

Brazilian Masculine Identity in Mario Prata's Album-Novel *Buscando o seu mindinho: Um almanaque auricular*

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Abstract. This article explores Mario Prata's use of an album-novel writing strategy in *Buscando o seu mindinho: Um almanaque auricular* (2002) to subvert stereotypes of exaggerated Brazilian masculinity. This album-novel subverts notions of Brazilian masculinity through the phallic metaphor of the little finger or, in the case of the narrator, its lack. By mimicking the fragmented and hypertextual appearance of Internet writing in a paper novel, Prata challenges readers' expectations about the role of the author by suggesting that his narrator, Mindinho, is as much an assembler as he is a writer.

Mario Prata's novel *Buscando o seu mindinho: Um almanaque auricular* (2002) appropriates and interacts with Internet-writing practices and demonstrates an album-novel narrative strategy. This technique is manifested in the life story of an editor/narrator who compiles stories, anecdotes, screenplays, histories, scientific facts, and more, some invented by the author and some skimmed from blogs and Web pages. These fragments find outlet through an editorial presence that pastiches various texts together, some from the Internet and some of his own creation. In this study I propose that Prata's album-novel breaks down traditional categorizations of high and low art and questions stereotypes of Brazilian masculinity by making the little finger a metaphor to parody and subvert phallogocentrism. The mimicry of online content in this

album-novel indicates technical changes that broaden the genre of the Brazilian novel in the twenty-first century and point toward the enduring allure of print publication even as readership is moving online.

Mario Alberto Campos de Morais Prata of São Paulo began writing short stories and also for television and film in the 1970s, including his most successful work, the script for the award-winning film *Besame mucho*.¹ Since then he has published fifteen novels and hundreds of *crônicas* in various literary supplements. While he has published a great deal, Prata's works have been viewed as more commercial than critical and have drawn little academic attention. Prata is widely known for being the creator of the *telenovela* *Bang-bang* that was canceled by Rede Globo after only a few months. In *Buscando o seu mindinho*, published before Prata began production with Globo, a fragment also entitled "Banguê-banguê" appears as a predecessor to the unsuccessful *telenovela*.² Criticism on *Buscando o seu mindinho* is limited to a small number of reviews in cultural supplements in newspapers such as *Veja São Paulo*, though scholars of communications such as Alex Primo and Maria Carmem Jacob de Souza have analyzed Prata's *telenovelas*.

Buscando o seu mindinho revolves around a protagonist called Mindinho and his ailing wife Gloria. The text has several diegetic levels; the author Prata begins with a fictional version of himself receiving the pieces of the album as edited by Mindinho, who is himself an autobiographical character in a number of the fragments. Each fragment of text, whether copied from the Internet or invented by Mindinho, is preceded by an introduction that relates some of Mindinho's experience of losing his wife to cancer. The first segment, "Introduzindo o Mindinho: Leitura indispensável," is a foreword to the album, written by a fictionalization of the author who states that his old friend from school, Mindinho, had recently passed away from cancer. At the funeral, all of Mindinho's old friends attend to bid farewell to their friend nicknamed after his lack of a *mindinho* ("little finger"). At the service, Mindinho's son Fabrício hands Prata a shoebox left by Mindinho to him containing a jumble of texts all related to the little finger. In the first fragment from the shoebox, Mindinho explains that as Gloria became increasingly feeble, he began to distract himself by researching all things related to the little finger and to his own personal genealogy as they interrelate. Having over the years accumulated a series of short stories, screenplays for *telenovelas* and movies, as well as plays, poetry, essays, emails, and other odds and ends that were summarily rejected by the publishing and broadcasting establishment in Brazil, he decides to include all of the fragments of his failed writings in the shoebox given to Prata.

Mindinho is characterized by professional, physical, and hereditary failure. In the first fragment he claims that, in spite of his greatest efforts, he failed to publish any of his works: “Mandava para Deus e o mundo. Nunca obtive uma resposta deles, os chamados produtores de ficção” (17). Mindinho blames all of his failures on his missing finger. The spelling of Mindinho’s legal name Fabrício shows an absence similar to the physical form of his right hand.³ The lack of the second letter “i” in his name changes Fabrício to Fabrigo: the *eu* conjugation of *fabricar*. Immediately after explaining the missing letter, Prata describes in detail his missing appendage, making it seem no coincidence: “O problema dele era na mão direita. Ele não tinha o dedo mindinho. E, o mais estranho, é que ele não havia também o lugar onde deveria ter o dedo mínimo” (12). The lack of the finger and the lack of the letter in his name frustrate normalcy as a child for Mindinho and he begins to prefer his nickname, capitalizing on the absences rather than suffering from them. Mindinho claims in his letter to Prata that the act of writing and fabricating stories allowed him a measure of peace from his disfigurement:

[É] claro que eu tinha que ter problemas psicológicos com essa mão direita tão esquisita. Isso me inibiu na vida. Eu disfarçava, você sabe. Mas acho que nunca dei muito certo por causa disto. Mas, desde que comecei a me dedicar ao assunto, a procurar tudo que havia sobre o dedinho, ganhei uma nova vida. (18)

The themes of failure and denial lie heavy on the text, and they frequently interact with notions of inflated patriotism and chauvinism as a coping mechanism. By creating an encyclopedic album of all Internet content related to the little finger, Mindinho searches to find meaning for his, and metaphorically Brazil’s, failures. The fragments ultimately decline in relevance to his pursuit, but he discovers that the very act of searching, writing, and compiling provides his life with meaning and a sense of value to posterity.

Between his failed literary works, Mindinho includes loosely related fragments taken from the Internet using *mindinho* as a search term. Every result includes the topic word at least once, but may or may not be of any use whatsoever to his encyclopedic project. In the novel Prata creates a version of himself as an extra-diegetic compiler of the text and attributes to himself only the foreword. The extremely un-technological shoebox that Fabrício hands him at the funeral is the unassembled text and parodies the high-tech electronic fragments contained therein. While the album style of the novel and the website

attributions mimic the experience of online reading, at the bottom lies a linear story. The reader of *Buscando o seu mindinho* is presented with the finished product of semi-organized narrative fragments, the shoebox, that are relevant to the life story of Mindinho, Gloria, his son Fabrício, his ancestors, and his perceived inheritance of failure with his disability and his Brazilian identity.

An example of the Internet search employed in the novel appears in “Cartas ao jornal Expresso, de Portugal.” Mindinho explains in his preface: “Isto também é da Internet. São cartas de leitores para o jornal Expresso, de Lisboa. Até lá, fui achar um mindinho” (185). This fragment is nothing more than a pair of online comments posted by Internet readers of the Portuguese newspaper. The first online contributor to the newspaper uploads a nostalgic eulogy for the disappearing art of Fado music in Portuguese culture and suggests renaming Lisbon’s Ota airport after the singer Amália. The letter does not have anything to do with the little finger or Mindinho’s search for meaning and its tangential inclusion can only be explained by its single use of the word *mindinho*. Email correspondence represents a large portion of the album-novel. In the spirit of Internet chatter, the emails are tangential to Mindinho’s search for knowledge about the little finger. He explains that he had emailed a number of authors about the uses of the little finger and provides a response from João Ubaldo Ribeiro (53). Ubaldo informs him that many people use their little fingers to clean their ears, belly buttons, and anuses. In a footnote, Prata states that he did not believe the email exchange to be real, so he himself contacted Ubaldo Ribeiro to verify whether the letters were true. Ubaldo misinterprets Prata’s question and replies that he himself does not employ his little finger for any of those uses. The exchange demonstrates the frequent errors of attribution and anonymity found in Internet content.

The next fragment is an anonymous email written to “Querido senhor Mindinho” (57). The writing is a microcosm of the novel; a number of seemingly random statements in free association result in a connection to the little finger and a description of Brazil’s troubled past. First, the correspondent relates breaking his or her finger and the high cost of medical care in Brazil, then mentions the film *Bonnie and Clyde* in order to evoke how Clyde cut off his little finger to avoid military service. The author then returns to his/her own injury and mentions how breaking a digit made him/her fear for the nineteen others. (S)he subsequently relates how Bill Clinton, when meeting Gabriel García Márquez, wore tennis shoes because leather shoes had led to his many foot problems. The seemingly errant email proceeds with an

anecdote about how Pierre Trudeau, when visiting the leaders of the dictatorship in Brazil also wore tennis shoes and that Fidel Castro sported a pair to protect his toes. Finally, the email relates the story of an ex-torture victim at the hands of the dictatorship who tracks down the famous military interrogator Otavinho and shoots him with a shotgun, selecting that weapon over a pistol due to the fact that Otavinho had cut off his index and little finger, thus making the use of a small firearm difficult.

This kind of writing, bouncing from one topic to another, each time loosely related to the overall point of the text, is demonstrative of Web writing in general. Prata includes this as a microcosm of his greater project. Though it seems unconnected, the various paragraphs are all related to a political world of capitalism, power, North American hegemony, and iconic figures where the most salient example of the victim of global capital is the old man seeking vengeance with an improvised weapon. The damaged hand seeking revenge suggests the social activists of the 1960s and 1970s, who were brutally suppressed by the government and have been marginalized ever since. As a metaphor, it could also be read as the damaged margins of the body politic.

Many of the sections are attributed to people that Mindinho claims to have corresponded with in online chat rooms. One fragment is the result of a Google search provided by ChrisAngel, an anonymous Web handle. Mindinho claims: "A ChrisAngel eu também conheci num chat" (64). In her search, ChrisAngel notes the many children's nursery rhymes that feature the little finger. The Internet search sifts through a myriad of information or chatter to locate a few useful bits of information, in this case, the little finger as a topic of nursery rhyme. While the previous email exchange dealt with politics and social problems, this one takes the same theme, the little finger, and finds a harmless children's use for the word.

The second half of the album-novel, titled "Pesquisas de seu mindinho," is compiled from the results of Mindinho's Web searches. For example, one fragment is a list of nicknames beginning with the letter M. Its only connection is that two of the many names are Mindinho. Yet another fragment is a list of translations of Mindinho into languages "[d]o Esperanto ao Japonês" (200). He acts as an intelligencer, linking together the disparate pieces in his prefaces in his search for personal meaning. This section of fragments mimics the appearance of hypertext. "Hypertext" is defined by George Landow and Paul Delaney as the computerized manifestation of a text, with new capabilities and characteristics: "We can define Hypertext as the use of the computer

to transcend the linear, bounded and fixed qualities of the traditional written text" (*Hypermedia* 3). Landow and Delaney describe a process that has become prevalent in Internet culture. New media differentiates itself from conventional writing in that it has active links to other texts that allow the user to make choices about how they will read the narrative. Landow and Delaney explain:

Unlike the static form of the book, a hypertext can be composed, and read, non-sequentially; it is a variable structure, composed of blocks of text (or what Roland Barthes terms *lexia*) and the electronic links that join them. Although conventional reading habits apply within each block, once one starts to follow links from one block to another new rules and new experience apply. (3)

A hypertext, following this argument, is not restricted to traditional practices of reading and writing. *Buscando o seu mindinho* prints its hypertext links and the reader has no ability to adjust the reading path; nevertheless, the description of the hypertext is relevant to a discussion of Prata's novel because his novel mimics the appearance of hypertext.

An example of this mimicry is a fragment of *Buscando o seu mindinho* supposedly taken from a blog with the source websites listed in case the reader should like to continue reading. While these citations do mimic the action of hypertext, as a paper document, the citation demonstrates the limitations of paper. In one preface *Mindinho* informs the reader: "Este site www.bpiropo.com tem coisas geniais escritas pelo Piropo. Vai aqui uma mostra. A Glorinha vive entrando nele. No site, não no Piropo!" (201). The link is only mimed in the paper album-novel, and even in the literary device of the shoebox the notion of including hyperlinks is absurd. Furthermore, this mimicry presupposes that the reader will have a computer with Internet access at hand. While this mimicry is problematic, it also comes packaged with the readers' expectation that the novel's content will reflect the wide mixture of media, genre, and narrative sources such as disparate high and low art forms common to online content.

The mixture of high and low art found in various fragments of the novel is a technique common in recent years, though its roots can be traced through myriad previous Latin American authors. Speaking about the use of high and low art in the McOndo writers and *La Onda* in Spanish America, Ana María Amar Sánchez affirms that "'counterculture' manifested by characters and responsive to the mediating imaginary of the day is distanced by a

technical-formal display reminiscent of some works of the Boom” (“Deserted Cities” 210). In many of the experimental novels of the 1990s and 2000s, the novel is written in the language of media where popular culture is not a referent of high prose, but rather coexists or even overshadows it. This album-novel is an example of a mixture of media that refuses an easy hierarchy of high art exploiting popular culture. Mindinho is not self-conscious about his compilation of disparate chatter into an album-novel. As an intelligencer, he takes that which is useful to him in the moment. As is noted by Amar Sánchez, contemporary Latin American authors increasingly approach popular art and mass culture as defining referents in their texts. Prata does not exhibit low art, popular art, or mass media from the perspective of high art, but rather blurs genres and refuses to privilege the traditional hierarchy of art over mass media or popular culture.

An example of the loose positioning of high art with low art is the placement as the last two fragments of the novel of a poem by Federico García Lorca after a treatment of “As águas vão rolar” (79), a *telenovela* that Mindinho claims is designed for Rede Globo. The plotline of the proposed *telenovela* revolves around two rival cities: Das Pedras, a modern and industrial city on the other side of a river from Rio Bonito, a refined city proud of its traditions. The rivalry between the cities is exacerbated by the visitation of an alien who impregnates Stella Maris, the most beautiful girl in Das Pedras. The resulting child’s only tell-tale sign that she is part alien is a blue little finger. The story then abounds with seductions and backstabbing among a plethora of stock characters. The storyline is full of options; Mindinho provides detailed lists of possible outcomes for the many characters explicitly naming plot devices from *Citizen Kane*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Lysistrata*. The plot mimics the way the *telenovela* genre appropriates popular narratives into large webs anchored by a few central characters and a peripheral constellation of secondary, two-dimensional characters. On the heels of the screenplay for the *telenovela*, and in contrast to its popular origins, is a fragment of the poem “Menino mudo” by García Lorca. The word *mindinho* is the only connection to the other fragments and the poem appears to have been translated by the narrator to serve as a capstone to the entire work: “Não a quero para falar; / farei com ela um anelzinho / que o meu silencio levará / no dedo, no seu dedo *mindinho*” (241–2). The lack of self-consciousness on the part of the editorial voice to note the contrasts in style is demonstrative of a process of blurring the boundaries of high and low art; the *telenovela* is made equal to canonical

poetry, and this contrast demonstrates the trend in Latin American novels since the 1990s to freely mix high and low art, languages, genres, and media.

Across the many disparate fragments, some common themes emerge, such as the questioning and ridiculing of a conflation of Brazilian national identity as composed solely of European roots and extreme heteronormativity. Brazilian national character is explored in many of the fragments of text either under the guise of a sexual fantasy or as a historical fiction. Mindinho collects fragments that, in their sum, describe a people hypocritically exporting hyperbolic myths of sexual potency and control while constantly subverting their own sexual rules and prohibitions. Brazilian history is seen in this light as potential carnival boiling under the surface of façades of Brazilian male sexual dominance.

A distinct Brazilian nature, characterized by Portuguese traditions and rabid sexual desire muffled by half-hearted morality is depicted in the final two fragments of part one. The erotic story “O Carneirinho” (133), attributed to a fictitious Cabo Verdian Germano Almeida, describes the sexual confusion of a visiting Brazilian. Carneirinho is a Brazilian visiting the narrator of the story in Cabo Verde, a place “conhecido em todo o mundo pela sua morabeza, sua ternura e mulheres boas e onde tu mesmo reconheces que a bunda abunda” (134). Their conversation drifts towards broad categorizations of Brazilian high sexual self-esteem versus Cabo Verdian high sexual self-esteem. Germano affirms that Carneirinho “estava apaixonado por mim, ascrentando de seguida que ficasse, porém, descansado porque ele não era bicha” (134). Germano challenges Carneirinho’s sexual boasting and invites his friend Marta to be the judge of a sexual duel. Marta gladly accepts but is disillusioned by Carneirinho’s refusal to compete:

[L]amentou o reacionarismo sexual do Carneirinho. Os brasileiros têm tantas manias de que são bons, disse ela, passam o tempo a afirmar que são uns machões de primeira, e este aqui tem a oportunidade de o provar e recusa participar uma ménage a trios em competição directa com um caboverdeano. (135)

Disappointed, Marta begins to taunt Carneirinho: “[A]final o Brasil é só futebol e *telenovela*” (135). When Carneirinho accepts, his sexual performance with Marta is a disaster. With Marta’s assistance, the narrator begins a step-by-step tutorial for the Brazilian’s benefit, which culminates in Carneirinho demanding to be penetrated by the impressive Cabo Verdian. The political metaphor occasions the pornographic content.

While in most cases, the metaphoric, situational vehicle of an erotic story is of negligible importance to the libidinal intent, this story, in its context, is the reverse. The tropes of pornography are parodied by these characters. The flimsy set-up to the graphic sexual encounter is, in fact, the point of the story. Carneirinho is a metaphor for the export of Brazilian national identity. As a representative Brazilian, he describes himself as being virile, unwaveringly heterosexual, and more than just “futebol e telenovela.” The reality, as discovered by the narrator, is that Carneirinho demonstrates an inhibited façade of stereotypes in spite of being thoroughly bisexual. The story serves as a parody of Brazilian national identity by demonstrating that the trope of the virile Brazilian male is a fantasy.

In a great number of the fragments of the text, female sexuality is dealt with in an objectified and exaggerated manner. The notion of sexuality in general is an urgent topic for Mindinho and he specifically describes his sexual prowess in a fragment he refers to in his preface as “minha história policial,” entitled “Mindinho—bom de cama” (118). This detective-fiction parody describes his interrogation as the accused in the murder of Dona Ana Blanche, an adulterous housewife. Doutor Capella, the hardnosed prosecutor, begins Mindinho’s interrogation with an accusation of guilt in the sexual assault and stabbing of Dona Ana that mimics the ubiquitous scene of police questioning that is an essential component of the genre of detective fiction. Doutor Capella growls:

Meu amigo, a dona Ana Blanche foi esfaqueada brutalmente. No quarto dela foram encontradas mostras de esperma (muitas!) por todo lado. Porra sua, porra! No cabelo, no nariz, nos seios, no umbigo, nas costas. Impressão digital até no congelador. Você está fodido, cara! (120)

In his own defense, Mindinho describes why his DNA could be found all over the victim and the room: “Para me safar daquilo eu deveria contar algo muito íntimo, o meu segredo de alcova, o meu segredo de bom de cama. O meu segredo de levar as mulheres a orgasmos hiper múltiplos” (121). Mindinho then describes how he had been having an ongoing affair with Dona Ana. The story is a fantasy of sexual prowess that, in its extremity, implies a deep sexual insecurity. He admits to the detective that he is not well endowed but that his special hand and handiwork have made him a success among women; though he is left to satisfy himself post-act. The fragment clearly parodies the genre of pornography and points toward the underlying metaphor of an

impotent finger in the place of a phallus. The character's sexual insufficiency is made up for by the fantasy prosthesis and, by extension, the myth of the insatiable and potent Brazilian male lover is ridiculed.

Shortly thereafter, Mindinho provides an essay in homage to a pioneer of the feminist movement in Portugal titled "Quem tem medo de Florbela Espanca?" (125). The essay catalogues Florbela's accomplishments as a poet and artist during the 1920s. While in previous fragments, male sexual prowess is hyperbolized and ridiculed, this fragment chronicles the writings, marriages, and sex scandals of a pioneering female artist. As an epitaph for Florbela, Mindinho quotes her final words:

Sou pagã e anarquista, como não poderia deixar de ser uma pantera que se preza.
Nem saúde, nem dinheiro, nem liberdade. A Pantera está enjaulada e bem enjaulada, até que a morte lhe venha cerrar os olhos.... (131)

Mindinho's essay is profoundly sympathetic to Florbela; indeed, he empathizes with Florbela's inability to succeed with her artistic endeavors during her lifetime. Florbela became an important writer only after her death, and her poems were reappraised as masterpieces. As time passes, her fame increases, and Mindinho chronicles her enshrinement into the literary establishment: "Em 1964, finalmente, o arcebispo de Évora reconhece Florbela como uma grande escritora" (131). Her entrance into the canon after her death is depicted in glowing terms, even gaining the approval of the Catholic Church, which had previously condemned her for her scandalous love life. Mindinho sees Florbela as a role-model. The disastrous events of her life, poor health, and many romantic upheavals all aid her in the construction of her texts, which are richer for her misery. Mindinho lauds Florbela and reveals a similar desire for celebrity and success. The act of compiling the failed artistic works of a lifetime into a shoebox and begging for them to be published as a last request before death denotes a desperation and a hope to follow Florbela into achieving social relevance, albeit post-mortem.

Mindinho's body is a site for the expression of parody of national identity. His genealogical research leads him through an account of escape from slavery in his search for the first instance of the inherited trait of the missing finger. Mindinho provides a family history about his ancestors, who arrived in Brazil near the end of the importation of slaves. In his preface, Mindinho claims that his great grandfather, Vô Brico (short for Grandfather Fabrício), born in 1850

and deceased in 1920, was a slave on a plantation near Rio de Janeiro. His job on the *fazenda* was to impregnate slave women whose children were then sold. The story itself, “As margens do Rio” (21), is attributed to the great grandfather, though Mindinho claims to have updated the prose in some places.

After a child is born without a little finger, the slave owner beats Brico and places him in domestic service where he came into contact with his daughter Sinhazinha. Brico and Sinhazinha illicitly have a little-fingerless child together and flee to Rio de Janeiro, where Sinhazinha leaves him with the child. Vô Brico reflects on his mulato children and grandchildren, who range from black to white, but all missing the little finger on their right hand. Metaphorically speaking, Prata is describing a Brazilian society that has not yet finished processing its history of injustice as represented by the hereditary missing little finger. The endlessly missing little finger is a psychological scapegoat that blinds the characters from appreciating their own agency in their future.

Mindinho simultaneously posits that the missing little finger is descended from Portugal in the section, “A procissão dos nus.” In this story, set in fifteenth-century Portugal, a young doctor goes on a religious pilgrimage where all of the pilgrims walk nude to visit the tomb of a saint. The young doctor, lacking a little finger, is interested in joining the procession to see naked women. He states: “[C]omeçaram a rolar tanta indecencia, galhofa e riso e todo tipo de sacanagem” (143). A religious event subverted into a libidinous sexual holiday corresponds to Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival and is poignant when speaking of a Brazilian culture where carnival is the most important event of the year. Bakhtin avers: “[A]ll were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age” (10). The prurient story tells how the young doctor tricks an attractive woman by rubbing goat feces on her aching belly and suggesting that he provide a sexual remedy to her pains. They marry and raise a family: “Ao nosso primeiro filho, o concebido na época de esterco de cabra, demos o nome de Cabral. Cabral Pedro Alvares que, desde pequenininho, gostava de brincar com barquinhos de papel e madeira” (148). The Portuguese conquistador and founder of the political, economic, and religious colony of Brazil, Pedro Alvares Cabral, according to this story, is the product of carnival. The European side to Brazil’s history is implied to be based in carnival and sexual mischief. The inference to be drawn is that from the slaves to the conquistadors, all of Brazil lacks the little finger.

The nature of the little finger–failure metaphor is explored in another fragment in which Mindinho relates a story told to him by the ex-governor of Pernambuco about the origin of the habit of letting one’s little fingernail grow out. In 1888, according to the story, a self-proclaimed professional heir, Zêca Junqueiro, lets his fingernail grow long to demonstrate that he has never worked with his hands. To his friends Zêca brags:

Senhores, isso aqui—e hirtava o mindinho, orgulhoso, soberbo—é a prova definitiva que eu continuo a não trabalhar. É um simbolo. É a marca registrada da ociosidade de nós, os ricos, os que podemos. Aconselho-os a fazer o mesmo. Assim, ao nos verem, pensarão: ali está um brasileiro bem-sucedido: nunca trabalhou! Status, amigos. (49)

While in the story the rich hyperbolically grow out their little fingernails to demonstrate their laziness, the transcriber of the anecdote, Mindinho, does not even have a little finger. The narrative parodies the elite with their useless fingernails, but it also parodies Mindinho’s despondency. While the rich proudly flaunt the symbol of their idleness, Mindinho believes that he cannot succeed at any job because of the curse of his missing finger. This notion of a psychological block based on a physical trait (the finger and slavery) that prevents any progress is confronted by Gloria and by Mindinho himself as they near death. Mindinho recalls Gloria’s last words before succumbing to cancer: “A Glorinha, na vespada de morrer, depois de dias em coma, abriu os olhos e—olhando no fundo de mim—disse: ‘Não deixe o Fabrício ter complexos. Isso vai acabar com a esposa dele’” (46). Her concern for Fabrício is a reflection of metaphoric concern for the continuity of a psychological problem passed down from the father. If Mindinho is the failed present, Gloria fears Fabrício will follow in his father’s ways. The fact that Mindinho has asked for the profits of the publication of his neurosis to be used by Fabrício in his education implies that, while the trait is indeed passed on, the psychological trauma associated with the lack of the little finger need not be extended to his son.

The notion of a Brazilian identity superior to that of other Latin American nations is parodied in a screenplay for an American western cowboy-style *telenovela* entitled “Banguê-banguê” attributed to Prata’s pseudonym Campos de Moraes.⁴ The annotated screenplay includes camera instructions and scene changes. The only relationship to the little finger is that there are characters named Mindyn and Moreno who own a saloon named “Mindyn&O.” The story

is full of the usual old west character tropes and parodies Western plotlines and situations. In parody of the Lone Ranger, the new sheriff Ben Silver approaches Albuquerque with his sidekick, Pablo. Pablo is a Mexican servant and parodies the character Tonto from the Lone Ranger television show. The character speaks Spanish and is described as dirty, lazy, and cowardly. After a long ride, he tells his boss: “A mi, me gustaria mucho dormir tod el dia, señor Silver” [sic], to which Ben Silver authoritatively responds in Portuguese: “Estamos ainda muito longe de nosso destino, Pablo. Andiamos!” (161). By sleight of hand, the superior figure of the Western stereotype becomes a manly Brazilian and the Hispanic sidekick’s inferiority becomes a joke on the traditional xenophobia and bigotry of the racist Western genre. The reader is in on the joke that, by making Ben Silver both an extremely masculine Brazilian and a racist American cowboy, the easy parody of the cowboy extends to cover the notion of Brazilian heteronormativity.

The casting of the character of Big Mother, the strong-willed black mammy of Ben Silver’s love interest also subverts the Western genre in addition to the stereotype of Brazilian machismo. Mindinho suggests in an author’s note: “Big Mother—uma preta velha... que poderia ser interpretada pelo Grande Otelo.... Uma dupla muito engraçada” (163). Grande Otelo (who died in 1993) is one of the most famous Brazilian actors of the twentieth century and played the title role in the 1969 movie adaptation of Mario de Andrade’s 1928 national epic *Macunaíma*, which is itself a novel that parodies many tropes of Brazilian nationality. Notions of heterosexual masculine dominance conflated with national identity are ready targets for Prata’s parody.

In conclusion, as an album-novel, *Buscando o seu mindinho* employs the technique of bricolage to mimic the hypertext format of Internet writing. In this critique, I have proposed that Prata’s fragmented texts of multimedia content threaded together can be recognized as an album-novel. In a more linear narrative it would be difficult to relate a historical anecdote about the origins of the long fingernail, a chronicle of slavery, a pornographic short story, and a Portuguese carnival. All of the fragments relate the little finger to notions of Brazilian historical and contemporary culture, achieving a critique of Brazilian national identity, its colonial roots and enduring myths of male sexuality. Mimicry of the hypertext allows Prata to subvert a multitude of traditional tropes and genres and to merge high and low art. The unifying thread between so many disparate pieces, the little finger, signals lack and failure; nevertheless, it also represents difference and celebrates postmodern sexual contradictions and genre breakdowns.

There are some unresolved questions regarding Prata's choice to write in this manner. For example, why does Prata only mimic the randomness of the hypertext? Why does he finally publish on paper what he has already made available online? One of Landow and Delaney's conclusions regarding paper and pixel is that paper publication provides the author with control and remuneration. The fact that Prata extracted a section of the album and sold the *telenovela* treatment "Banguê-banguê" to Rede Globo reinforces the commercial underpinnings of the narrative. *Buscando o seu mindinho* demonstrates the changing role of the author as a compositor, an editorial presence who assembles as well as creates fiction.

Notes

¹ *Besame mucho* won awards for best script in the Gramado, Cartagena, and Figueira da Foz Film Festivals in 1991.

² The myriad fan groups who clamored for a change of direction in the plot of the television show represent the largest body of critics of Mario Prata's work, numbering into the thousands on website fan communities such as Orkut. Maria Carmem Jacob de Souza, in a study of *telenovela* fan groups known as *fãs*, describes the notoriety of Prata's firing from *Bang-bang*. Jacob de Souza affirms: "Um outro episódio, também fresco na memória, é a demanda por um 'escritor'—autor de sucesso do horário das sete da TV Globo para enfrentar problemas de audiência na telenovela 'Bang-bang,' para muitos agravados com a saída do autor-escritor logo nas primeiras semanas [...]. [P]roblemas na equipe de escritores relacionam-se ao 'abandono' de Mario Prata que não resguardou a equipe dos erros."

³ On page 12 Prata explains the misspelling of Fabrício, which would have been Mindinho's legal name, had the local authorities not written down Fabricio by mistake.

⁴ "Banguê-banguê" was produced in 2006 as *Bang-Bang* by TV Globo and has been noted as one of the most disastrous productions in Brazilian *telenovela* history by Marfa Carmem Jacob de Souza.

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