small Italian city where she had spent her summer vacation with her husband Arthur the year before. That is the present time of the story, advanced by dynamic flashbacks and flash-forwards, such as one story invading another one of the protagonist's stories, in which there is a poor hard-working young woman who lives under the constant threat of being seduced by a rich handsome aristocratic married man. His wife is also very beautiful, sarcastic, and cruel to the young girl – all of which takes place in a castle. This "gothic fantasy," as Joan calls it, is interspersed throughout the whole novel, until we come to understand this intrusive narrative seems to represent many of Joan Foster's fears and insecurities, just like her gothic heroine named Charlotte can also represent Joan and her difficulties dealing with a man's world. While "dead" in Terremoto, Joan once recalls a very emblematic passage in her life related to the barriers to being a writer, which had taken place in Toronto, when she was still "alive" and married to Arthur:

> Arthur never found out that I wrote Costume Gothics. At first I worked on them only when he was out. Later I would go into the bedroom, close the door, and tell him I was studying for some university extension course or other: Chinese Pottery, Comparative Religion, courses I never managed to complete for the simple reason that I never really took them . . . Why did I never tell him? It was fear, mostly. When I first met him he talked a lot about wanting a woman whose mind he could respect, and I knew that if he found out I had written *The Secret of Morgrave Manor* he wouldn´t respect mine. I wanted very much to have a respected mind. (31)

In this passage, an array of relevant nuances can be found, as Joan's house in Toronto became "a room of her own" (in a Woolfian way) to write when her husband was out. In his presence, the space of creative freedom would be reduced to the bedroom. At this point in the narrative, Arthur still didn't know Joan made a living as a successful writer of gothic stories, since she reverberated herself the predominant social concept that this genre was smaller and less important, as "These books, with their covers featuring gloomy, foreboding castles and apprehensive maidens in modified nightgowns, hair streaming in the wind, eyes bulging like those

of a goiter victim . . . would be considered trash of the lowest order" (31). It goes without saying that Joan wrote under a pseudonym.

When Joan leaves her parents' home, she wanders through various parts of Canada, using her deceased aunt's name, so as not to be found by her mother. When she finally loses those 46 kilograms, she receives her inheritance and goes to London. From there she wanders to other countries and ends up getting involved for the first time with a man, a Polish count who writes novels about nurses and medical doctors for a pulp fiction publisher. Inspired by this, Joan begins to have some success writing historic novels. With this count, she pretends to be a student of arts who travels the world. He seduces her and she does not reveal she is a virgin. Yet, their relationship is not very long, since she finds out he has a gun and she begins to fear he might be violent. She then meets Arthur, a Canadian leftwing political activist, in the streets of London, and she falls in love with him. They move in together and she makes up the story she was evicted from an apartment where she lived with a friend.

Now living in London with Arthur, one day she comes home and has a vision of her mother in the middle of the room. This greatly frightens her, but that is only one of the facets of the supernatural gift of which the minister from the spiritual church her aunt Lou attended had warned her. Days later, she gets a telegram from her father saying her mother had died the night before. She hurried back to Canada, but misses the funeral and spends a few days with her father; however, as she finds she has never had any affinity with him, she decides to look for work in Toronto. She tries to write to Arthur, but he never writes back, since he had returned to Canada shortly after she did. They end up meeting again in Toronto and get married. To Joan's surprise, the wedding ceremony is performed by the same spiritual church minister lady from the past, yet oddly introducing herself with a different name. Although she recognizes that woman, Joan says nothing. However, the woman recognizes her and asks her if she has already tried automatic writing, a suggestion Joan then decides to take, obtaining very positive results, but always receiving such occult messages without her husband's knowledge. Even though she already made money writing, the first book deriving from these experiences, with a little "help" from the beyond, mixing the occult, poems, feminist ideas, and an autobiography, is entitled *Lady Oracle*. The book was then published and she becomes a successful writer, which Arthur does not appreciate much, since he thinks their life is one of the inspirations for Joan's writing.

From then on, Joan travels frenetically throughout Canada, going to various book-launch parties, and she meets the Royal Porcupine, a flattering handsome man who becomes her lover. Living this double love life, she fears Arthur may somehow find out, and that the Royal Porcupine one day might show up at her home, revealing her secret. Living this paranoia, she makes up to a couple of political friends of Arthur that the police might soon find them all out, as they were following a clue she gave. The couple then help her forge a 'death' for Joan, by drowning her in a lake in Toronto, and she goes to Terremoto, Italy. There she spends uneasy days, and her paranoia goes on, causing embarrassing situations. At this point in the narrative, we completely understand why Chapter One opens with the death, albeit fake, of the protagonist. Some time later, a Canadian reporter finds Joan, but she hits him with a Cinzano bottle and he is hospitalized. She thought he was a police officer or something of the sort, but he reveals that the couple of Arthur's friends were arrested under the accusation of having killed Joan. She then has no alternative but to go back to Toronto and clarify everything. Nevertheless, the one returning would be a *different* Joan Foster, a woman forged by her displacements, the inner world she built for herself, and the talent for writing, which granted her fame, money, and independence from men's financial support.

Lady Oracle provides fertile ground for studies on the themes of women writers and the importance of nationwide or worldwide displacements. Facing a sad and sort of lonely childhood, not relying on attentive and loving parents, Joan Foster learns how to struggle to survive, she negotiates with bullying classmates, builds an emotionally compensatory relationship with a darling aunt, ends up engaging in a process of growing into maturity, leaving home, becoming a writer, and acquiring sexual and emotional experiences with men, of which she had complete control, even if she wants the reader to believe that she didn't.

Furthermore, Joan Foster makes a living on writing fiction and becomes famous, regardless of her husband, or any of the other men in her life. Even working secretly at first (she had a pseudonym), she found her way into success, and managed to preserve herself and her talent for writing from the expected sabotage of a husband who would not have taken her writing seriously, had she told him about that before the proper time.

Moreover, Joan engaged in empowering displacements, both geographically and emotionally speaking. Her displacements were not limited to Canada, but go beyond her country's borders and her native continent.

Joan Foster leaves home, wanders through Canada, goes to Europe and gets back to Canada, maturing hence in exile, as an individual who finds herself estranged, away from everything familiar. Besides, to a certain extent, Joan also performs the gender negotiation with the masculine already approached previously, and to which Sandra Almeida makes reference (59), getting rid of the trap Clifford suggests, as she means to return to Canada, after being "dead," in a sort of resourceful "resurrection," making the reader infer she will be more empowered. Likewise, if one considers all the effort toward developing self-awareness of the issues and female marginalization Atwood's protagonist often goes through, she is a good illustration of the undermining of dominant, Eurocentric canon, pursuing the traces of a writing tradition of women, so many times utterly denied in the Western world. By doing so, Atwood has surely managed "to break the sentence" (DuPlessis 32), the tacit condemnation that reduced literary foremothers to mere mimickers of men's writing styles. Thus, Joan Foster and Margaret Atwood mirror each other in this regard; they can finally "set down their titles" (Howells 194) and find a path of their own, not admitting setbacks to previous disadvantageous positions in the then recovered female tradition of writing in Anglophone Canada in the 1970s.

Works Cited

Almeida, Sandra Regina Goulart. *Cartografias Contemporâneas: Espaço, Corpo, Escrita.* 7Letras, 2015.

Atwood, Margaret. *Lady Oracle.* McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *O Segundo Sexo.* Nova Fronteira, 1980.

Bonnici, Thomas. *Teoria e Crítica Literária Feminista*: *Conceitos Fundamentais.* Universidade Estadual de Maringá, 2007.

Bonnici, Thomas and Lúcia Osana Zolin, organizers. *Teoria Literária*: *Abordagens Históricas e Tendências Contemporâneas.* Universidade Estadual de Maringá, 2009.

Deakin, Michael. "Hypatia." www.britannica.com/contributor/Michael-Deakin/9175579. Accessed 17 June 2020.

Duplessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing Beyond the Ending*: *Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. Indiana UP, 1985.

Durant, Will. *O Livro de Ouro dos Heróis da História*: *Uma Breve História da Civilização, da Antiguidade ao Alvorecer da Era Moderna*. Translated by Laura Alves and Aurélio Barroso Rebello, Ediouro Publicações, 2001.

Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Mad Woman in the Attic*: *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale UP, 2000.

Hall, Stuart. *Da Diáspora*: *Identidades e Mediações Culturais*. Translated by Adelaine L. Resende et al, UFMG, 2003.

Hoffman, Eva. "The New Nomads." *Letters of Transit*: *Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss,* edited by André Aciman, New Press, 1999, p. 35-63.

Howells, Coral Ann. "Writing by Women." *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Edited by Eva-Marie Kröller, Cambridge UP, 2004, p. 194-215.

Laurence, Margaret. *The Diviners*. Virago, 1989.

Mill, John Stuart. *A Sujeição das Mulheres*. Escala, 2006.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Doubleday, 1970.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Routledge, 1989.

Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. Signet, 1971.

Resende, Adelaine L. "Mapeando os Estudos Culturais." *Fronteiras Críticas, Literárias e Culturais*, edited by Sueli da Fonseca Quintana. PROMEL/UFSJ, 2005, p. 11-28.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*. Virago, 2013.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication on the Rights of Woman and the Wrongs of Woman*. Longman, 2007.

Woolf, Virginia. *Um Teto Todo Seu*. Translated by Bia Nunes de Sousa and Glauco Mattoso, Tordesilhas, 2014.

Storytelling and Survival in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*

Melissa Cristina Silva de Sá

Oryx and Crake and *The Year of the Flood* are fragmented novels that highlight ex-centric perspectives, display metafictional comments and play with reader's expectations. Storytelling is a major theme in both novels and it is often related to the very idea of survival of the protagonists. As Coral Ann Howells writes, "Atwood's novels have always highlighted the art and indeed the artifice of storytelling, where the real world is transformed and reinvented within the imaginative spaces of fiction" (186). In the novels studied, my claim is that Atwood goes even further: she discusses what happens to a world in which imagination, and consequently storytelling, has no place. The dystopian capitalist reality the protagonists inhabit leads to final disaster, and storytelling and the knowledge obtained through it are what make survival possible after the end of the world.

Oryx and Crake presents two narratives: one after the extinction of humanity and another before it. Both of them have a third person narrator, Jimmy, a "words person" in a world of "numbers people." In the post-apocalypse scenario, Jimmy calls himself Snowman: "The Abominable Snowman – existing and not-existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints" (8). Like his alias, Snowman lives in the past: he reminisces about his previous life, immersed in guilt and anger. However, instead of telling his own story, Snowman is obsessed with the figures of Oryx, his lover, and Crake, his best friend. Both Oryx and Crake have their part on the extinction of humanity: Oryx, without knowing, spreads a deadly virus hidden in a pill that claimed to improve sex life; Crake designs the pill and the virus, working on the destruction of humanity and its substitution for genetically engineered creatures.

Before killing Oryx and thus making Jimmy kill him out of revenge, Crake inoculates Jimmy turning him into humanity's sole survivor.

The Year of the Flood is a simultaneous narrative to *Oryx and Crake*. It also works with two different narratives, one in the present apocalypse and one in the past extreme capitalist world. The protagonists, Toby and Ren, are poor women. They share a common past in a religious group called God's Gardeners, but take separate ways: Toby works in a spa, giving information to a more radical faction of the Gardeners and Ren becomes a prostitute. When the extinction event happens they are imprisoned in their workplaces, trying to survive. The narrative goes back and forth to their past lives to explore the dystopian scenario of a corporate society that exploits the lower classes. Another figure present is Adam One, the leader of God's Gardeners, an important influence to both women. Their survival knowledge obtained through storytelling while they lived among Gardeners allows them to continue to exist when most of humanity perished.

For Walter Benjamin, storytelling is intrinsically related to experience: "Experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn" (85). According to him, Modernity diminished the importance of sharing experiences, and to illustrate his point, Benjamin discusses how the soldiers coming back from World War I were silent rather than talkative about their experiences, favoring information over stories. The delivery of factual, direct information, was chosen over telling their personal stories about combat.

In Atwood's novels, the society portrayed values scientific knowledge as reliable and reduces social interaction to virtual exchanges. The absence of shared experiences leads to a societal lack of empathy and human suffering is turned into reality shows broadcasted online. The outcome for such society, both in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, is catastrophe. A product of this highly scientific society that places no value in human life, Crake envisions the extinction of humanity and its replacement with genetically engineered creatures. The ones able to survive are the outcasts of the previous order, precisely the ones who share experiences and tell stories.

Not surprisingly, both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* have a cyclical narrative structure. In the former, the final section entitled "Footprint" repeats with minor differences the first section of the novel, "Mango":

> Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep. (4)
> Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep. (429)

The difference between the two passages is that there is now a footprint in the sand suggesting hope for humanity. Katherine Snyder claims that the cyclical nature of the narrative calls for an idea of "repetition with a difference" (464), as many circular narratives do. When discussing Snowman's outcome in *Oryx and Crake*, Snyder considers: "Retrodetermination does not mean that the past can be changed, but it does allow for the possibility that the present meanings of past events can be" (464). She relies on trauma theory to discuss cyclical trauma but it is possible to use her arguments in relation to the cyclical narrative in the novels. In Atwood's typical open-ended stories, the return to the starting point can be read as illusory since perceptions have changed. If storytelling in the beginning of the novel is regarded as unimportant, in the post-apocalyptic world it is all that is left of human culture: a story to be told by its last survivor or survivors.

In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby's anxiety in the beginning of the narrative, indicated by her heartbeat "*katoush, katoush, katoush*" (5), is echoed in the protagonist's penultimate section in the book: "*katoush*" (415). However, instead of the fear of wild animals and her intense worry that makes her listen to the sound of her own pounding heart described in the beginning of the novel, in the end she is afraid that others may hear the beating of her heart and thus be found and probably killed by the other humans that survived. Toby at first is afraid of being the only survivor, but later she realizes that she is to fear humans again. She is unsure whether the cycle of violence is to repeat itself and her final prayer in the end of the chapter, "Dear Leopard, dear Wolf, dear Liobam: lend me your Spirits now" (415), points to her ambiguous relation to the God's Gardeners and their faith.

In the novels, repetition is linked to death. Both protagonists are starving in the beginning of the novels and both in the end are about to confront other humans, and it is unknown whether they are going to survive or be killed. However, it is also possible to read these repetitions as images of life: they are survivors in a wasteland, they managed to stay alive, and in

the end they find other humans also alive, suggesting a possibility to start over. These repeated images of death, but at the same time of life, point to the protagonists' experience of survival and to the way they used their own forms of storytelling to survive. When Snowman and Toby face extreme situations in which the images of life and death appear, the two protagonists resort to storytelling. The disvalue of storytelling led the world to its final catastrophe, but it is ironically storytelling that is left in the post-apocalyptic setting since it is what enables the protagonists to survive.

If *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* both present the relation between storytelling and survival as convergent in the sense that it is storytelling that makes survival possible, their protagonists, however, face different obstacles. In the former novel, Jimmy feels an outcast because he loves art and later, as Snowman, he is unable to find food. In the latter, Ren and Toby are victims of sexual abuse and poverty both in the pre and post-apocalyptic world.

The issue of storytelling has been explored as well in Atwood's previous novels. The figure of the storyteller as someone who has power over his or her own personal story and how telling one's story becomes an act of survival permeate the Canadian author's works. Novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Alias Grace*, and *The Blind Assassin* present this connection between the act of storytelling and survival. Nonetheless, in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* this connection is foregrounded.

Whether in the post-catastrophe world with humanity almost extinct or in the highly capitalist society that commodifies women and banalizes forms of exploitation, survival means navigating through these incredibly violent environments. Snowman/Jimmy, Toby, Ren, and Adam One use their stories to stay alive. The first uses it not to lose his mind in the hostile scenario he has to face on his own. So as to keep her sanity, Toby writes down many lists that include survival items, random objects she finds, and things she has to do. She also follows the advices she learned from the God's Gardeners' stories to keep herself going. Ren learns about the power a story can have in people's life being both the storyteller the one about whom the story is, learning from these experiences how to use the power of a story to make a better living for her in her violent world. Adam One uses stories to convey survival knowledge to the members of his religion. All these instances of survival are endured through the act of storytelling.

The two novels studied radicalize the issue of storytelling and survival in one more layer. In fact, if we analyze the first layer of this

dystopia, the one of the highly capitalist society, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are novels about a world in which storytelling has lost its value. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy and Crake spend their teenage years surfing illegal websites filled with pornography, torture, and even deliberate executions. The two boys spend their afternoons playing games or meeting each other virtually, but without much contact. The narrator explains the situation: "Crake had two computers, so they could sit with their backs to each other" (88). Jimmy initially feels uneasy about this lack of interaction. As the narrator observes, "It did seem weird to have the two of them in the same room, back to back, playing on computers" (88). This lack of contact would later on prove to be convenient when the two friends watch extremely violent and pedophilic porn. Back to back, they do not have to face each other during these experiences. As adults, the pattern continues: they seem unable to connect, to understand each other, even though they are supposedly best friends. Their inability to share their experiences – something encouraged by the factual science-oriented society they live in – leads to the ultimate disaster. Jimmy could not perceive what was around him and could not prevent Crake's actions. His relation to storytelling comes as a form of personal expression that never effectively reaches other people: he eventually tells stories to himself.

In *The Year of the Flood*, this same cultural environment that values only science is portrayed. Storytelling becomes, then, a form of opposition to this technology-oriented culture. With God's Gardeners, a marginal group in society, storytelling is valued as a form of knowledge. The Gardeners are not encouraged to talk about their personal past experiences, as the narrator indicates when Toby first joins the cult: "it hadn't taken Toby long to realize that the Gardeners did not welcome personal questions" (102). However, they do share their experiences in the present and treasure this sharing as their most valid form of conveying knowledge since the written word is forbidden. In their limited environment, the God's Gardeners are able to resist the pressure of a society that is leading itself to destruction both culturally, with its devaluing of art and lack of critical thinking, and environmentally, with politics that disregard the consequences of pollution and overpopulation. By the end of the novel, most of the survivors are Gardeners, people who learn through sharing and who are able to pass this knowledge on by telling stories and learning from them.

The world that belittles storytelling, overvalues mere information and disencourages the sharing of experiences among people is the depiction

of a society that lacks critical thinking. The absence of criticism is shown in both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* through corporations controlling society, unethical scientific experiments, impossible patterns of beauty that are imposed only to increase the profit of cosmetic products and surgery, exacerbated consumerism, commodification of women and their bodies, banalization of violence, disregard for environmental issues, etc. Atwood goes one step further, even, when portraying the extinction of humanity.

Walter Benjamin considers how a scientific, fact-driven discourse diminishes stories: "If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs" (89). In *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood draws on the scenario Benjamin exposes and projects its tendencies in an exaggerated fashion as dystopias often do. In both novels the absence of storytelling leads to the doom of humanity and its persistence in marginal forms is what ultimately makes human survival possible.

Benjamin associated the end of telling stories mostly with the rise of the novel, which he considers a genre of individual activity. For him, the interaction between a listener and a teller is essential for community life: for storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while one is listening to them (91). In the selected novels, the same interaction between listener and teller and the necessary repetition are valued and their absence is what is being criticized. Interestingly enough, in Atwood's works the significance of storytelling and collectivity takes place ironically in a genre historically associated with individualism. However, dystopias as a genre tend to have a social appeal to readers, provoking them to reassess their own realities. The tension between the individual nature of the novel and the social dimension of dystopia contributes to the unresolved conflict the protagonists themselves have to face regarding their own personal experiences and their association to the collective.

Atwood discusses corporate culture which encourages people to turn a blind eye to social issues and maintain a pattern of behavior focused on individualism. The image of the two friends in contact through the internet though not really interacting is disconcertedly quite related to our times. This strong critique of alienation is at the surface of the novels studied and the more critically aware the reader is, the more he or she is

able to connect the world of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* to his or her own. As a criticism of the disregard for environmentalism and a debate on ethical bioengineering, the novels project their dystopian realities on the effects of a culture concerned only with money and individual profit, neglecting art and even the mere act of having people talking to each other. Both texts present the deterioration of human relations and its cruel consequences: the indifference towards others and the banalization of the violence targeted at the ones at the margins. In Atwood's bleak scenario, a world without interaction among people and with a focus on profit can only lead to catastrophe.

Storytelling means survival in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* in a radicalized manner if one is to compare these novels to Atwood's previous work. More than the survival of the protagonists that tell their stories to remain alive, in the two layers of these dystopian novels – the post-apocalyptic scenario of the present and the memories of the pre-catastrophe world – what is at stake is the survival of human culture. In both novels, this culture is kept and modified through oral tales. The reader is taken to the beginning of human culture, with stories shared by the fire and lessons being passed through tales of experience. In an Atwoodian way, the end is the beginning and the beginning is also the end. In a cyclical view of both history and literature, stories are at the core of humanity's building blocks. As the Crakers, the genetically engineered humans that survived extinction, learn to tell their own stories, both novels leave room for speculation on how human culture will develop after the encounter of these two different, but seemingly human, species.

Another aspect of storytelling to consider is the mythmaking project devised by Snowman for the Crakers in *Oryx and Crake*. As the sole human survival, Snowman is left to interact with the Crakers – the genetically modified creatures Crake designed to replace humanity. The Crakers are herbivores, mate in seasons, have colorful skin and citric scent. All these characteristics were carefully considered to make them able to survive in the wild. They also use simple language and have difficulty understanding abstract concepts. The relation with them is not easy for Snowman since, although peaceful creatures, the Crakers do not share cultural referents with Snowman. Because of this, he decides to address their curious questions about the world with stories and tells the only story he knows: his own. He turns Crake into a god-like figure and himself into a prophet.

Snowman turns his personal story into myth. By doing that, he interferes in the Crakers', provoking them and showing that Crake's design to make symbolic thinking impossible for these creatures is a failure. The Crakers are based on human DNA and the capacity of understanding symbols and giving meaning to them is part of the building blocks of humanity. The act of telling stories to the Crakers enables Snowman's own survival since it gives him a reason and motivation to keep looking after these creatures he considers boring, as the following quotation shows: "they [the Crakers] accepted, without question, everything he [Snowman] said. Much more of this – whole days, whole weeks of it – and he could see himself screaming with boredom" (408). Storytelling allows human's capacity to create art and stories to survive.

Deprived of any association with human culture once they cannot write or read and have never been exposed to the world before the plague kills off humans, the Crakers ironically were given the names of prominent humans like Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie, Simone de Beauvoir, Eleonor Roosevelt, and Benjamin Franklin. These names, nonetheless, are devoid of meaning for the Crakers: they are just names without any cultural reference. One may infer that Snowman is actually trying to establish a culture for the Crakers, a culture that may convey meanings in names and things, not necessarily like in his previous culture, but at least one that makes the Crakers overcome their limited linguistic and cognitive abilities.

Carol Osborne points out the fact that, by the end of *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers seem to be developing a way of thinking that resembles the previous humans, with a religion and artistic expression. They believe the lore Snowman created for them. When he leaves to search for food in the Paradice Project, the Crakers make a material representation of him and chant to it, believing that by doing this Snowman would come back to them. With this act, the Crakers show that they have developed the capacity to create symbols and attribute meaning to them. Osborne considers the impact of Snowman's tales on the Crakers:

> The myths of origin have set the stage for the Crakers to reverence language, since words were created by Oryx, and their curiosity, love of repetition, and eagerness for stories suggest that they have the ability, with time, to expand their vocabularies and become more proficient communicators. What seems the most important aspect of the mythology Snowman has invented, however, is the sense of community

> that results from the ritual telling of the stories, for it sets a precedent for how stories may function when Snowman goes to meet the humans. One of Snowman's imagined scenarios, after all, the one he does not dismiss, involves the trading of tales, and the mutual understanding that may result from the survivor's having shared the horror of the apocalypse. (40)

The mythology Snowman creates influences the Crakers to the point that they start to create their own culture. They begin to value language because, according to Snowman, while Crake created them, Oryx created all the words. They then become eager to learn new words so they could please and get closer to their goddess. Moreover, they develop a sense of community derived from the moments of storytelling. The way the Crakers repeat Snowman's tale, the use of elements such as fire, and the later material representation of Snowman point to the birth of a ritual. The relevance of storytelling as a way to share experience is thus emphasized.

Snowman helps the Crakers develop, but not in the way Crake predicted. Initially, the scientist has Oryx to teach them how to identify animals and hostile elements in the environment. He says to Jimmy: "Simple concepts, no metaphysics" (363). Snowman, however, pushes the Crakers towards a more inventive, curious, view of the world. He creates a mythic genesis for the universe and for the Crakers. The following extract shows how Snowman explains to these humanoid creatures the end of humanity in the form of a myth: "And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos*. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away" (119). After one of his sessions of storytelling, one of the Craker women asks: "Oh Snowman, tell us about when Crake was born" (120). The Crakers learn how to interact with a story and attempt to expand on it in their own terms; they are developing an oral tradition. About their material representation of Snowman, the Crakers state: "We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you" (419). They have learned how to act creatively in the world, even if on the most basic level – something that Crake wanted to eradicate completely.

Storytelling at this level enables the survival of human traits. It is interesting to see how the other instances of storytelling in the novels studied here – Snowman's story of his earlier persona, Jimmy; Ren's diary and her experience with the meaning of telling a story; Oryx's absent story; Toby's lists that convey narrative experience – seem to culminate in the survival of the very essence of humans, at least in the terms proposed in

the novels: the ability to tell stories. When, in the end of the *The Year of the Flood*, the Crakers sing, apparently going in the direction of Snowman, now in the company of Toby, Ren and Amanda, the narrative takes a step toward an unprecedented situation: the encounter of the Crakers with the survivors of humanity. Atwood's ending is typically open-ended. Will the Crakers be able to evolve? If so, what will their interaction with humans be like? Will they keep Snowman's mythology and develop a culture out of it? How are they going to deal with gender difference? Though unanswered, at the core of these questions one finds storytelling.

Works cited

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Virago, 2004.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Year of the Flood*. Doubleday, 2009.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schoken Books, 1985, pp. 83-109.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Margaret Atwood*. 2nd ed., MacMillan, 2005.

Osborne, Carol. "Mythmaking in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*." *Once Upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings*, edited by Sarah A. Appleton, Cambridge Scholars, 2008, pp. 25-46.

Sá, Melissa C. S. *Storytelling As Survival in Margaret Atwood's* Oryx and Crake *and* The Year of the Flood. 2014. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, M.A. thesis.

Snyder, Katherine V. "'Time to Go:' The Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2011, pp. 470-89.

The Brazilian Milton: Innovation, Recreative Spirit and Absence in Machado de Assis

Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade

In *John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History, and Culture* (1991), John Shawcross examines the influence that John Milton had on his successors. Chapter 9 of his book, entitled "The American Milton: Imitation, Creative Spirit, and Presence", refers directly to the influence of the English poet on North American literature, which carries a burden of dependence, where Milton's presence becomes a source of inspiration. His theory is valid because Milton's writings played an important role in the historical, political and social fields in the United States, especially in the nineteenth century. However, Shawcross's attempt to deviate from the anxiety of influence, by playing with Harold Bloom's words, did not succeed – his studies only reinforced it, calling Milton a star that should be admired and imitated.

Following another trajectory by moving to Brazil and adapting the title of the chapter by Shawcross, this essay discusses the traces of Milton's *Paradise Lost* that can be found in the short story "A Igreja do Diabo" ("The Devil's Church") by Machado de Assis (1839-1908). Assis is one of the most widely read, studied and translated Brazilian writers, a fact that contributes to another possible dissemination of Milton's research in Brazilian literature. His writings allude to religious issues while at the same time going beyond the traditional politics of religion and examining other elements explored in Milton's works. The Brazilian author established textual relations with the English poet not based on imitation, but through the use of key, indirect references and allusions, through which they innovate and recreate Milton's texts in Brazilian Literature. In this sense, the English poet is part of the compositional universe of Machado de Assis, but not in a straightforward manner – rather as an absence that may be read as presence.

The intertextual relations between the Brazilian author and the English poet are analysed in this article based on Jacques Derrida's thoughts on the logic of the supplement, with writing serving as a way of proliferating meaning in different spatiotemporal contexts.

Most of John Milton's writings demonstrate his critical stance against Catholicism, especially regarding the issues of freedom of belief and religious tolerance. Milton defended his position as an anti-trinitarian and his theodicy on free will. In such ideas, Milton sees the Catholic Church as an institution full of errors and in some of his texts he problematises his anti-idolatrous and anti-popish messages even further. In *Paradise Lost*, more specifically, one of Milton's satires can be read in the demon's assembly at Pandemonium, which is compared to a Catholic religious ceremony. In John King's book, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (2000), the assembly of demons at Pandemonium resembles the Vatican establishment of the Pope, and with this assertion, King reinforces Milton's criticism on rituals and ecclesiastic pomp. King also alludes to Milton's "ecclesiastical satire" as a way of attacking the catholic structure and ridiculing "recognisable historical targets" by means of "instances of linguistic appropriation, imitation or innuendo" (13). Machado de Assis read Milton's satires and played with them, also appropriating Milton's creations and recreating them in Brazilian literature. In this sense, Milton's controversial religious position has received other meanings and elaborations in the writings of the Brazilian writer.

Machado de Assis's short story "The Devil's Church" was published in 1884, in a collection entitled *Histórias sem data,* which translated into English is *Undated Histories*. This title suggests that the narratives of this collection can be read at any time. With this idea in mind, "The Devil's Church," written in Brazil with traces of Milton's elements of composition, is a forever-present story. The main theme of the Machadian text is to question humanity and in doing so, the Devil is seen as the best choice when he decides to formally establish his church, with official institutions, regular rituals and all the procedures to make it become a legal religious organisation, with physical and spiritual structures.

The Devil's proposal for his church is based on a very similar doctrine as a Christian church, but with one basic difference: all kinds of transgression are permitted. By transgressing, the Devil's followers deny the virtues of the church of God, and in a sense, they live only by their vices. Machado de Assis also published a short story entitled "The Devil's

Sermon," and when this sermon is read together with "The Devil's Church," it illustrates that the Devil's service is a direct negation of God's virtues. The Devil's Sermon resembles Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew, and the beginning of the short story confirms this resemblance:

> This is a part of the Devil's gospel, a sermon on the mount just like we see in Matthew. Its intent here is not to make catholic souls go insane. Saint Augustine used to say that the Devil's church imitates God's church. That's why there is a similarity between these two gospels. . . . The devil, then seeing the multitude of people, went up a hill named Corcovado, and after sitting down, started his speech. (151, my translation)[1]

Curiously, the hill mentioned in the Devil's sermon is one of the most famous Brazilian landmarks, "Corcovado," where the statue of Christ the Redeemer is now situated. In Machado de Assis's time, the statue had not yet been built, but ironically, this short story anticipates how symbolic the hill would become to the Brazilian catholic cause in a distant future. In the Devil's words, blessed are the ones who transgress, because by transgressing they can be the salt and the light of the money market, the elements that drive the world. The Devil's sermon thus comments on the dynamic of Christ's gospel, representing its opposite and working on the superficial word of the Devil and its ways of transgressing against virtues as a way to establish the power of exercising vices.

Going back to the Devil's church, the short story starts also with playful words in relation to the catholic tradition:

> An old Benedictine manuscript tells how, one day, the Devil had the idea of founding a church. Although he was making steady and substantial profits, he felt humiliated by the rather isolated role he had played along the centuries, with no organisation, no rules, no canon law, and no rituals, indeed nothing much at all. He lived, so to speak, on divine leftovers, on human oversights and favors. . . . A Devil's church would be the best way to take on the other religions and destroy them once and for all. (29)

[1] Although there are translated versions to English of this short story, in some passages I may use my own translations from the Portuguese edition, with the page numbers from Assis, Machado de, *Obra completa.* Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 1986. 3 v.

Machado de Assis was a man of his time and was extremely familiar with Brazilian issues relating to religious freedom. When the short story says that the Devil's church was the most effective means to combat other religions, as well as to destroy them once and for all, the Brazilian writer is demonstrating the risks of institutions of power that carelessly impose their rules without any control, and in this case, the state and the church work hand in hand to disseminate vices, instead of virtues.

During the colonial era (1500-1822) and the imperial era (1822-1889), Catholicism was the legally accepted religion in Brazil. In Machado de Assis's time, there was a serious argument involving the Catholic Church and members of the Freemasonry society. Some local bishops did not want Freemasonry lodges in their jurisdiction and demanded their closure. The Church was as strong as the state and had the power to command the law based on their own dogma, with the rationale that they were trying to maintain order. The bishops considered Freemasonry a secular doctrine that was against the law in a country declared as Catholic. The bishops demanded the closure of the Freemasonry lodges based on the argument that their meetings were a form of civil disobedience not only against the Church, but also against the imperial state. Machado de Assis was an informed reader of the Brazilian cause, and this issue needed an answer from his writings. The Brazilian State faced many problematic issues after this episode, with the Catholic Church demanding other acts to be executed in the name of law and order.

The Devil's church surely looks back to this religious affair, which was a serious issue in Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the words of the short story show that:

> 'While the churches and religions quarrel and split, my church will stand united and alone . . . . There are many ways to affirm a belief, but only one way to deny it.' As he said this, the Devil shook his head and stretched out his wings . . . Then he remembered that he really ought to go and see God, to tell him his plan and throw down this challenge; he raised his eyes, burning with hatred and bitter with revenge, and said to himself: 'Yes, it is time.' And with a beat of his wings – which set off a rumble that shook all the provinces of the abyss – he flew swiftly up from the shadows into the infinite blue. (29)

The notion of a division and quarreling among churches illustrates the Brazilian religious landscape when the short story was published. And

another serious issue was raised at the same time: the necessity to fight for religious freedom. In the catholic domain, such freedom was impaired, and it was the Devil's church, in a satirical way, that would grant this possible freedom to all. Rui Barbosa, another Brazilian writer and a contemporary of Machado de Assis, denounced the restraints imposed by the Catholic tradition in relation to religious freedom. For him, "of all the social freedoms, none is so congenial to man, and so noble and so fruitful, and so civilising, and so peaceful, and so born of the Gospel, as religious freedom" (419, my translation). These Brazilian authors were part of the debate in the Brazilian social, political and religious context and tried hard to take critical stances through their writings.

In this atmosphere of fighting for freedom of expression, the words of the Devil in Machado de Assis's short story confirm his intent: "There are many ways to affirm a belief, but only one way to deny it," this was the Devil's thought when he resolved to found his church, and he then went to Heaven to challenge God in his enterprise. The description of his preparation to leave for God's domain presents some traces of the passage in *Paradise Lost* when Satan, intent on revenge, goes to Eden. It should be noted that Machado de Assis recreates Milton's passage in a way that offers a possible new meaning, in the fictional world, to the crises in the Brazilian political/religious arena. The passage in *Paradise Lost*, Book 2, demonstrates that Milton's traces are part of Machado de Assis's compositional elements:

> Satan . . . Weighs his spread wings, at leisure to behold
> Far off the empyreal Heaven, extended wide
> . . . And, fast by, hanging in a golden chain,
> This pendent World, in bigness as a star
> . . . Thither, full fraught with mischievous revenge
> Accursed, and in a cursed hour, he hies. (2, 1043-1055)[2]

The lines of Machado de Assis's short story when the Devil "stretched out his wings / raised his eyes, burning with hatred and bitter with revenge" can be directly compared to Milton's: Satan, who "Weighs his spread wings, at leisure to behold / full fraught with mischievous revenge." Machado de Assis, as a reader of Milton, was surely playing with this passage from

[2] All the references to *Paradise Lost* are from Milton, John. Orgel, Stephen; Goldberg, Jonathan, eds. *John Milton*: the major works. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 and they will be cited parenthetically with the book number, followed by the number of the line(s).

Paradise Lost in the "official" establishment of the Devil's Church, adding new meanings to Milton's literary universe.

The Devil from the short story returns and prepares himself for the initiation of his church: "once on Earth, the Devil did not waste a single minute . . . and began to spread a new and extraordinary doctrine. . . . He promised his faithful disciples all of Earth's delights, all its glories, and all its most intimate pleasures" (32). The Devil's church became a great success:

> The church had been founded and its doctrine was being propagated; there was not one region of the globe that did not know of it, not one language into which it had not been translated, and not one race that did not love it. The Devil gave a triumphant cheer. (33)

As news spread that all transgressions were permitted, the Devil's church became a triumph. The Devil's rhetoric was his main tool for persuading his followers and his great success guaranteed that his moments of glory would place him at a higher position in relation to God. This passage brings to mind the moment that Satan felt himself above God immediately after Adam and Eve's fall in *Paradise Lost*. In Book 10, Sin elevates Satan as the antagonist of the almighty king, the triumph over triumph element:

> The race
> Of Satan (for I glory in the name,
> Antagonist of Heaven's Almighty king
> Amply have merited of me, of all,
> The Infernal Empire, that so near Heaven's door
> Triumphal with triumphal act have met. (10, 385-390)

This passage illustrates that Satan's triumph can only exist if he assumes his role as the antagonist of God. In other words, The Devil's church is the creation of a narrative that only exists as a unification against the church of God.

According to Neil Forsyth, in his book *The Old Enemy* (1987), "Satan is first, and in some sense always remains, a character in a narrative . . . and that his essential role is opposition" (xiv-4). Forsyth reinforces the term adversary in the definition of the devil as a fictional character, and as the adversary, he the devil must always exist in relation to another being, and not as an independent entity. "As Augustine and Milton show, it is precisely when Satan imagined himself independent that he is most

deluded. His character is, in this sense of the word, a *fiction*" (Forsyth 4). Thus, the Devil's church, an institution that opposes the church of God, is not an independent entity, but only acquires "life" and recognition in relation to the Christian church.

Machado de Assis certainly took note of Milton's maneuver in the description of Satan's character delusion, especially in *Paradise Lost*, with his moments of glory and apparent victory being so short. At the beginning of the Devil's sermon, there is a passage that mentions that "Saint Augustine used to say that the Devil's church imitates God's church." The devil as a fictional character, imitating or opposing God's church, is an inheritance that Machado de Assis recognisably received from Saint Augustine (as the direct allusion in the short story suggests). However, Machado de Assis indirectly chose Milton to be an oblique part of his Devil's church and sermon, lending his pen to fictional elements that were a part of his private library, which also contained Milton's texts. In this manner, Milton's epic poem is given new meanings when the Devil establishes his church as a possible new reading of Milton's institutionalised assembly of demons at Pandemonium, and the Devil's church failure is another way of describing Satan's failures in his attempts to defeat God.

In the short story, when the Devil believed he had triumphed and that nothing could overcome his power, he sees one of his most corrupted disciples going to a Christian church, being blessed with the sign of the cross and giving money to the institution. The Devil could not cope with the idea that his disciple felt like going back to the Christian tradition after everything he had achieved while on the Devil's side. The Devil decides to go back to the Lord's words in search of an explanation for such a unique phenomenon. In Heaven again,

> The Lord heard him with infinite satisfaction; He did not interrupt him . . . Nor did He even triumph because of that satanic agony. He looked at the Devil and said to him: "What do you expect, my poor Devil? It's the eternal human contradiction." (34)

With these lines, the short story ends, establishing the certainty of the Devil's temporary moments of glory over God's creatures. Although the Devil tried hard to permit all kinds of choices for his followers, he forgot the exercise of free will and that his beliefs may not always be valid for his disciples.

The Devil from Machado de Assis experienced some moments of glory, being the direct antagonist of God, denying the Christian beliefs and virtues and trying to institute infernal empire over religion. His attempts to grant extreme religious freedom did not prevent his disciples from choosing to return to God's church. Just like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, his kingdom is doomed to failure because evil will never be so absolute as to overcome good. Machado de Assis's portrayal of the Devil's temporary success attempts not only to question the religious cause in the Brazilian political and social contexts, but also to highlight the presence of an entity that exists only to express his total opposition to God.

For Neil Forsyth, in *The Old Enemy*, "the traces of Satan's lineage are clear in *Paradise Lost*" (xiii) and "Milton is reflecting accurately the essential ambivalence of the Judeo-Christian tradition when his narrator piles up the classical parallels and the folklore" (xiv). In the characterisation of the devil, especially in Milton's epic poem, "we must try to see him [the Devil] as an actor, or what Aristotle called an 'agent,' with a role to play in a plot, or *mythos*" (4). In other words, according to Forsyth, Milton is one of the names in literature that helped to disseminate Satan's lineage in a tradition that mixed classical parallels and folklore, with a role or story to play. In this sense, Machado de Assis's short story is clearly in a dialogue with Milton's creation regarding the existence of the devil.

According to Jacques Derrida, the logic of the supplement works as a type of logic that adds meaning to previous ideas and terms, not as the logic of copies, but copies that institute themselves based on the notions of difference. Following Derrida's idea, Machado de Assis's text is a supplement of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, adding more layers of meaning to Milton' s creation. It is important to mention that in an analysis of literary texts, in this case of Milton's and Machado de Assis's texts, both are independent ones and, because the short story comes after Milton's epic poem and due to their spatiotemporal distances, Machado de Assis's text is presented full of variations, and its supplementary signs give new meanings to Milton's. The supplementary discourse, as suggested by Derrida, adds more possibilities, not erasing a pre-existing structure, but proving itself as a new elaboration of an "origin."

The Brazilian work recreated and suggested new possible meanings of *Paradise Lost*, especially in the fictional narrative of the devil, making Milton part of the serious political and religious debate over the expression of power. This text highlights the legacy of *Paradise Lost* in "The Devil's

Church," especially in the fictional creation of evil, a tradition from which it is quite impossible to escape. After all, according to Forsyth, when reading Percy Shelley, "the Devil…owes everything to Milton" (xiii).

Works Cited

Assis, Machado de. *Obra completa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 1986. 3 vols.

Assis, Machado de. *The Collected Stories of Machado de Assis*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa and Robin Patterson, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018.

Barbosa, Rui. *Obras Completas*. Vol. 4, Tomo 1, *O Papa e o Concílio*, Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, 1877.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Forsyth, Neil. *The Old Enemy*: *Satan & The Combat Myth*. Princeton UP, 1987.

Orgel, Stephen, and Jonathan Goldberg, editors. *John Milton: The Major Works*. Oxford UP, 1991.

Shawcross, John. *John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History and Culture*. Duquesne UP, 1991.

Motherhood and the Ethics of Care in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and *Sula*

Natália Fontes de Oliveira

To define an ethics of care is to welcome different discussions encompassing elements from various areas. It is pointless to try to devise a homogenous or single meaning of such a term. Critics have different opinions about how to define the boundaries for such a flexible term. This essay aims to discuss the meaning of the expression *ethics of care* to focus on how its principles are altered by the slave holding society in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2007) and by a society still marked by the consequences of slavery in *Sula* (1973). The distortion of the ethics of care causes many women bonds to rupture as family and social relations are inverted to best suit economic and ideological interests. Attention is given to how women characters cope in different ways with the severing of bonds and how, as a consequence, many have haunted memories, are unable to have a stable relationship, turn to violent acts and even become disoriented.

The ethics of care is characterized by vocabulary from distinct fields that try to delineate a clear notion of the term. It is important to consider that these ponderings and meanings are interwoven with complex notions and analogies, creating an intriguing discussion. A dialogue between feminist criticism and the studies on the ethics of care can be established as the discussion enhances the understanding of the definition of this expression. The emergence of the feminist movement in the 1960s can be regarded as a rebellion against women's subordination to men, as well as against the supposed feminine nature of caring (Sevenhuijsen 5). Seen as limiting, caring was viewed as an obstacle incompatible with the incessant quest for women's independence. As the feminist movement becomes consolidated in several areas, various reflections on new and old themes have caught critics'

attention. In this context, the ethics of care, once completely rejected, has recently appeared in the feminist agenda through alternative perspectives.

Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings proposed a feminism that is care-focused. They argue that caring is socially engendered, because women are constantly associated with acts of carging, an activity that is devalued and undermined by sexist discourses. In *In A Different Voice*, Gilligan proposes that we should view "women's capacity for care as a strength" (11), which should and must be expected of men as well as women. In *A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Noddings's care-focused feminism differs from an ethics of justice because it has the potential to a more concrete evaluative model of moral dilemma.

In a book dedicated to the subject, Virginia Held presents an approach with specific characteristics of the ethics of care, associating it with moral ethics and the ethics of justice. She initially defines ethics of care as a cluster of practices among individuals extending beyond family and friends, in fields such as medicine, law and international relations (3). Thus, the ethics of care is not limited to biological or social categorization as it occurs in different settings and refers to the cultivation of embracing acts that foster social connections and cooperation. In this sense, the ethics of care focuses on trust and in the response to the needs of others. On the other hand, the ethics of justice focuses on individual rights, equality and abstract notions (Held 15). This distinction shows that the ethics of justice is different because it is concerned with individual rights, with the separation between one and the other.

As Held adopts a maternal figure as the model of her analysis, she has received criticism from those who argue that she is perpetuating an ideal model of woman who cares for everyone. Even though she adopts a woman figure to illustrate her ponderings, her work is not necessarily informed by essentialisms because the model is based on caring individuals, be they represented by a woman or a man. Nevertheless, she associates the mother figure with care and compassion as opposed to justice. As Selma Sevenhuijens argues, this principle may erroneously reproduce arguments based on dichotomous oppositions (13). Held's distinction is, therefore, set on slippery paradigms because it opens space for a binary distinction between women and men by associating women with care and men with justice. Even though emphasis is given to Held's relevant definitions of the ethics of care, this article places no emphasis on women as essentially

caring subjects or on a simplistic belief that caring is exclusively a feminine characteristic.

Cynthia Willet, discussing maternal ethics specifically in the context of slavery, points out the importance of challenging the "altruism-egoism dichotomy of traditional ethics" (9). It is crucial to elaborate alternative characteristics of the ethics of care, which, although marked by solidarity among individuals, does not imply that there is an ideal selfless person involved. As bell hooks explains, "rather than seeing giving care as diminishing us, we will experience the kind of care giving that enriches the giver. It is fundamentally rooted in the ability to empathize" (*Sisters* 168). hooks's comments are relevant because they stress the fact that, although caring has been perceived as a feminine trait and, therefore, has often been rejected as outdated, the focus now is on the positive aspect of care for both women and men. This topic does not place women in a passive and confining role, but rather highlights the benefits of caring or the problems arising from its rupture. As Gillespie and Kubitscheck emphasize, it is important to "reclaim caretaking by focusing on its empowering, generative aspects" (29). Thus, the ethics of care can have healing aspects as individuals may benefit from such interactions.

Motherhood may be interwoven with the ethics of care, but such concept is not limited to motherly expressions. This work analyzes motherhood showing how such bond is seen as more powerful or superior, as alternative perspectives are used to challenge preconceived stereotypes commonly associated with such bonds. I propose an open ended definition of an ethics of care as the willingness to empathize and act with solidarity to assist, even if temporarily, one or more individuals. Although the scope of this article is limited to women bonds, there is nothing that restricts the ethics of care only to women. Thus, other relevant aspects and manifestations of an ethics of care are mentioned whenever needed to enhance the discussion.

On this topic, we shall focus on how slavery and its aftermath alter the ethics of care among the characters in the chosen novels, *Sula* and *A Mercy*. The notion of an ethics of care is incompatible with slavery because this institution confines individuals to inhumane roles and disseminates a notion of superiority based on race which causes individuals to lack solidarity with each other as they incorporate a distorted view of care. In *Sula*, the characters analyzed are Eva with her children Hannah and Plum, as well as Hannah and her daughter Sula. In *A Mercy*, the characters chosen for analysis are Florens and her mother, because they have the central

mother-daughter conflict. It is important to note that in these novels, women characters resort to actions that are a reflection of a society tainted by slavery and its aftermath, as is the case with Rebekka, who eventually adopts a fallacious notion of the ethics of care. This essay highlights how the changes in the ethics of care force women to behave unexpectedly, and assert that their actions cannot be used to completely condemn them, nor simply classify them as good or bad.

In *Sula*, the alteration of the ethics of care greatly affects motherhood. Even though the women characters are forced to stray from the traditional representations of an ethics of care, they are nevertheless judged by such traditional paradigms. When Hannah asks Eva if she ever played with them, Eva answers: "Play? Wasn't nobody playin' in 1895. Just 'cause you got it good now you think it was always this good?" (68). Although Eva's answer might seem harsh, her experiences and constant struggles have shaped her way of showing her feelings and her practical attitude towards life. Another misunderstanding between Hannah and Eva happens when Hannah asks: "Mamma, did you ever love us?" (67). She thinks for a second before answering: "No. I don't reckon I did. Not the way you thinkin" (67). Once again, Eva's responses are not the conventional outburst of explicit love that her daughter wants, but it does not mean that she does not love her children. In Eva's generation, mothers were lucky if they could manage to keep their children alive and close to them. As she is left by BoyBoy with young children to raise, she has no time to think and express her emotions because she has to concentrate on finding a job to make ends meet, to feed her children and care for them, as they are too young to be left alone. For Eva, simply ensuring her children's survival is a demonstration of an overwhelming love. Hannah continues to question her "But Mamma, they had to be some time when you wasn't thinkin' 'bout" (69) and Eva replies:

> No time. They wasn't no time. Not none. Soon as I got one day done here came a night. With you all coughin' and watchin' so TB wouldn't take you off and if you was sleeping' quiet I thought, O Lord, they dead and put my hand over your mouth to feel if the breath was comin' what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer? (69)

Hannah does not understand the context from which her mother is speaking, the arduous days and nights Eva had to endure just to make sure her children were alive. For Eva, this is the ultimate expression of love. This experience of feeling rejected by her mother greatly affects Hannah and has an impact on her feelings toward her own daughter Sula. Hannah interprets her mother's response according to the conventional motherly attributes which would classify Eva as loveless, because she does not say she loves her children. But as Adrienne Rich states: "Eva Peace . . . is forced to pour all her forces into fighting for her children's survival; her maternal love expresses itself in action to the last" (xxvi). Her love is explicit through her actions, but her daughter does not understand this important detail. Eva loves her daughter so much that when she sees that Hannah is burning, she immediately tries to save her:

> Eva knew there was time for nothing in this world other than the time it took to get there and cover her daughter's body with her own. She lifted her heavy frame up on her good leg, and with fists and arms smashed the windowpane. Using her stump as a support on the window sill, her good leg as a lever, she threw herself out of the widow. Cut and bleeding she clawed the air trying to aim her body toward the flaming, dancing figure. (76)

Eva is in her bedroom, on the top floor of the house, but she does not hesitate and jumps to try to reach Hannah in time to help her. Eva's desperate attempt to save her daughter illustrates the immensity of her love. She has always loved Hannah but because of the alteration of the ethics of care, caused by her social, cultural and financial constraints, she does not express her emotions in the traditional manner that her daughter expects. Even so, when her children are in danger, Eva is unconcerned with the difficulty of saving them and is ready to take action.

Likewise, Sula judges her mother with the same idealization of the maternal role and, like Hannah, she wrongly interprets the situation by placing unrealistic expectations on her mother. One afternoon, Sula hears Hannah saying to her friends: "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (57). Sula interprets Hannah's words as a lack of love and care towards her. This episode marks Sula's behavior as an adult as it "taught her there was no other that you could count on" (118-19). She is thus determined not to rely on or love anybody because, in her

opinion, not even her mother likes her. After this episode, Sula is lost as she feels she "had no center, no speck around which to grow" (119). She is thus described:

> Distinctly different. Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life. (118)

Sula incorporates different aspects from Eva's and Hannah's personalities and she mixes their qualities to create her own subjectivity, as a free and careless woman. She is determined to search for whatever amuses her without worrying about other people. Sula is traumatized by what she perceives as her mother's indifference; she mistakenly believes that alone she will be independent and strong because no one will be close enough to harm her.

Sula suffers greatly when she hears her mother saying to her friends that she loves but does not necessarily like her. She does not understand the context in which her mother grew, the events she had been exposed to, and her way of reasoning about the world. In the same way Hannah fails to understand Eva, Sula is unable to contextualize Hannah's comments and understand her perspective. Hannah's reactions are probably the result of what she herself had gone through with her own mother, as she too feels rejected. Sula becomes lost and does not know exactly how to react to her mother or to the other people around her. When Eva is desperately trying to save Hannah from burning, she remembers that "she had seen Sula standing on the back porch just looking" (78). She is shocked by Sula's reactions and tries to convince herself that her granddaughter was probably numb from seeing her mother on fire. In fact, Sula's action is not easy to comprehend, but it is a direct consequence of the alteration of the ethics of care that distances the characters. Sula cannot seem to empathize with her mother's suffering, as she too is hurting. She is disappointed by Hannah not liking her, and she is unable to take any action as she is paralyzed by what she experiences. The alteration of the ethics of care strangely affects Sula and

her actions because she cannot cope with the feeling of maternal rejection derived from her misinterpretation of her mother's words.

As an adult, Sula places Eva in a retirement home. The event is briefly described by the impersonal narrator: "In April two men came with a stretcher and she didn't even have time to comb her hair before they strapped her to a piece of canvas" (94). Sula does not explain or talk to her grandmother, but while talking to Nel, she says: "She didn't belong in that house. Digging around in the cupboards, picking up pots and ice picks" (100). Through her remark, it seems that just like Eva, she is being practical and taking action when something bothers her, except for the fact that Eva always acts on behalf of her family, and Sula pushes her loved ones away. Sula goes on to say: "I'm scared of her, Nellie. That's why . . . You don't know her. Did you know she burnt Plum? . . . It's true . . . And when I got back here she was planning to do it to me too" (100). Sula does not understand Eva's past actions towards her uncle and she is afraid that her grandmother will eventually burn her too. In turn, Eva becomes scared of Sula and, after their conversation, she only sleeps with her bedroom door locked. The alteration of the ethics of care causes mistrust and miscommunication between the characters and weakens the women bonds as they react according to an often erroneous interpretation of events.

The changes in the ethics of care also affect the mother-son relationship of Eva and Plum, Sula's uncle. After he returns from the war, he seems to suffer from shell-shock as he cannot insert back into the community. He quits his job and locks himself for days in his room to use drugs. Eva cannot stand watching him being slowly consumed by his drug addiction any longer. One night, she goes into his room and: "With a swing and a swoop she arrived at Plum's door and pushed it open with the tip of one crutch . . . She sat down and gathered Plum into her arms" (46). Eva holds him close and has mixed feelings because although she loves him, she cannot bear the fact that he is lost in a world of drugs. Eva recalls memories of his childhood and "lifted her tongue to the edge of her lip to stop the tears from running into her mouth. Rocking, rocking" (47). She holds and rocks him like a baby, expressing her motherly love. When she remembers he is not a child anymore, yet refuses to behave like an adult, she once again has to interfere in his life. Many years before, when Plum was just a baby, he would cry suffering day and night because of constipation discomfort. Eva decides to take action to ensure the end of Plum's misery, and she inserts her hand inside him to help restore his bowel movements, pulling

out dry stone-like lumps. Once again, when she sees her son suffering and helpless, she decides to take action into her own hands and free him from his dependence on drugs. She goes into the kitchen, gets gasoline and sets him on fire. Interestingly, he is not scared or desperate and the event is portrayed without conveying a violent image: "He opened his eyes and saw what he imaged was the great wing of an eagle pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought . . . he closed his eyes and sank back into the bright hole of sleep" (47). The narrator describes Plum as feeling a certain tranquility, believing he is experiencing a cleansing or a transcendental moment and he relaxes, falling into sleep. Eva may feel her actions to be extremely painful and difficult, but in her opinion, being a mother implies saving her son, and in this case ending Plum's life is a way to put him out of his misery of drug addiction.

A reference to Morrison's *Beloved* is relevant here, because the protagonist Sethe, a runaway slave, also struggles against the contradictions imposed on the black mother. As Sethe is fleeing from the plantation with her children, she becomes desperate when the slave hunter approaches. She is determined to save her children from slavery because she cannot imagine them suffering the same cruelties she has. While the man is approaching, she believes the only way to protect her baby daughter from the atrocities of slavery is by killing her. Sethe kills her own daughter to free her from a life in slavery. Carole Boyce Davies argues that "Sethe's violent action becomes an attempt to hold on to the maternal right and function" (139). The same reasoning can be applied to Eva because she believes that a mother's duty is to save her son from his imprisonment in the world of drugs. Plum barely leaves his room, only hurts himself with higher and higher doses of drugs. Eva is a practical woman who has endured different kinds of difficulties to guarantee her children's well-being, she cannot see another way out to help Plum break his chains of drug addiction – a life in slavery, because the drugs control him. Both Sethe and Eva cannot be judged as cruel mothers because their actions are a reflection of their past experiences and the alteration of the ethics of care. Like many mothers in slavery, who preferred to kill their children rather than to see them in such misery, Eva prefers to kill Plum and thus provide him with a possible way out of his enslavement to drugs. Likewise, Sethe in *Beloved* prefers to kill her baby daughter rather than to see her suffer a lifetime of slavery.

We reject dichotomous paradigms to classify characters like Eva and Sethe as good or bad mothers because doing so contributes to the

dissemination of the ideal and unattainable model of a perfect woman. hooks argues that "discussions of black subjectivity are often limited to the topic of representation of good and bad images" (*Yearning* 19); it is therefore crucial to represent the characters and their actions moving beyond this binary distinction of good and bad, especially in the context of slavery and its aftermath in which the ethics of care is altered, and consequently the women characters might adopt unconventional actions to care for others. In this sense, although Eva's and Sethe's actions seem outrageous, they cannot be judged by ordinary notions of mothering because of the changes in the ethics of care caused by slavery and its aftermath. Eva is willing to sacrifice her life when she needs to support her children and when she tries to save Hannah from burning. She does whatever it takes to ensure her children's well-being.

Likewise, in *A Mercy,* motherhood is affected by the changes in the ethics of care. Florens's mother experiences the confining contradictions imposed on black mothers and the lack of opportunity and means to immediately explain her actions. Florens and her mother initially belong to D'Ortega, a Portuguese slave owner, who owes money to Jacob, a tradesman. Jacob goes to the Portuguese plantation to receive his payment, but "it became clear what D'Ortega had left to offer. Slaves" (21). D'Ortega insists that Jacob take a slave as payment, but Jacob is hesitant: "Jacob winced. Flesh was not his commodity" (22). He initially discards the idea of buying slaves, but near the house, Florens's mother calls his attention: "He saw a woman standing in the doorway with two children. One on her hip; one hiding behind her skirts. She looked healthy enough, better fed than the others. On a whim, mostly to silence him and fairly sure the Portuguese slave owner would refuse, he said, 'Her. That one. I'll take her'" (23-24). Florens's mother is a house slave quite valuable, because he answers: "Ah, no. Impossible. My wife won't allow. She can't live without her'" (24). Jacob perceives from his reaction that "there was more than cooking D'Ortega stood to lose" (24). It is implied that Florens's mother is abused by him and, for that reason, she is kept around the house. Although D'Ortega says his wife cannot live without her, it seems that he is the one who does not want to live without her. During the conversation between Jacob and D'Ortega,

> the little girl stepped from behind the mother. On her feet was a pair of way-too-big woman's shoes . . . The woman cradling the small boy on her hip came forward. Her voice is barely above a whisper but there was no mistaking its urgency. 'Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter. (26)

In an act that surprises Jacob, Florens's mother offers her own daughter to be taken away. Jacob misinterprets Florens's mother's actions, describing her daughter as the "ill-shod child that the mother was throwing away" (34). Like his peers, he shows a distorted view of motherhood that sees black mothers as cruel and detached. This assumption benefits Jacob because it releases him of any guilt for his action of buying a young slave girl and, thus, depriving her of her mother's company. In other words, Florens's mother is judged through the lenses of a white male who fails to understand the reality of black women during slavery. He conveniently portrays Florens's mother as monstrous and convinces himself that he is doing Florens a favor by taking her away from this unnatural mother. Jacob tells himself that the "acquisition [of Florens] . . . could be seen as a rescue" (34), insisting on the fact that he saved her from a mother who did not care.

Later in the novel, however, Florens's mother has the chance and the means to tell her story and explain her actions. The last chapter is a letter written to her daughter, which Florens never receives. She tells the story from her viewpoint speaking directly to her daughter, explaining to her in the letter that "you [Florens] wanted the shoes of a loose woman, and a cloth around your chest did no good. You caught Senhor's eye" (166). Despite Florens's mother's attempts to keep her as a child as long as possible, she is worried because D'Ortega already started to notice her daughter. She knows that, if Florens stayed, she was doomed to have the same fate as many women slaves: to be sexually abused and to serve the sexual needs of her white master. She continues to explain her actions: "One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference" (166). Florens's mother is aware that there are no guarantees for women slaves, but she knows that there are different kinds of oppressions, and she cannot imagine her daughter suffering sexual abuse the way she does at the hands of D'Ortega. She describes the same scene that Jacob sees but from a completely different perspective:

> You stood there in those shoes and the tall man laughed and said he would take me to close the debt. I knew Senhor would not allow it. I said you. Take you, my daughter. Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes.
> It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy. Offered by a human. I stayed on my knees. (166-67)

Florens's mother sees in Jacob the only chance for Florens to escape from D'Ortega. As a mother, she tries to secure a better future for her daughter – a future with hope that Florens will not have to endure the cruelties she has faced. Although it is an opportunity for a black mother to have a voice and to show her perspective, she is unable to reach her daughter. She is given voice and her cry resonates with those of many black mothers who face the contradictions of mothering under slavery and are often cruelly misjudged.

There is a miscommunication between Florens and her mother, because she believes her mother did not love her. As Florens's mother is sexually abused by D'Ortega, she is desperate for Jacob to take Florens away from the plantation. Florens does not understand her mother's action, which may be because she is young and does not fully comprehend how the context of slavery affects motherhood and bonds in general. Observing Florens's mother, it becomes noticeable that she acts to defend her daughter in the best way she can. Like many other black mothers whose "source of strength was not some mystical power attached to motherhood, but rather their concrete experiences as slaves" (Davis 29), Florens's mother finds the courage to send Florens away for her daughter's own good. The ethics of care shifts because the manifestation of empathy and care is bound to slavery. Black mothers have to be considered according to the context of slavery which means that "envisioning mother-child separation [may be seen] as a form of caring" (Henderson 44). As it becomes clear, in the last chapter of the narrative, Florens's mother acts out of love, hoping to give her daughter a better life.

The alteration of the ethics of care weakens women bonds, such as motherhood. Nevertheless, because slavery and its aftermath cause a tainted ethics of care, the mothers should not be judged simply as good or bad, as they regularly have to resort to unconventional actions to ensure their own survival and that of their loved ones. The characters may still feel solidarity towards each other, but their actions may not necessarily convey this empathy in the midst of dealing with cruelties caused by slavery.

Works Cited

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. Routledge, 1994.

Gillespie, Diane, and Missy Dehn Kubitschek. "Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in *Sula*." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1990, pp. 21-48.

Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice*. Harvard UP, 1982.

Henderson, Mae C. "Pathways to Fracture: African American Mothers and the Complexities of Maternal Absence." *Black Women, Gender, and Families*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, pp. 29-47.

Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*. Oxford UP, 2006.

hooks, bell. *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*. South End, 1993.

hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. South End, 1990.

Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. Alfred A. Knoff, 2009.

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. Penguin, 1973.

Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. U of California P, 1984.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1986.

Sevenhuijsen, Selma. *Citizenship and Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*. Translated by Liz Savage, Routledge, 1998.

Willet, Cynthia. *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities*. Routledge, 1995.

Contributors

Amanda Pavani Fernandes earned a Doctorate in Literary Studies from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte. Her doctoral thesis, "The Simulacrum in Contemporary Science Fiction: Atwood, Willis, Piercy, Collins, Cadigan," employs Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum to interpret world building, character development and relationships among signs in contemporary science fiction. Her research interests include Science Fiction, Afrofuturism, Cyberpunk, Utopianisms, among others. She is the former editor of the graduate student journal *Em Tese*, and co-founder of NEUFIC, a research group on science fiction and utopianisms, both at UFMG.

Cláudio Roberto Vieira Braga holds a Doctorate in Comparative Literature from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (2010), Brazil. He has also conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Leeds, UK, and University of São Paulo (2016-2017). He is currently Associate Professor of Literatures in English at the University of Brasilia, where he teaches undergraduate courses and supervises MA and Ph.D. candidates. His research interests are contemporary literatures in English, Diasporic and Postcolonial Literatures, and Literature and Cinema. He is the author of *A literatura movente de Chimamanda Adichie*, published by UnB University Press in 2019. He is the editor of *Almas de África no mundo: literaturas africanas e afrodiaspóricas em diálogo*, a collection of essays published by Pontes in 2019.

Gláucia Renate Gonçalves received her Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina in 1995. She is Full Professor of Literatures in English at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, where she has been teaching in the graduate and undergraduate levels since 1996. She is the co-editor of *The Art of Elizabeth Bishop* (2002) and *New Challenges in Language and Literature* (2009). Her research interests are American Literature, Diaspora and Immigration Studies, in particular the literature of the Japanese diaspora, and Memory. She served as president of ABRAPUI – Brazilian Association of Professors

of English from 2005 to 2007, and is currently the coordinator of NELLI – Center for the Study of Literatures in English at UFMG.

José de Paiva dos Santos earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (2001) from Purdue University. He is currently Associate Professor of Literatures in English at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, where he teaches courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs. He is also the sub-coordinator of NELLI - Center for the Study of Literatures in English at UFMG. He conducts research in the fields of American and African American Literature, Comparative Literature, and Literature and Religion. Among his most recent publications are "The Darkening of Medea: Geographies of Race, (Dis)Placement and Identity in Agostinho Olavo's *Além do Rio (Medea)*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas*, Oxford University Press, 2015; "The Representation of Rituals in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Community, Resistance, Empowerment", in *Scripta,* vol. 16, 2018; "Trauma, Cura, Comunidade: as Faces de Cristo em *Amada*, de Toni Morrison," in *Teoliterária: Revista Brasileira de Literaturas e Teologias*, vol. 10, 2020.

José Otaviano da Mata Machado is currently a Doctoral candidate in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). He obtained a Master's degree in Literatures in English and a BA in English from the same institution. He conducts research in the fields of Literature, History and Cultural Memory, Comparative Literature, Song Studies, and War Literature. He is a member of UFMG's War and Literature Study Group (NEGUE). He also works in cultural studies communication through the *mimimidias* podcast and YouTube channel.

Juliana Borges Oliveira de Morais is Assistant Professor in the Department of Letters, Arts and Culture at Federal University of São João del-Rei - Minas Gerais, where she teaches Literatures in English and Literary Theory. She holds a Master's Degree in Literatures in English and a Ph.D. in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature, both from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Her research interests are literatures written by women, contemporary literatures of the African diaspora and literary theory. She is the author of *The Representation of Home*: *Cartographies of Belonging in Loida Maritza Pérez's* Geographies of Home*,* published by VDM Verlag, 2010.

Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira holds a doctoral degree in Comparative Literature from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (2007). He is currently Associate Professor of Literatures in English at the Federal University of São João del-Rei, Minas Gerais, where he teaches in the undergraduate and graduate programs. His main research interests are the representations of identity, gender (feminism), post-colonialism, race, ethnicity and diaspora in literatures in English by women writers. His most recent publications include: "Poéticas em Trânsito: espaços, deslocamentos e temporalidades múltiplas," in *Soletras*, vol. 38, 2019, co-authored with Shirley de Souza Gomes Carreira and Maria Aparecida Rodrigues Fontes; "Com Sexta-Feira, entre Calibans, Jasmines & Lispeths: reflexões sobre as representações do pós-colonialismo nas literaturas de língua inglesa," in *O Eu e Seus Nós: teoria literária e crítica da cultura*, edited by Raimundo Expedito dos Santos Sousa and published by Mares Editores in 2017.

Melissa Cristina Silva de Sá is currently Assistant Professor of English and Literatures in English at the Federal Institute of Minas Gerais (IFMG). She researches dystopian fiction written by women, with a focus on the subject of storytelling. Her areas of interest include Science Fiction, Utopian and Dystopian Fiction, and Fantasy. She is one of the founding members of NEUFIC, a research group interested in utopianisms and science fiction, and has contributed to *Utopias sonhadas / Distopias anunciadas: feminismo, gênero e cultura queer na literatura* (2019), a collection of essays on feminist utopian fiction, edited by Ildney Cavalcanti and Luciana Deplagne.

Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade holds a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. She is currently Assistant Professor of English and Literatures in English in the same institution. Her scholarly interests range widely, from Shakespeare Studies to John Milton's presence in the 18th, 19th, and 21st Centuries; from studies of the short story to the novel in English; and from North-American and English Fiction to Brazilian Literature. Her most recent publications include "Machado de Assis and John Milton: Possible Dialogues," in *Milton Studies*, vol. 58: Milton in the Americas, edited by Elizabeth Sauer and Angelica Duran, Duquesne University Press, 2017; "Rosa, Goethe e Milton: prolegômenos a diálogos poético-bíblicos," in *Remate de Males*, vol. 39, 2019.

Natália Fontes de Oliveira earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Purdue University. She holds a Master's Degree in Literary Studies and a BA in English from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. She is Associate Professor in the Department of Letters at the Federal University of Viçosa and is currently the President of the Board of Linguistic Policy of the Federal University of Viçosa. Her fields of research are Comparative Literature and Literatures in English, with a focus on contemporary literature, cultural and literary translations, women's writing, feminist literary criticism, African American and Afro-Brazilian literature, diaspora studies, and travel writing. She has recently published *Three Traveling Women Writers: Cross-Cultural Perspectives of Patagonia, Brazil and the U.S.*, Routledge Press, 2018.