

ECHOES OF THE ELEGIAC NOVEL IN BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract: This article will examine the (meta)narrative elements of *Dom Casmurro* (Machado de Assis, 1899), *São Bernardo* (Graciliano Ramos, 1934), *A hora da estrela* (Clarice Lispector, 1977) and *Um beijo de colombina* (Adriana Lisboa, 2003) which draw on the elegiac novel. Starting with a brief introduction of the main features of the elegiac novel, focusing on a reading of *Lord Jim* (Joseph Conrad, 1900), it will investigate how the relation between narrator and heroine, unique in each novel, challenges the hegemonic masculine narrative discourse, making use of subtle strategies to give voice to the heroine.

Keywords: *Lord Jim*; *Dom Casmurro*; *São Bernardo*; *A hora da estrela*; *Um beijo de colombina*.

ECOS DO ROMANCE ELEGÍACO NA LITERATURA BRASILEIRA

Resumo: Este artigo examina os elementos (meta)narrativos de *Dom Casmurro* (Machado de Assis, 1899), *São Bernardo* (Graciliano Ramos, 1934), *A hora da estrela* (Clarice Lispector, 1977) e *Um beijo de colombina* (Adriana Lisboa, 2003) que os aproxima do romance elegíaco (Bruffee). A partir de uma breve apresentação das principais características do romance elegíaco, sobretudo de uma leitura de *Lord Jim* (Joseph Conrad, 1900), investiga como a relação entre o narrador e sua heroína, única em cada romance, desatabiliza o discurso narrativo masculino hegemônico, ao se valer de estratégias súteis para dar voz à heroína.

Palavras-chave: *Lord Jim*; *Dom Casmurro*; *São Bernardo*; *A hora da estrela*; *Um beijo de colombina*.

Echo and Narcissus

In *Metamorphoses*, the poet Ovid tells us that it was Juno who denied Echo the ability to express herself verbally as a punishment for her deceitful use of language.¹ The nymph, previously so eloquent, was condemned to only repeat the last words spoken by others, because she had distracted Juno with lengthy conversations while Jupiter was to be found lying with other nymphs in the mountains. Juno uttered the words: "I shall give you less power over that tongue by which I have been deluded, and the briefest ability to speak".² Some time after being cursed, Echo spied the young Narcissus while he was hunting deer with his companions. Echo immediately fell for Narcissus and followed him from a distance. The more she looked at the young man, the more she desired him. However, the curse prevented her from talking to Narcissus.

Perhaps because he realised he had been followed for several days, Narcissus separated from his group of companions and called out: "Is anyone here?", to which Echo replied "Here". And so continued their dialogue: every time that Narcissus addressed the mysterious nymph, the only resource Echo had at her disposal to express her desires was to repeat his last words. "Here, let us meet together", insisted Narcissus. "Together", replied Echo. In her delirium, Echo ran towards Narcissus, intending to throw herself into the young man's arms. Narcissus, however, was horrified and, spurning her, cried out: "Away with these encircling hands! May I die before what's mine is yours." Echo once more repeated his last words back to him, expressing for the last time her thwarted desires: "What's mine is yours!".³ Then, she fled, scorned, humiliated and ashamed.

Narcissus's refusal to reciprocate her amorous desires ended up transforming the nymph into nothing more than an echo. Today, all that remains of Echo is the sound of her voice. Narcissus eventually died himself, consumed by the love of his own image, which he saw reflected in the lake; a love which proved unattainable: "Alas, in vain, beloved boy!", and many other words were returned to him; and hardly had he said 'Goodbye', when 'Goodbye' said Echo too".⁴

¹ I would like to thank Andy McDougall for translating part of this article.

² OVID. Eco Sees Narcissus, in *Metamorphoses*, book 3, on-line.

³ OVID. Eco Sees Narcissus, in *Metamorphoses*, book 3, on-line.

⁴ OVID. Eco Sees Narcissus, in *Metamorphoses*, book 3, on-line.

Narrator and heroine

From the myth of Echo and Narcissus summarised above, I tried to pull out some features which were later explored in the modern novel, particularly in elegiac novels whose first-person narrator tells their life story to their fellow men and blames a woman for their failures:

- The silencing and marginalising of the female voice;
- The nullification of female sexuality;
- The ability of the female to find ways, even if limited, to express their desires;
- The ambiguity that the female introduces into the discourse.⁵

In this article I aim to briefly explore the way in which interaction takes place between narrator and heroine in *Dom Casmurro* (Machado de Assis, 1899), *São Bernardo* (Graciliano Ramos, 1934), *A hora da estrela* (Clarice Lispector, 1977) and *Um beijo de colômbina* (Adriana Lisboa, 2003), taking into account the elements that define the elegiac novel. These four Brazilian novels are all first-person narratives, which contain a story within a story, in which a narrator records in writing the story of their failure and, in the process, involves the reader in the discussion of their complicated relationship with the heroine and the arduous trail they've had to tread in order to construct a text and a sense of meaning in their life. They are, therefore, novels concerning the confession of a male voice, about their aversion to or admiration for a woman and an attempt to exclude or silence said woman in the narrative. The very act of writing and the silencing, at least temporarily, of the female voice are central themes in these novels. Yet, at the same time, the formal devices employed by their writers prominently portray the ability of the female voice to survive, emerge from the male discourse, or even take possession of it, rendering it ambiguous.

In the four novels, the heroine is crucially implicated in one way or another in the narrator's failure, whether for her being strong or weak, much or little loved, admired or detested, for her intellectual prowess or shortcomings, for her superiority or mediocrity, or simply for existing. In *Dom Casmurro* and *São Bernardo*, coincidentally the two novels with a male author, the narrators are inarguably men and the heroine is already dead when the

⁵ See SPIVAK, Echo, 1993, and BERGER & GABARA, *The Latest Word from Echo*, 1996.

narrative begins. In *A hora da estrela* and *Um beijo de colombina*, the identity and gender of the narrator are more contentious. Clarice Lispector and Adriana Lisboa bend the rules of the elegiac novel and *récit* – that is, of a story in which a male narrator relates events which generally happen in the past – in order to expose the literary conventions, established by canonical authors of the magnitude of Machado de Assis and Graciliano Ramos, which made the male voice the owner of the narrative.

The elegiac novel

Patricia Merivale, in a study on female bonding in Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer*, wrote that "an elegiac romance is, to abridge considerably, a fictional autobiography which must disguise itself as the biography of a person now dead." (MERIVALE, 1980, p. 46) The term elegiac romance was coined by Kenneth Bruffee to define a new narrative form that allowed the tradition of the heroic quest romance to survive in the fiction of the twentieth century. Books of this kind include Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) and Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962).⁶ Bruffee prefers to call these works "romance" rather than "novel" because the hero embarks on a kind of quest similar to that found in chivalric romances. They are elegiac because the narrators tell us the story after the death of the hero, as in a pastoral elegy, and share the same underlying driving force: they are the outcome of the need for the narrators to overcome the feeling of loss caused by the death of their heroes. For this reason, they are heroic and elegiac at the same time.

The elegiac romance explores the interaction between the narrator and the hero in the recent and distant past. The loss of the hero is irredeemable. As a result, the narrator begins to construct the hero, who is a product of his or her fantasy; as readers, we do not have access to the hero except through the narrator, who inevitably becomes his mediating force. Even when he is given a voice, what the hero says is meticulously selected and edited by the narrator. For example, Marlow guides his listeners as follows:

I am telling you so much about my own instinctive feelings and bemused reflections because there remains so little to be told of him. *He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you.* I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you. Were my commonplace

⁶ See BRUFFEE, *Elegiac Romance*, p. 15-72.

fears unjust? I won't say – not even now. You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game. (CONRAD, 1996, p. 136, emphasis added).

The narrative structure of the elegiac romance is a reconstruction in the narrative present of the relationship that was established between these two complementary characters in the past, blending factual reality with invention. The problem that the narrator faces is that although the hero is dead, his influence remains alive in the narrator's mind. By dying, the hero takes the past of the narrator with him. The narrator embarks on an imaginary journey as a means of exorcizing his ghosts and recovering his past, and this will result in an autobiographical account. By telling his story, the narrator manages, or at least tries, to obtain a degree of control over his underlying concern, which is the driving force behind the narrative. When the elegiac romance is compared with other narratives about heroes, the narrator of this form can be said to be much more than a mere observer: he undergoes change insofar as he gives an account of the hero and is the victim of his relationship with him or her. The elegiac romance is thus an autobiography of the narrator disguised as the biography of the hero.⁷

Dom Casmurro and São Bernardo

In the novels of Machado de Assis and Graciliano Ramos, the male point of view dominates, thus following canonical literary models, such as that of the *récit* and the elegiac romance.⁸ To adapt them to a Brazilian context, they mirror the discursive asymmetry between (male) narrator and heroine in the socioeconomic dependence of women in Brazil's oligarchic and patriarchal society, highlighted in two moments of crisis: the decline of the agricultural oligarchs in the mid-nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century (GLEDSON, 1989). The narrators chosen by Machado de Assis and Graciliano Ramos are in both cases patriarchs and the heroine's husband. Capitu and Madalena were therefore triply silenced: first of all, as characters not narrators. The narrative in *Dom Casmurro* and *São Bernardo* is a product of the reconstruction, in the narrator's temporal moment, of the relationship which these two complementary characters – fictional author and heroine – maintained in the past, mixing facts and inventions, so as to justify jealousy

⁷ For a comparative analysis of Lord Jim and Dom Casmurro, SILVA, The Elegy of *Dom Casmurro*, 2018.

⁸ On the French *récit* see SEGAL, Narcissus and Echo, 1988.

and violence against the woman. The female voice is intermediated by the narrator's and, therefore, is his (re)construction and a product of his fantasy. Even when her words are transmitted via direct speech, in dialogues, the female voice is meticulously chosen and edited by the narrator. Her silences, the narrator's reading of her facial expressions, and the few words afforded to Capitu, such as when Bentinho tells her about his mother's plans to send him to the seminary, contribute to the creation of a character who is calculating, unpredictable and conspiratorial:

Capitu, a princípio, não disse nada. Recolheu os olhos, meteu-os em si e deixou-se estar com as pupilas vagas e surdas, a boca entreaberta, toda parada. Então eu, para dar força às afirmações, comecei a jurar que não seria padre. Naquele tempo jurava muito e rijo, pela vida e pela morte. Jurei pela hora da morte. Que a luz me faltasse na hora da morte se fosse para o seminário. Capitu não parecia crer nem descreer, não parecia sequer ouvir; era uma figura de pau. Quis chamá-la, sacudila, mas faltou-me ânimo. Essa criatura que brincara comigo, que pulara, dançara, creio até que dormira comigo, deixava--me agora com os braços atados e medrosos. Enfim, tornou a si, mas tinha a cara lívida, e rompeu nestas palavras furiosas: – Beata! carola! papa-missas! (ASSIS, chapter 18, online)

Another example is a conversation between the couple about the wife's finances, which arises from a tedious astronomy lesson and becomes the main subject of one of the book's chapters. The narrator edits the female character's speech to insinuate that Capitu was distracted because she was thinking about Escobar and, at the same time, to encourage the reader to suspect that the alleged romance between his friend and the heroine could have been born from those encounters of a professional nature:

"Você não me ouve, Capitu."

"Eu? Ouço perfeitamente."

"O que é que eu dizia?"

"Você...você falava de Sírius."

"Qual Sírius, Capitu."

"Há vinte minutos que eu falei de Sírius."

"Falava de... falava de Marte, emendou ela apressada."

Realmente, era de Marte, mas é claro que só apanhara o som da palavra, não o sentido. Fiquei sério, e o ímpeto que me deu foi deixar a sala; Capitu, ao percebê-lo, fez-se a mais mimosa das criaturas, pegou-me na

mão, confessou-me que estivera contando, isto é, somando uns dinheiros para descobrir certa parcela que não achava. Tratava-se de uma conversão de papel em ouro. A princípio supus que era um recurso para desfadar-me, mas daí a pouco estava eu mesmo calculando também, já então com papel e lápis, sobre o joelho, e dava a diferença que ela buscava.

"Mas que libras são essas?" perguntei-lhe no fim.

Capitu fitou-me rindo, e replicou que a culpa de romper o segredo era minha. Ergueu-se, foi ao quarto e voltou com dez libras esterlinas, na mão; eram as sobras do dinheiro que eu lhe dava mensalmente para as despesas.

"Tudo isto?"

"Não é muito, dez libras só; é o que a avarenta de sua mulher pôde arranjar, em alguns meses, concluiu fazendo tinir o ouro na mão."

"Quem foi o corretor?"

"O seu amigo Escobar."

"Como é que ele não me disse nada?"

"Foi hoje mesmo."

"Ele esteve cá?"

"Pouco antes de você chegar; eu não disse para que você não desconfiasse." (ASSIS, chapter 56, on-line).

Secondly, the heroines' desires and aspirations are constantly reined in, as they are economically dependent on the fictional authors, who don't want them to devote themselves to anything other than looking after the house or having and raising their children. Thirdly and finally, the heroines' voices are silenced because they are dead when the narrative begins. We, as readers, do not have access to their voices other than through the narrator, who becomes their mediator, their inevitably partial spokesman.

The problem the narrator faces is that, despite the heroine being dead, her influence remains alive in his mind. When they die, Capitu and Madalena take the narrator's past with them. To rid themselves of their ghosts and recover their past, Bento Santiago and Paulo Honório must embark on a memorialist and literary journey which results in the autobiographical story. Their reading of their own lives aims at understanding their relationship with the heroines and, likewise, how they lost them. In his reconstruction of the past through writing, the narrator regrets not being able to start over: "Se fosse possível recomeçarmos..." (RAMOS, chapter 36, on-line). In telling his story, the narrator is able, or at least tries, to gain some control over the underlying problem, which is the very loss of the female voice. The echoes of the female

voice which remain in their thoughts put them in a bind, preventing them from finding a unifying purpose for their actions and existence.

Ironically, the autobiographical aspect of the narrative is most evident in the novel which puts most focus on the interaction between narrator and heroine, which is to say, in *Dom Casmurro*. The relationship between Bento Santiago and Capitu is addressed from the novel's starting point and precipitating event: from the very opening scene, when Bentinho has revealed, or at least made clearer, to himself, his passion for Capitolina, the heroine's hidden personality and the future the family had in store for him.

Dom Casmurro tells the story of its narrator's obsession with the – heroic – figure of his "primeira amiga", as he calls Capitu in the book's final chapter. His search – and, incidentally, that of Paulo Honório – is also internal, or rather, in trying to reconstruct his interaction with the heroine, he seeks epistemological and psychological self-affirmation. The narrator reveals as early as chapter 2 his "fim evidente" in writing the book "era atar as duas pontas da vida, e restaurar na velhice a adolescência", something he failed to achieve with the house built in Engenho Novo.

The title of *São Bernardo*, meanwhile, being the name of the narrator's farm, suggests to us the overlap between proprietor and property, the parallels that will be established between the construction and ruin of the estate and Paulo Honório's own life trajectory. With the text, he rebuilds his past, from his humble origins as an orphan to his position as landowner, entrepreneur, known and respected across the region, and, in the end, as a solitary, ruined man without heirs or friends. Madalena appears in the text of *São Bernardo* much later than Capitu in *Dom Casmurro* and initially as an indispensable figure in the perpetuation of the estate and the formation of a new lineage, which will bring about an heir to the farm:

Amanheci um dia pensando em casar. Foi uma ideia que me veio sem que nenhum rabo de saia a provocasse. Não me ocupo com amores, devem ter notado, e sempre me pareceu que mulher é um bicho esquisito, difícil de governar. A que eu conhecia era a Rosa do Marciano, muito ordinária. Havia também conhecido a Germana e outras da mesma laia. Por elas eu julgava todas. Não me sentia, pois, inclinado por nenhuma: o que sentia era desejo de preparar um herdeiro para as terras de São Bernardo. Tentei fantasiar uma criatura alta, sadia, com trinta anos, cabelos pretos mas parei aí. Sou incapaz de imaginação, e as coisas boas que mencionei vinham destacadas, nunca se juntando para formar um ser completo. (RAMOS, chapter 11, on-line)

The narrator, through the reifying spirit that Graciliano Ramos imprints throughout his work, tries to reduce everyone to an object (CANDIDO, 1992; LIMA, 1969). He makes use of physical violence and intellectual repression to reduce women to the level of goods, which, however, only works when dealing with those who have a brief passage through his life, such as Germana: "abraquei a Germana, cabritinha sarará danadamente assanhada e arrochei-lhe um beliscão retorcido na popa da bunda. Ela ficou-se mijando de gosto (RAMOS, chapter 16, on-line).

The quote above also reveals, however, that the female world resists this reification, as the woman is a "bicho esquisito, difícil de governar" (RAMOS, chapter 11, on-line). We can see the same thing elsewhere in the novel: "Conforme declarei, Madalena possuía um excelente coração. Descobri nela manifestações de ternura que me sensibilizaram. E, como sabem, não sou homem de sensibilidades." (RAMOS, chapter 20, on-line)

The focus of *São Bernardo* isn't on the relationship between Madalena and Paulo Honório from the outset. Nevertheless, just as with Bento Santiago, what drives Paulo Honório to write is the constant presence of the heroine in his memories: "Penso em Madalena com insistência", Paulo Honório says in the last chapter of the book (RAMOS, chapter 36, on-line). In *Dom Casmurro*, as the narrative progresses, Capitu's presence and the mysteries surrounding her personality become constants. Meanwhile, if Capitu is presented as an indecipherable figure, in terms of her actions she fights back against male domination less than Madalena does. After their separation, Capitu is sent to Switzerland, whence she will never return. It is, therefore, still Bento Santiago, who opted for a separation that is only superficially circumstantial, on the pretext that she is going to accompany their son on his studies, who defines her destiny.

Madalena, for her part, represents the knowledgeable, intellectual, politicised woman who fights for the rights won by the Brazilian feminist movement, such as the right to vote enshrined in the 1934 Constitution (ARAÚJO, 2003). After the first weeks of their marriage, Madalena's behaviour starts to unsettle Paulo Honório. She doesn't fit the profile of a housewife. She writes to newspapers, talks to men as an equal, takes an interest in the running of the farm, and the school, she cares about the living conditions of the workers and their wages. The matrimonial jealousies and frictions intensify as Paulo Honório perceives that his wife's intellectual qualities and progressive political vision show his own inferiority, his outdated

views, and represent a threat to his authority and estate. The route found by the character to free herself from his domination is suicide. As drastic as her decision is, it represents a refusal to be subjected to a lifestyle that didn't correspond to the aspirations of women of her time.

Macabéa and Olímpico

In *Dom Casmurro* and *São Bernardo*, the narrator's narcissism and the silencing and marginalising of the heroine are connected through the construction of an elegy, that is, through the lament for the death of a loved one which causes pain, sadness and the reevaluation of one's own existence. *Dom Casmurro* and *São Bernardo* are elegiac novels according to Kenneth Bruffee's definition, and we can consider Machado's novel one of the pioneers of the genre, along with *Lord Jim*, by Joseph Conrad. It is certainly the first Brazilian elegiac novel and one which inaugurates a tradition of novels narrated from the male viewpoint, to which *São Bernardo* belongs.

In *A hora da estrela*, we find the same complex relationship between narrator and heroine, along with the key features of the elegiac novel: the first-person narrator, the construction of a framing narrative, the ambiguity of the relationship between narrator and hero, the narrator's introspections and the rhetorical manipulation of the reader. Nevertheless, as we will soon see, the binary relationship between narrator and heroine and the elegiac nature of the narrative are called into question in Clarice Lispector's novel. The author transfigures the narrator into a character, challenges the position of male discourse as an instrument for ordering the world and highlights the artificiality of narrative structure and time. The narrator even reveals to us that they must control themselves in order to not give away the ending:

Pergunto-me se eu deveria caminhar à frente do tempo e esboçar logo um final. Acontece porém que eu mesmo ainda não sei bem como esse isto terminará. E também porque entendo que devo caminhar passo a passo de acordo com um prazo determinado por horas: até um bicho lida com o tempo. E esta é também a minha mais primeira condição: a de caminhar paulatinamente apesar da impaciência que tenho em relação a essa moça. (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 16).

While Olímpico's identity is built in opposition to Macabéa's (as previously were those of Bento and Paulo Honório to those of Capitu and Madalena), as a representation of the north-eastern immigrant's virility and

ambition, that of the narrator Rodrigo S. M. is intimately linked to that of his heroine. Rodrigo stands before the female protagonist as if in front of a mirror: "Vejo a nordestina se olhando ao espelho e – um ruflar de tambor – no espelho aparece o meu rosto cansado e barbudo" (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 22). Rodrigo's identity is built as he himself builds his heroine: "Pareço conhecer nos menores detalhes essa nordestina, pois se vivo com ela. E como muito adivinhei a seu respeito, ela se me grudou na pele qual melado pegajoso ou lama negra" (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 21). The transformation of the narrator into a character is, in fact, suggested at various points in the novel, for example:

Para desenhar a moça tenho que me domar e para poder captar sua alma tenho que me alimentar frugalmente de frutas e beber vinho branco gelado pois faz calor neste cubículo onde me tranquei e de onde tenho a veleidade de querer ver o mundo. Também tive que me abster de sexo e de futebol. Sem falar que não entro em contacto com ninguém. Voltarei algum dia à minha vida anterior? (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 23)

É paixão minha ser o outro. No caso a outra. Estremeço esqualido igual a ela. (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 29)

In the quotes above, Lispector imbues gender relations with a relational and interdependent aspect. In the fictional discourse, narrator and heroine are no longer in opposition to each another. Each of them can only be understood through their relationship. Rodrigo S. M. expresses his difficulty in dealing with the pressure of creating a whole character from his own imagination. However, his existence depends wholly on the construction of his character: "preciso falar dessa nordestina senão sufoco. Ela me acusa e o meio de me defender é escrever sobre ela. Escrevo em traços vivos e ríspidos de pintura" (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 17). In *A hora da estrela*, this mutual dependency extends to the very existence and survival of the narrator and heroine: "Macabéa me matou. Ela estava livre de si e de nós. Não vos assusteis, morrer é um instante, passa logo, eu sei porque acabo de morrer com a moça" (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 86).

It is true that there are several instances in which the narrator insults the female character. He feels superior to her but recognises the similarities in their backgrounds. Both are north-eastern immigrants trying to survive in Rio de Janeiro, which distances Rodrigo from Paulo Honório and Bento Santiago. Rodrigo tries to take control of the narrative, by becoming a writer

and the creator of a character, one who would not have the ability to tell her own story, as she cannot write. He creates Macabéa as his double.

The fact that Macabéa is pure invention – the vision of an underemployed suburban north-eastern immigrant he saw in the streets of Rio (“É que na rua do Rio de Janeiro peguei no ar de relance o sentimento de perdição no rosto de uma moça nordestina”) (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 12) – exposes the conventions of prose fiction, among them the difference between complex and linear characters and indeed narrative construction as a whole. As Rodrigo writes, “também esqueci de dizer que o registro que em breve vai ter que começar – pois já não aguento a pressão dos fatos – o registro que em breve vai ter de começar é escrito sob o patrocínio do refrigerante mais popular do mundo e que por isso me paga nada” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 23). Clarice Lispector challenges the process of literary creation by exploring the artificiality of one of the most popular narrative techniques, placing the central narrative in a frame which provides it with a beginning, middle and end. In the specific case of *Dom Casmurro*, *São Bernardo* and *A hora da estrela*, a man sits down to tell us the story which turns out to be the novel. This technique is also found in the elegiac novel. Clarice Lispector exposes the artificiality of this technique when her narrator is aware of the act of creating the heroine, whose death, incidentally, is preannounced at the beginning of the text: “Só não inicio pelo fim que justificaria o começo – como a morte parece dizer sobre a vida – porque preciso registrar os fatos antecedentes” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 16).

Furthermore, he knows he has the power to manipulate time and the sequence of events:

A história – determino com falso livre-arbítrio – vai ter uns sete personagens e eu sou um dos mais importantes deles, é claro. Eu, Rodrigo S. M. Relato antigo, este, pois não quero ser modernoso e inventar modismos à guisa de originalidade. Assim é que experimentarei contra os meus hábitos uma história com começo, meio e “gran finale” seguido de silêncio e de chuva caindo. (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 13).

We can see that the passage above allows us to glimpse the identity of Lispector herself as a narrator, in revealing to us that the narrator is embarking upon a narrative style he is not accustomed to, something *A hora da estrela* does indeed represent in Lispector’s body of work.

Teresa or João?

The title of this section expresses the doubt regarding the true identity of the fictitious author with whom the reader completes their reading of *Um beijo de colombina* by Adriana Lisboa. Teresa, a young writer on the threshold of a resounding literary success, disappears and is believed to have drowned in the sea in Mangaratiba. She had just published her first novel and “o novo”, which “já estava quase concluído”, was to be “um romance baseado nos poemas de Manuel Bandeira” (LISBOA, 2015, p. 23). It is the lines by Manuel Bandeira, from the poem “Cantiga” (*Estrela da vida inteira*), found by João on the fridge of the flat the couple shared, which point to suicide: “Nas ondas da praia, nas ondas do mar, quero ser feliz, quero me afogar” (LISBOA, 2015, p. 69). From that moment on, the fictional author, a Latin teacher, who had never had any “vontade de escrever” (LISBOA, 2015, p. 15), embarks upon a double literary adventure: the weaving together of a memorialist novel about Teresa, and a plunge into the poetry of Manuel Bandeira. The first adventure is born from the desire to, through writing, understand Teresa, what they experienced in their eight-month relationship and to unravel the mystery surrounding her death. The second is prompted by João’s need to possess something more tangible than the depths of an individual’s personality. In the chapter “Tempo-será”, when he invites the reader to reflect with him, João reveals that the acts of writing and reading are tightly bound:

Peremos para pensar. Oito meses, um sujeito que ela conheceu numa festa, mas e daí, todo mundo conhece todo mundo em festas, e daí se eu morei na casa dela, as pessoas moram mesmo umas nas casas das outras durante a época que dura um beijo longo, um desejo mais ou menos sério, um amor mais ou menos grave, uma dependência mais ou menos explícita, uma convivência mais ou menos impune, e daí se ela morreu ou não, se comente o suicídio ou não, se foi ser feliz ou não, comigo ou com a outra Teresa ou com ninguém?

E quanto a mim. E quanto a mim, eu não sabia. Não tinha como saber. Não tinha como me apossar dos mistérios daquela mulher como me apossara dos seus livros de Manuel Bandeira. (LISBOA, 2015, p. 162-163).

In these lines we can also sense the feeling of inferiority that the male character feels in relation to his female counterpart. In another passage, João confesses to, as well as his lack of disposition towards writing, his mediocrity (“não era um aluno excelente, não era um aluno de todo mal”) and lack of

ambition (“nunca fui ambicioso de verdade, fui fazendo o meu cruso pelo meio”) (LISBOA, 2015, p. 23).

Instead of settling for the suicide theory, the narrator prefers to feed the story with doubts and uncertainties and imagine possible causes for Teresa’s death: an asthma attack, suicide (the press’s preference), a shark, a slip on a rock and even the possibility of Teresa having never existed. (LISBOA, 2015, p. 68-69). He simultaneously dives into the writer’s world and nourishes himself with her readings to organise his memories. The novel’s structure is guided by an arrangement of chapters whose titles are taken from Manuel Bandeira’s poems. Throughout the text there are numerous quotes and allusions to his verses. Furthermore, the characters’ itinerary maps out the places in central Rio de Janeiro the poet used to frequent and the streets he lived on. It is, therefore, a metanarrative text about the figure of the author, from the point of view of the central role that reading and intertextuality play in literary creation.

As we can see, *Um beijo de colombina* presents all the features of the elegiac novel, until however João discovers that Teresa hasn’t died. This is when an extradiegetic narrator takes possession of the text and begins to narrate in the third person. The last chapter, suggestively titled “Unidade”, provides, perhaps too explicitly, a frame for the novel within the novel:

Por que ela não escreveu, em todo o livro, o nome de João, nem uma única vez? Aquele espécime curioso e adorável lendo alguma coisa em latim, para suas aulas ou por pura diversão. Transformou-o em narrador, ele ainda não sabe, ela não quis lhe contar nada sobre o livro até que tivesse terminado. (LISBOA, 2015, p. 173-174).

Teresa, as fictional author, makes use of the features of the elegiac novel to place herself at the centre of the narrative. She fakes her death to attract fame and, from the male viewpoint, to affirm her superiority in relation to the male character.

Conclusion

Capitu’s and Madalena’s voices were silenced because their stories were told from the perspective of the patriarch and because they were already dead when the narrative began. Macabéa, meanwhile, is silenced by her inability to write and as a result of being a conscious creation of the narrator. This north-eastern Echo was deprived of an attractive body (“o fato de vir a ser uma

mulher não pertencesse à sua vocação”) (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 49), she is fated to merely parrot phrases she hears on Rádio Relógio and to type incomprehensible words. Although the heroine’s voice remains silenced, the novel presents a reflection on the traditional position of canonical narrative schemes in which a male narrator uses a female character to assert his virility and superiority. In *Um beijo de colombina*, Lisboa, for her part, creates an author-character who hijacks the male viewpoint to project herself as an author. The text deals with the development of a woman as a writer, turning the ending into a *Künstlerroman*.

These four Brazilian novels present fascinating variations on the elegiac novel. As the Ovidian narrator shows us, even having been deprived of language, our heroines manage to express their desires, within the limitations of repetition, as Echo did. The echo, or rather, the female voice, doesn’t disappear; in fact, it intercepts and destabilises the hegemonic male narrative discourse and becomes one of the great mysteries and enigmas of literature.

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