

The Beginning of the World as We Would Like It to Have Been, or an Analysis Towards a Theory of Gender in Germano Almeida, or ...

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Abstract. Germano Almeida's *Memórias de um Espírito* is able to achieve two feats. Firstly, he does justice to Machado de Assis: starting off from the similarity in titles, we are able to read Machado's work with all its traces of postmodernity—narrative fragmentation, the addressing of the reader and his inclusion in the narrative, the mixture of fiction and reality—and of a certain kind of feminine *écriture* that is revealed not only through these traces but also in his ability to give flesh to portraits of fully-rounded women. Secondly, he makes a break with the Brazilian tradition, a tradition he refers to when he shows us a universe ruled by pleasure and by an optimism based on the life of one man, the center of whose being is based on the primacy of feeling and not of reason. In Germano Almeida, irony coincides with humor and Machado de Assis's "pen of birth" is used to subvert the universe whence it came.

We would like to begin our analysis with *Memórias de um Espírito* [*A Spirit's Memories*] (2001) in order that we may, retrospectively, observe the intertextual dialogic circle created by the author—one that in a certain sense heralds the end of a certain stage in his writing—and so that we may observe a new phase in his writing, one that incorporates more recent literary-theoretical preoccupations.

It is quite clear to everyone that *As Memórias de um Espírito* cannot but evoke one of the greatest names in Brazilian literature, Machado de Assis, and, in particular, his work *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1880). Both

characters, Brás Cubas and Alíro de Sousa, reflect on their own past. An innovator in all respects, Machado de Assis already incorporated elements of what we would today call postmodernism and there is no doubt that this author had already, in his fiction, walked all the avenues and byways of post-colonialism; it is sufficient for us to detain ourselves for a short while in “Instinto de Nacionalidade” [“The Instinct of Nationality”] (1962) so that we can see how the major thrust of his argument is appropriated by Germano Almeida more than a hundred years later, and working without the aid of a theoretical system. Machado de Assis asks for a literary independence, something that it is necessary to create, over and beyond political independence; he insists on the need for a system of self-criticism and self-analysis at a national level¹ and holds that it is necessary to continue creating a national literature with an eye for the future. We are dealing with three points that are fundamental for the comprehension of Germano Almeida’s texts, which, while they do not negate the weight of history, which is already evident from the [fact that he writes in the] official language of the country, look at and make use of the literature that came before with a critical eye, especially with regards to whether it can be incorporated, developed or whether it should be side-stepped; these texts do not adopt a perspective of spurious repudiation, which would create an unreal historical vacuum, one that would give Cape Verde no basis from which to launch itself into the world. I would like to remind the reader that it is only occasionally that Germano Almeida makes use of grammatical structures borrowed from the Creole;² he does not have to dramatically recreate a new language. Once again, this sort of concern cannot but suggest Machado de Assis: a space of epistemological progression, one without breaks with the past but rather continuity, where language is seen as an ideological, political and socio-cultural instrument within a temporal continuum. Suffice it to recall Machado de Assis’s condemnation of Gallicisms and his opinion that it is in sixteenth-century Portuguese that we may discover the future of the language: “*desentranhar dêles mil riquezas, que, à força de velhas se fazem novas [...]. Nem tudo tinham os antigos, nem tudo têm os modernos; com os haveres de uns e outros é que se enriquece o pecúlio comum*” [“to unearth thousands of riches which though old are made new (...). The ancients never had everything, as neither do the moderns; it is with what they had and with what we have that we may enrich the word-hoard”] (1962, 809). Compare this idea with some of the commentaries made by some of the characters in Germano Almeida: the comparison between [the characters] Natal [lit.

“Christmas”) and Caga-Vírgulas [lit. “The Shitter of Commas”], both the motive of jest and ridicule on the part of the narrator, given the first one’s project of writing an *Arte de Carpir em Cabo Verde* [*The Art of Lamentation in Cape Verde*] (216) and the second one’s intention of writing “*coisa inovadora, uma espécie de saga capaz de abarcar a globalidade da nossa realidade social desde os tempos das descobertas*” [“something innovative, a type of saga capable of dealing with the totality of our social reality ever since the time of the discoveries”] (159), not to mention the silliness of funeral orations, which that same character regards as essential to develop in the country and whose tradition (to paraphrase Caga-Vírgulas) harkens back to names of Brazilian origin. The truth, the narrator tells us, is that Natal “*é no aspecto literário tão chato como o Caga-Vírgulas e a única vantagem que me parece que ele tem sobre o outro é o facto de continuar a adiar para o ano seguinte todos os seus projectos de escrita*” [“in so far as his literary qualities go, he is as much of a pain as Caga-Vírgulas and the only advantage he has over the other is the fact that he continues to postpone his literary projects from year to year”] (216). These are comments that naturally remind us of those historical periods when there was a need to create a historical past and to make use of material that was indigenous to the country; for instance, the use of terms of Amerindian origin to which Machado de Assis refers and which, according to him, is necessary, although it is erroneous to suppose that it is the only element necessary with which to build a Brazilian literature. Finally, it would be somewhat pathetic on our part if we did not refer to the similarities between Machado de Assis and Germano Almeida; it would be equally pathetic if we were to imagine that Germano Almeida was somehow innocently trying to establish this theoretical-diegetic link without a specific end in mind.

However, let us not forget the initial comparative proposition that we have made use of: the development of a feminine space within a social and politico-literary kingdom traditionally closed off to women. Although space forbids us from developing this idea, we cannot but note that the development of literature written by women in Brazil (as opposed to the panorama in the rest of Latin America) was a phenomenon that, according to Judith Paine (1993), was explainable by Machado de Assis’s creation of original and revolutionary female figures, within his literary universe that is. It is a universe that would have contributed, and noticeably at that, towards the emergence of an unorthodox creative environment, one where women would feel freer to produce and where, from early on, it was possible to find rounded,

complex and rich female characters. The truth is that tradition determines that knowledge belongs within the sphere of rationality, which is attributed to the male, but if that which is masculine and that which is feminine are mixed in the creative results of works whose authors are male but whose characteristics point to the feminine, then this fluidity can be used to demystify the political world and power structure where only the masculine voice has a place.

It is precisely with this stance in mind that we would like to investigate the work of Germano Almeida, someone who, though living in a different world and in a context that is different in all respects to that of Machado de Assis, still needs to fight for the inclusion of the feminine in a universe that has only very slowly come to accept its inclusion, a universe that, almost always, is antagonistic to and fears the other half of humanity. On the other hand, the obvious connection that Germano Almeida's title suggests to Machado de Assis's novel is, to say the least, disconcerting. Given that, and there is ample evidence of this in his work, Almeida's critical stance towards the connection with Brazil, which serves neither literature nor the political needs of his country, what do we make of this obvious intertextual connection? It seems as if the best way to make sense of this situation is, in fact, to analyze it *ad nauseum*, which will lead us to the obvious conclusion: this connection can quite easily be understood as a large-scale parody of Machado de Assis's novel. Consider: if, on the one hand, Brás Cubas, at the moment of his death, has a woman, Virgília, beside him, and the text summons up three further women, Sabina, Eugénia and Marcela, Alípio de Sousa, on the other hand, has twelve women standing around his coffin, of which only one was not a girlfriend, and the narrative casts its net wider to deal with eight other women, of which only one did not have intimate relations with the "dead man." The excessiveness in number, and the kind of psyche that would permit such "playfulness" also has the ability to give voice to all these women—this is something Machado de Assis does not achieve, for it is always Brás Cubas who holds the reins of the narrative.

Let us observe, with more concrete examples, how Germano Almeida, under the guise of his character, transforms fiction into reality, or, more correctly stated, into another fiction, into a space where the connection with the reality of the country is so obvious that there is no way we can relegate his work to the area of pure fiction where we could ignore the social effects of this sort of writing.

The female characters in *Memórias de Um Espírito* are introduced as the narrator's wake takes place. Even though they are presented by the same nar-

rator—"Agora é Julinha que entra. Vem composta como de costume, serena" ["Now it is Julinha who comes in. As always, she is composed, serene"] (115)—they quickly take command of their own stories, making the dead man's words superfluous, and they create a world of internal commentaries in which they become the actors and interpreters of their own narrative. Add this to the fact that the novel in question is in permanent dialogue with the author's other works, and it is not difficult to find a certain amount of repetition—which we could, after all, find redundant. For example, on page 27, when we are first introduced to Aninhas: Aninhas has already appeared as a character in *D. Pura e os Camaradas de Abril* [*Dona Pura and the April Comrades*] and she is the addressee of a letter written by Caga-Vírgulas in the last story in *Estórias de Dentro de Casa* [*Stories from Inside the House*], "Agravos de um Artista" ["An Artist's Wrongs"] (which in turn establishes a dialogue with a non-fictional text, "Agravos de um Artista" ["A Writer's Wrongs"], included in *Estórias Contadas* [*Recounted Tales*] [59-63], a collection of journalistic accounts). This is one of the many examples of such repetition. Now, as Susan Suleiman has told us, in her *Authoritarian Fictions, The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (1983), the more redundancy we encounter in a text the greater likelihood it is that we have before us a *roman à la these* [sic], one that attempts to transmit a specific message. This message may be either transmitted directly or we may find it in specific contexts, namely that of intertextuality, whereby a story is presented as a variation of another story. What we thus have are kinds of exemplary stories in which there is a process of reduplication *ad infinitum*. We already had the occasion to conclude³ that this characteristic of Germano Almeida's texts does not serve authoritarian purposes. Based as it is on continual and renewing desire, each repetition can be regarded as yet another attempt at ecstasy, one whereby the body of an ethical outlook would be configured with the body of the text. It is an ethical outlook that would privilege, and permanently at that, the dialogic situation, be it in the space of intimacy, which is configured in the very act of writing or creating—which would be equivalent to the sexual act—or be it in the public sphere, the sphere of speech that escapes the domination of the singular and ephemeral voice and that is recovered in a permanent dialogue with the reader. It is almost like taking the author's mental associations and what they mean in the text, and re-inventing them. The text is the author and it is worthy of interest both as a signifier and as a signified; like a parallel structure, the text belongs to the order of the individual and that of the collective.

For, if authorial plurality contributes to the devaluation of that same plurality to the detriment of the characters, these same characters, such as is the case with *O Meu Poeta* [*My Poet*] as well as in the work we are discussing, are more or less evidently authorial in category and for that reason in control of discourse. We have already ascertained that this authorial polyphony reveals itself to be the guiding principle of writing and that it is also a cultural hallmark. The authorial "I" appropriates for itself borders that are unsteady; it goes from the aforementioned position of subject to that of object, and thus it is through this polyphony that we are able to go beyond the binary structures of traditional dialogue. Polyphony reveals the contiguity that exists between the inner and outer lining of the textual and cultural space that surrounds him and which he creates and which he leaves for us as a body of writing and, also, as the desire that determines this body of writing should be integral to a *poesis* that, after all, coincides with the political vision of the work itself.

Let us accept that this intertextual repetition of characters and stories is like a representation of sensual *jouissance* that works towards the demolition of expectations: the text is created anew in a new text, one where the ideology and ethics of an open, borderless space remain an important idea. Thus we see how the figure of the narrator, which could easily be perceived as both suffocating and authoritarian, is transfigured, and how the typically colonial discourse of power is reworked.

On the other hand, in tandem with Lukács, the novel is the biography of a difficult individual; that is to say, the novel portrays the world he moves in, subject to its contingencies and without transcendental meaning. Now, in a world of this nature, human individuality ceases to be organic. Or, better stated, this human individuality is no longer something the individual possesses nor is it the basis of his immediate existence. Individuality is transformed into an object that is searched for: "[T]he story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and by proving itself, to find its own essence."⁴ We have chosen this quote because it applies so obviously to the *Memórias de Um Espírito*. The text is literally about a difficult individual, an atheist, who because he does not seek to find meaning in a transcendental order uses his non-organic nature in the most ironic manner possible: after he has died and has no body, he has around himself a group of women who, they insist, are connected to him primarily through this body. A body that was used not only in aid of a certain lifestyle, but which is also like the literary text that revolves around the death

of this body, bringing it back to life and preventing it from being completely forgotten, because that body is made eternal within the text and in the multiple memory of those who “usufruct” that body. In conclusion, if under these circumstances, and in agreement with Lukács, what is searched for when one writes a novel is the essence of the soul, it seems quite clear to us that he lacks all props except that of his body. Consider, for example, the final irony when Alírio is taken to the gates of death by two “*belas moças, nuas em pelota*” [“lovely naked nude lasses”] (319). Besides, according to Miguel Oliveira da Silveira in his article “Hormonas, Afectos e Razão,” in the human being there exists the “*presença do outro como mistério, também do outro sexo em nós, a importância insubstituível da fruição da alteridade sexual nos nossos sentimentos e razão, do si mesmo que se transforma, pela dialéctica da alteridade, pelo acolhimento desse mesmo outro*” [“presence of the other as a mystery, and also of the other sex within us, the irreplaceable importance of the fruition of sexual otherness in our feelings and our reason, of the I that is changed through the dialectics of otherness by receiving this same other”] (23). We will in due course invoke Cixous’s feminine écriture as an aid to a structural understanding of Germano Almeida. Let us make use of this quotation as a way of achieving a profound understanding not only of the way the text makes use of sexuality as an obvious part of the content but also as a way of understanding the feminine element in this work, which implies not only the right of the female to reclaim her own bodily pleasure but also the right of the female to reclaim her own space within a narrative written by a male author, something Germano Almeida evidently is. Note how the various women insist on making use of Alírio de Sousa as a body for sex. Let us take the example of Irma and all the different ways this manifests itself:

eu, uma mulher habituada a mandar em homens e a ser obedecida por eles, conhecida entre os meus pares pela minha independência, estar aqui a chorar um macho (285)

[I, a woman used to bossing men around and being obeyed by them, a woman who’s known among her peers for her independence, here I am crying for a male];

uma das razões que a tinha levado ao divórcio era o facto de se sentir rebaixada, e até muitas vezes conspurcada quando o marido a possuía: trepava para cima dela e despejava-se! (290)

[one of the reasons that had driven her to divorce was the fact that she felt demeaned, and many times even defiled, when her husband possessed her: he climbed on top of her and poured it all out inside her!];

Dizia que preferia aquele lugar para poder ter um melhor domínio da situação, poder controlar até ao último instante o perverso risco de ser surpreendida em flagrante delito (281)

[She said she preferred that place so she could have a better command of the situation, so she could have full control over that perverse risk of being caught red-handed];

E foi muito estimulante continuar o jogo de não saber quem entrava e quem saía, e de cada vez que o tinha [Alfrio] e o sentia e verificava que *estava* comigo inteiro e que continuava a querer-me (287)

[And it was very stimulating playing that game of not knowing who was going in and who was going out, and that each time I'd had him [Alfrio] and felt him and made sure he was with me and still desired me];

Especializámo-nos a fazer amor falando de história, literatura, direito, pintura, etc., até que descobri o prazer de tocá-"lo" (287)

[We became experts in the act of making love by talking about history, literature, law, painting, etc., until I discovered the pleasure of touching him].

There is an issue raised in Miguel Oliveira de Silveira's text, to which we have referred, and that is that it is not possible to assess the true weight of the female biological condition in its [culturally] accepted role of subordination, or rather, it is not possible to assess the cultural importance of man's use of physical strength, because that would suggest the permanent possibility of physical and sexual abuse of woman. It seems that the several excerpts from Germano Almeida's book point in the direction of the possibility that woman can be freed of this burden and also to the fact that this possibility of freedom is intimately related to education and, finally, to the fact that it is possible, to some degree, to alter sexual roles: it is not only Irma who is in control of her own sexual pleasure but it is the sexual act itself that can turn her

on only if it happens out of the bed, “*na cama, passividade completa, mesmo um certo enfado*” [“total passivity in bed, even a certain resentment”] (285). And we are not dealing with a situation where there has been a sudden inversion of the rules, one where a woman—unexpectedly, improbably, and ridiculously—holds the reins of a situation that is almost always held by the man. True-to-life, Alírio de Sousa maintains his habit of having several relationships at the same time and he is fully involved in all of them. We are not dealing with the imposition of a female harem, of an unwanted polygamy, but rather a space for genuine dialogue with several women; here the author allows space, as in the example of Irma we have analysed, to be occupied by the will and desire of this female character. He gives her space not only so that she can express her point of view but also to affirm her control at a sexual and social level, for she is also a member of the political power structure. Note how the text itself, in very similar ways to Germano Almeida’s other literary texts, provides space for a disagreement of opinions and for doubts about the verisimilitude of what is being represented. What we have is that now-commonplace narrative plurality and a space where there is no absolute truth but where all the characters are given the opportunity to present their own version of the facts. It is this opportunity, which we have here in the episode cited, and which brings us closer to Alírio de Sousa’s voice, completely dismantles that idea, unthinkable in patriarchal culture, that woman could be in control of a sexual situation! We are, no doubt, dealing with the space for power, but one in which both at different times admit that they have been defeated: “*Acabei finalmente por dar-me por vencido*” [“I finally admitted to myself that I’d been defeated”] (284) and “*acabei atirando a toalha ao tapete, dar-me por vencida*” [“I gave up and admitted I’d been defeated”] (287). There are no winners, nothing is imposed, there is surrender to the “other sex within us,” to the jouissance of sexual otherness, the otherness of roles and the otherness of the self itself in his or her ability to take up this difference in all the different existential dimensions. Note, for example, how Irma considers that the main reason for her indifference to sex is because of an excess of interest on the part of the male—the way all men around her seem to want to approach her, and want to have sex with her, altogether ignoring the intellectual qualities she possesses—and see, also, how Alírio de Sousa offers, instead, a somewhat different version of all this:

a Irma é uma mulher não só voluntariosa como muito inteligente. Ora, quanto a

mim, o drama principal da inteligência é ela desumanizar as pessoas e como consequência resistir à reconciliação dos diversos indivíduos que existem em cada um de nós. E tinha-me ficado evidente que a Irma sobretudo tinha vergonha daquilo que considerava as suas fraquezas, como sejam a necessidade de dar e receber carinho, gostar de meiguice, a carência dos outros, antes privilegiando a razão como a única virtude digna de se orgulhar. (291)

[Irma is not only wilful, but she is also a very intelligent woman. For me at least, what's really wrong with intelligence is that it makes people less human and makes it difficult for us to be able to reconcile all the different people that exist within each of us. It had become quite obvious to me that Irma was actually embarrassed about what she regarded as her weaknesses, like giving or receiving affection, like being tender when others are needy; instead of that she privileged her rational side as the only virtue worthy of her pride.]

These different versions serve the purpose not only of presenting the different spaces for rationalization, both feminine and masculine, they are also, by themselves, reflections about the private areas of intimate relationships. We can say that, with this work, Germano Almeida makes an epistemological break with the rest of Cape Verdean literature. This text (and the ideologies underlying the construction of this particular text can already be found, as we have already stated, in earlier books—and we cannot overemphasize the importance of *O Meu Poeta* and *A Morte do Meu Poeta*) throws some rational doubt about the need to analyze the socio-political sphere from the position of the domestic sphere and, also, the assertion that any reflection on the feminine condition has been non-existent or simply based on a masculine projection about what men wanted women to have been or to be.⁵ This quotation, and the structure of the work in general, promotes—and quite exactly at that—the assertion of different projections made by some about others and about those times when they [the women] agree or disagree with the reality of the *other*. In fact, Germano Almeida is given the opportunity of going beyond feminine stereotypes, as well as the cultural conditioning upon which these stereotypes have been based. When Irma is presented to us as a woman dominated by rationality and whose fears are connected with those commonplace characteristics that throughout the centuries have been attributed to woman, Germano Almeida demystifies the prototype of a discourse based on the idea that women belong in the “natural” domain of instincts and emo-

tions whilst men, on the other, are located at the other end, exemplary specimens of the Enlightenment that they invented and that they constructed without any regard about what could or could not have been “womanly.” As we are told by Montserrat Galcerán, in her article “Naturalismo e Anti-Naturalismo em Torno da Distinção Sexo/Gênero,” it is on the basis of this theme that today we still insist “num pretenso *instinto maternal*, aspecto específico das mulheres” (36) [“on the would-be *maternal instinct*, something specific to woman”] as a constitutive element of her identity. And we are well aware how Freud came to make a bad situation worse when he put woman on that relative plane because her penis was missing and man was at the center, and it was from him that we could build this comparison. We believe that, in very many ways, Germano Almeida is capable of making the contrast between those differences that are biological in nature and those that are socio-cultural constructions.

We can now proceed to analyze an excerpt from the novel in light of this idea of the penis—the phallus of patriarchal power that has materialized and which has now been reduced to an instrument for pleasure, not only for the man, but also for the woman:

É que nunca tinha encontrado uma mulher que tratasse a ferramenta com um carinho tão picante, [...] metendo-a e tirando-a da boca, mordiscando-a de brincadeira, depois torcendo e largando para a ver voltar à posição erecta, ou dando-lhe breves palmadinhas, por sinal nem sempre cariciosas. Nessas ocasiões *eu zangava-me*: isto aqui é um instrumento sério, dizia-lhe, exige respeito, tratamento de primeira, carinhos leves, não pode ser tratada assim a trouxe-mouxe como tu fazes [...]. *Mas ela não ligava nenhuma* às minhas queixas, antes murmurava como se fosse *só para ela*, eu adoro isto, adoro brincar com ele. (278, negrito nosso)

[I had never come across a woman who treated the jack-hammer with such spicy tenderness [...] putting it in her mouth, taking it out, playfully nibbling at it, and twisting it and letting go of it so that it would return to its erect position; or else she would give it a few slaps, and by the look of it they weren't always that gentle. *I'd get cross* when that happened: “This here is a serious tool,” I'd say to her, “it expects some respect, first-class treatment, tender loving care; You can't treat it like this, all slapdash like you do” [...]. *But she didn't pay any attention* to my complaints; she'd mumble something like *it was for her only*, “I love playing with this

thing, I love playing with it." (our emphasis)]

The playful aspect is strongly stressed, and playful too is the independent and self-centered attitude of this woman who, on the one hand, could easily embody the sort of male sexual fantasy that she is making advances towards, and who, on the other hand, is a woman who is very much her own madam, someone who does not mourn the fact that she does not have a penis or who lives out the frustration of her deprivation, but who instead "plays" with this penis and with this idea that represents the power of the male, a mere jack-hammer in her hands. And still on this same theme, we would like now to consider the representation of the maternal in this work.

We are told about the conjugal relations between Alírio de Sousa and Alda right at the beginning of *As Memórias*:

Os anos seguintes foram realmente de pacato deleite, os dois tacitamente de acordo em seguir o conselho de uma tia da Alda que certa vez nos visitou: Vocês têm uma vida tão calma e harmoniosa, disse ao despedir-se, não deixem que alguma criança a venha estragar! Não deixámos. (22)

[The years that followed were really years of laid-back delight; the two had tacitly agreed to follow the advice of an aunt of Alda's who'd visited them one day: "The two of you have such a calm and harmonious life," she said as she was leaving. "Don't let some child come and spoil it all!" We didn't let it.]

A bit of advice that came from a woman, and one which the two heed. In a scenario where the main characters are always of the female sex and who add up to nothing less than eighteen—Alda, Alma, Aninhas, D. Rosalinda, Irma, Solange, Melly, Nanda, Lena, Dala, Julinha, Tiana, Ondina, Ângela, D. Sebastiana, Lídia, Shiva, not mentioning the other women who never get to speak in the first person—it is interesting that it is only Nanda who deals with the theme of the pregnancy in a relatively long manner. There is a passing reference to another pregnancy, one that in fact terminates in an abortion on account of some malformation in the foetus, and where the woman in question, Ana, makes the following statement: "*já viste como estaria agora empatada com uma criança nos braços?*" ["have you considered how tied down I'd be if I had a child in my arms?"] (96). This is after her relationship with Manco [lit. "Cripple"] has failed; similar to what happens with Caga-Vírgulas, Manco's name reveals his disabilities. If, on the one hand, this abor-

tion is presented to us as a blessing given the context, the possibility that Nanda might be pregnant happens in a genuinely pathetic context. Still living in Angola, Alírio de Sousa, his love affair with Nanda having run its course, literally does his duty as a friend: he makes her pregnant! She, who does not mind raising a child alone in that environment of civil war, will eventually marry a doctor who will find a solution to her infertility. Or rather, motherhood, the “natural instinct” of all women, is an object of controversy, eighteen to one! (Ana does not count in that number because she was never given a chance to take up a narrative voice.) Even for her, motherhood is something that she has to have the will to fight for and something her body craves for; she desires to have a child, even without a companion, husband or lover (were it not for the kindness of her friend, Alírio); her desire for a child obliges her to seek medical treatment, so that she can attain her aim. This pregnancy is, without a doubt, the result of Nanda imposing her “want” on the world, it is not the consequence of predestined biological and instinctual imperatives (and notice how this episode can be regarded as one of the redundancies of which we spoke!). And it is with some curiosity that we should consider how this theme is dealt with in *Memórias de Brás Cubas*: not only does the main character die obsessed with the fact that he has not left any children, throughout the text, whenever he speaks up on this topic, his perspective is radically different from that which we find in Germano Almeida. Machado de Assis’s vision of life, and even of death, is pessimistic; this is totally inverted in Germano Almeida’s text. In the second text people do not have children and if they do have children it is because they want to be happy; in the first text people do not have children and the only good that comes out of this is that: “não transmiti a nenhuma criatura o legado da nossa miséria” [“I did not transmit to any living creature the legacy of our misery”] (230). Alírio de Sousa is guided by the pleasure principle and the need for well-being; independently of all social prejudices, Brás Cubas is guided by these very prejudices and his well-being is determined by material gain. Consider Eugénia, who could have made him happy but who was poor and lame and whom he eventually left because he was considering political office, which meant that he had to marry Virgília, a marriage that never took place, notwithstanding the love that developed between the two of them, because Virgília was too similar to Brás Cubas and a more successful suitor came along. Consider, still, Marcela, who uses him for his money. The work of Machado de Assis portrays a universe dominated by social, political and

material concerns that begin and end with a feeling of failure and sadness—we have already read the concluding sentence in the text, let us now read the dedication: “*Ao verme que primeiro roeu as frias carnes do meu cadáver dedico como saudosa lembrança estas MEMÓRIAS PÓSTUMAS*” (sic) [“It is with fondness that I dedicate these POSTHUMOUS MEMORIES to that worm who first gnawed at the cold flesh of my corpse”]. In Germano Almeida, the world is governed by the pleasures of the flesh, by the desire for the Other—never mind the age or social standing; consider, for example, Ângela, who was a prostitute and much older than Alírio de Sousa, or D. Sebastiana, portrayed to be in a loving marriage with a man much older than she is, he who is the owner of a brothel and almost incapable of having an intimate relationship with the woman he loves! If Machado de Assis dedicates his book to the worm that will gnaw at his corpse, a suggestion of pessimism at its worst, Germano Almeida, on the other hand, dedicates his book “*a todos os seus companheiros de ficção e também aos que se dignaram acompanhá-lo durante as horas do seu agitado velório*” [“to all my literary companions and also those who deigned to keep him company during his agitated wake”]. One turns his attention towards death, the other towards life, a life that, even after his death, is pregnant with beauty and desire. Actually, in destroying the idea of the death of the body, not only with the mental existence that these women conjure up for his body, but also with the way they project death onto that body that is still present and is surrounded by the bodies of beautiful women. At the same time, Germano Almeida is also destroying the binary opposition of body/soul, one that brings with it an entire set of presuppositions: the death of the subject is less important than his funeral service, where, through the presence and the voices of these women, the discourse of his body is made to speak, the primacy of desire, which now more than at any other time, finds its prop in absence, in emptiness, but which on this occasion is able to transcend it [the emptiness]. There is no doubt that here we can find—or create—a new theoretical postulate that surpasses postmodernism, especially in so far as postmodernism is unable to provide an answer: we are dealing with the death of the rational, logocentric subject, but not the death of the de-centered subject who is propped up by the libido and who, as a consequence of that, is grounded in the unconscious. The connection between this idea and the ideas proposed by feminist theories is more than obvious; if it is not obvious then we should read Adrienne Rich:

I am convinced that there are ways of thinking that we don't yet know about. I

take these words to mean that many women are *even now* thinking in ways which traditional intellection denies, or is unable to grasp [...]. In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood or biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings, I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to *think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized. (192)

In other words, speaking in theoretical terms, Germano Almeida's work, especially with regards to the philosophical question of the death of the subject, does not permit us to escape from making a connection with feminism. It is our opinion that the metaphor is too facile: the death of the subject of rationality that modernity introduced and the leap towards the emptiness of the "untruths" introduced by postmodernity are closely connected to feminist discourse as a discourse of subjectivity. It is this discourse, which as we know and have seen, anchors itself in the word, in the [grammatical] first person, as a way of expressing otherness (the plurality of the various I's vying for attention in the text). Of course, the question that remains is knowing to what extent the emergence of a feminine discourse is rooted in the death of the rational male subject, and to what extent this feminist discourse is dependent on the male subject. That is to say, to what extent can Germano Almeida's feminine *écriture* not be regarded as an enunciation of the female political and theoretical subject? If the death of Alírio de Sousa—which is also the death of the author—is also, as we have so obviously seen, not the death of the patriarchal metaphor, but the death of the body, then the question that remains for us to ask is: what is the significance of this Cartesian death in the context of feminine *écriture*, at least in the manner that it was conceived by the French school, and also the weight of this project of thinking out the subject as a bodily entity in the Kingdom of Psychoanalysis which, so obviously, was the discipline that invented this whole way of looking at things when it postulated that consciousness was separate from the unconscious and when it linked the unconscious to the Kingdom of Basic Desires and, consequently, the body?

Concluding this first reading of this work, we can say that Germano Almeida is able to achieve two feats. Firstly, he does justice to Machado de Assis: starting off from the similarity in titles, we are able to read Machado's work from an extremely up-to-date perspective, one that is replete with the traces of postmodernity—narrative fragmentation, the addressing of the

reader and his inclusion in the narrative, the mixture of fiction and reality (“*eu, Brás Cubas, se adotei a forma livre de um Sterne, ou de um Xavier de Maistre, não sei se lhe meti algumas rabugens de pessimismo*” [“if is true that I, Brás Cubas, have adopted the free form of, say, Sterne or Xavier de Maistre, I can’t be sure I haven’t added some of my own pessimistic gripes”] (21)—and of a certain kind of feminine *écriture* that is revealed not only through these traces but in the ability to give flesh to portraits of fully-rounded free-willed women. Secondly, he makes a break with the Brazilian tradition, a tradition he refers to when he shows us a universe ruled by the body, by pleasure, by desire, by an optimism based on the life of one man, the center of whose being was based on the primacy of feeling and not of reason. Machado de Assis’s “*pena da galhofa*” [“pen of mirth”] is put in the service of melancholy and pessimism and his sense of irony is altogether lacking in humor. In Germano Almeida, irony coincides with humor and the same “*pena da galhofa*” that we find in his work subverts the universe whence it came: be it the world of *Claridade*, Brazilian realism or this text by Machado de Assis.

This in a first reading. If one were to make a more profound reading, the sort of questions we would have to ask ourselves would include the connection between postmodernism and feminism and the “novelty” of postmodernism itself. It is important to recall that many of the features of postmodernism have long been articulated by feminists: the question of gender as a social construction, the integration of marginalized discourses in the canon, non-totalization or the rigidity of the answers that are sought after, and the connection between all this and a political vision of effective action, of visible social and material consequences, space and time as fragmentary notions, the plurality of the subject and of reality. The truth is that if postmodernism has come to integrate all these presuppositions as being uniquely its own, it has done so in order that it can apparently facilitate the consequences that women can gain from them—and, since we are we talking about it, other marginalized groups, too; the problem is that in doing so postmodernism runs the risk of feminizing the universe, the universe we want to be free of the ideology of patriarchy or the simple lack of humanity in the system. Naturally, this global feminization easily falls into the same binary logic that it wanted to escape from, only this time it is not based on the difference in the sexes, but the difference of gender, one that unfortunately falls into the trap of becoming the Enlightenment *au contraire*: the primacy of feeling and the female gender. All that remains for us to do it to analyze the work of Germano Almeida from this perspective and assess the

extent to which his re-invention of reality is free from these dangers.

Notes

¹ “[A] literatura caboverdeana sofre do grandessíssimo defeito de ter sido até agora uma literatura meramente descritiva. Ora a consequência disto é que os nossos escritores não estão preparados para analisar e interpretar. Eu pessoalmente penso que as pessoas no geral e as que escrevem em particular sentem que há mudanças. Mas repara que uma mudança de mentalidade [...] não é uma realidade imediatamente apreensível [...]. Porém, para o escritor [as mudanças] já deveriam sê-lo, se ele estivesse preparado para analisar, quase que para reinterpretar a realidade” (Almeida 1992, 188). [“Cape Verdean literature suffers from that grave defect of having been, until now, merely a descriptive literature. The result of this is that our writers are not equipped to analyze and interpret. Personally speaking, I think that people in general and those who write feel that there are changes in the air. But note that a change in mindset [...] is not something that is immediately apprehensible [...]. But they [the changes] should be so for writers, had they been equipped to analyze, and even reinterpret reality.”] And now read Machado de Assis: “A falta de uma crítica assim é um dos maiores males que padece a nossa literatura: é mister que a análise corrija ou anime a invenção, que os pontos de doutrina e de história se investiguem, que as belezas se estudem, que os senões se apontem, que o gosto se apure e eduque, e [a literatura brasileira] se desenvolva e caminhe aos altos destinos que a esperam” (1962, 804). [“The lack of critics is one of the worst ills of our literature; it is imperative that analyses should correct or enliven that which has been invented, that history and our belief-system should be investigated, beauty studied, the “if not” pointed out, and taste should be refined and people should be helped to acquire it, so that Brazilian literature may develop and walk towards the high destinies that await it”]—the repetition of the same preoccupations in two countries so far away from each other, not only in terms of space but by time, but which are united in a common (post-)colonial experience, which is what has created this lack of critical sense in the first place; they [these countries] have been sabotaged by an external authority that had no interest in creating a critical sense.

² For example: “tempos de grande sabura” (Almeida 2001, 22).

³ We invite the reader to read two articles written by the author of this article, one published in *Revista Expressão* 5.2 (Jul-Dec), 109-116. Santa Maria: Ed. CAL-UFSM, entitled “O momento do ‘crime’ e uma breve contextualização: *Dois Irmãos* e *et al* de Germano Almeida”; and the other due for publication: “A Fronteira da Desconstrução: Construir Germano Almeida,” *Actas do XVIII Encontro de Professores Brasileiros de Literatura Portuguesa*,

⁴ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 89. Qtd. in Suleiman 65.

⁵ Observe the figure of Caga-Vírgulas, whose name is obviously derogatory, and the manner in which it is through him, once again (for we have already encountered this scene in *Estórias de Dentro de Casa*, “Agravos de um Artista”), that the supposedly traditional male and female roles are ridiculed: “[*Dizia ele que,*] como seria do meu conhecimento era dos livros que qualquer marido detém, por força da sua superioridade intelectual, um poder/dever de correção sobre a mulher” (160) [“He told me I should know from books that any husband, by virtue of his intellectual superiority, will have power over/the right to reprimand his wife”].

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