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BETWEEN FREEDOM AND PARADISE": HETERONORMATIVITY, MALE IDENTITY AND THE FLUIDITY OF DESIRE IN WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DULCE VEIGA? AND A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary individual emerges amidst the chaos of indeterminacy, constantly in search of a completeness that is utopian but also comforting. It would no longer be possible to conceive the static character formerly attributed to human identity, nor establish regular patterns that aim to group, in totality, the post-modern panorama, searching for a reality both objective and immutable – as sought by the realists. We live in the era of the fragmented and of the inconstant. We seek to understand reality, but get lost in our own inconstancy.

Literature, as an artistic and cultural phenomenon, indicates, in a notable manner, the characteristics that constitute postmodern societies. In the past decades, the lack of linearity in plots and the strong presence of a first person narrator that is either lost or in crisis, as well as setting, thematic discussions and the rupture of reconstruction of the formal aspects, constitute a type of literary creation that is in movement and dynamic. The works chosen for the present interpretation present such characteristics with clarity, and may be seen as portraits that capture a conflicted reality that transitions constantly from subjectivity in crisis to an urban world in the process of self-construction.

A Streetcar Named Desire is an award-winning play from 1947, written by American author Tennessee Williams. The plot of Williams' play centers around the story of Blanche DuBois, a teacher of decadent beauty and somber past, that experiences, throughout the narrative, the inability of finding a concrete reality and the completeness of her own fragmented identity.

Blanche arrives in her sister's apartment at Elysian Fields Avenue, New Orleans, having arrived by a streetcar called Desire – from this, obviously, originates the play's title. The urban setting is a shock to Blanche, contrasting with

her southern property of Belle Reve in Laurel, Mississippi, lost, "piece by piece", according to her, because "improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications" (WILLIAMS, 1974, p.43). The point of Blanche's arrival at her sister's residence marks the beginning of the narrative that constitutes the play – marked by a setting replete of symbols and by a plot constantly fragmented by the interruption of the constituent elements of the characters' psyche, especially Blanche'

In the case of *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*, the work is a novel by Brazilian writer Caio Fernando Abreu, the first edition dating from 1990. An unnamed character, a journalist, is situated in an almost cinematic, agile, narrative, sometimes broken by flashbacks that focus, essentially, on the eternal human search for a totalizing identity, symbolized in the protagonist's search for the singer Dulce Veiga, who's been missing for years

Although the special and linguistic distance is considerable, the permeable relationship between the two works are evident. This proximity is due to, mainly, certain elements such as themes, character construction, a plot interrupted by subjectivity and intimacy, the protagonists' identity crisis and a strong presence of eroticism in the narratives. The present study focuses, keeping in mind the dialogue between the two works, on the reading of three characteristics of setting and character outlining: the crisis of the subject as an element present in the constitution of postmodern identity; eroticism, which in this case is constructed by means of the transition metaphor; the masculinities which, in the texts, appear as distinct (re)configurations in the characters.

PATHS TAKEN BY EROS: FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES AND FLUID DESIRES

The representations of the masculine stereotype are evidenced in *A Streetcar Named Desire* by the image of Stanley, while in Dulce Veiga it falls to Rafic the social role representative of the patriarchal, hetero-normative male model. In what still regards gender analysis, the homosocial pact can be cited as a strong mark in Williams' text. In the work by Caio Fernando Abreu, the relationship between people of the same sex transit between the outspoken and the non-spoken, friendship and love, repressed desire and carnal explicitness.

The identity crisis will be analyzed as a constituent trait in the subjective aspect of the protagonists in both texts. Blanche, as well as the unnamed journalist from *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*, present fragmented identities, conflicting and even schizophrenic. In the same way, this psychological and existential conflict in both texts is intimately linked to complex questions of sexuality, eroticism, abandonment and solitude. Thus, the possibility of analyzing the constitution of these characters as fruits of madness and as constructors of fragmented realities based on daydreams and visions – a fact that puts into conflict the relationships between real and imaginary, decentralizing the linear construction of the plot.

Regarding eroticism, especially, we intend to analyze the thematic of public (i.e., collective) transportation as a propeller of erotic desires. If in Williams' play the reference to the streetcar in the title is related to the paths taken by Eros, in *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*, it is the subway that will be presented as a setting that incites desire and a metaphor for the pathways of human feeling – a desire that fluctuates between freedom and paradise.

As a theoretical reference, we intend to use the post-modern theories regarding cultural identity (Hall, Debord), men's studies (Nolasco, Badinter, Sedgwick) and eroticism (França, Chauí). In the guise of conclusion, the intention is to verify the possibility that the setting of the texts promotes a dialogue with socio-cultural realities contemporary to the authors, presenting the fragmented character of the contemporary world, and, consequently, the respective marks on literary creation. It is in this aspect that it would be possible a conjunction of the dialogical relations between the works of Caio Fernando Abreu and Tennessee Williams, keeping in mind the possibility of association of these inter-textual references to temporal limitations and the aspects constituent to the post-modern and post-dramatic literary aesthetics

The first aspect to be observed as an intertextual link between the works of Williams and Abreu is manifested in the subject of the construction of the erotic setting in both narratives. We here refer to the manifestation of desire as something transitory, marked by a continuous character of mutability in configuration, colors and forms. This transitory character of erotic desire within Williams' narrative is readily evidenced in the work's title: *A Streetcar named Desire*.

The association of the word "desire" as a denominator to the streetcar, which is, obviously, a symbol of transition, makes extremely evident Williams' intention of explicating human desire as something marked by the character of immutability, i.e. continuous transit. The fact that Blanches travels in a streetcar named desire evidences, thus, that inside the atmosphere of mutability in erotic configurations, she will be the character in which this characteristic of mutability is evidence since the beginning of the narrative.

In *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*

, this traveling Eros is manifested with even more clarity and is located in even more multifaceted places of human subjectivity. If in Williams the streetcar made clear the mutability of desire, in Abreu it is the subway that will be the great scenery of this process in continuous formation, travel, reconfiguration of Eros. This type of manifestation of human desire, with a transitory character, was already evidenced in the thinking of Marilena Chauí, in her text *Ties of Desire*:

Tendency, impulse, tension, inclination, aspiration, ardor, expansion and agitation, oréxis, hormé and appetitus, inseparable from the images of combat, conflict, privation, need and possession, tied desire into a knot that will never be undone: **that of movement.**

(CHAUÍ, 1990, p. 28, our highlight)

This continuous movement of Eros, this wandering of desire across the land, taking shapes, reconfiguring subjectivities, fragmenting and shattering identities, assumes another characteristic manifested in both works, pointing both to a character of poetic-literary construction and to a play-on-the-senses that puts in shock the impossibility of stabilizing erotic desire into a static and totalizing form. It is a certain metaphorical recourse or, more precisely, a semantic game with a connotative meaning of certain words evidencing such characteristics.

When Blanche alights the streetcar, as aforementioned, she stays in a place denominated Elysian Fields, much to her estrangement. Alas, when desire is abandoned, when she gets off the streetcar, the character finds herself in front of a strange place that is, ironically and paradoxically, a paradise. The reference to the name of the place as homonymous to where, in ancient Greek mythology, the gods resided in a metaphysical location, places in collision the relation between desire and paradise. This relation

can be better analyzed if we have in mind an excerpt from *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*, in which this same type of recourse is employed by the narrator:

Lifting her eyes to the face of that young man that I did not yet know was Pedro, between the jolts of the train, on the opposite side of the yellow bar that sinks down the tunnel, taken by those feelings and all others that I try to specify now, some without a name, like that crested and pleasurable goose-bump from the rollercoaster, one second before falling into the abyss, I ran into a clear face that oscillated from one side to the other, I couldn't tell if because of the movement of the train or if he was a little drunk.

It must have been Saturday, past midnight.

He smiled at me. And asked:

“Are you going to Liberdade?”

“No, I am going to Paraíso¹.” He sat next to my side. And said:

“Then I'm coming with you.”

(ABREU, 2007, p. 115)

It can be observed that the semantic game in Caio Fernando Abreu is very similar to Tennessee Williams'. Once off the subway cart, the characters have two options that are both physical locations and reference to mythical location or abstract feeling: Liberty and Paradise present themselves as alternatives, antithetical, of places where Eros conducts the characters.

Both Blanche and the character from Caio Fernando Abreu's novel place themselves in front of a choice directed by travel, by the constant moving of eros: liberty or paradise. Both characters, curiously, opt for paradise. The great conflict, however, plays out through the fact the mutability of desire creates a paradoxical relation between liberty and paradise. The characters choose paradise, tied to the view that they cannot be free if they want to go to paradise and that happiness will be possible without freedom. However, the impossibility of freedom will hurt them

¹ neighborhoods in the city of S. Paulo; the names mean, literally, Liberty and Paradise, respectively. *translator's note.*

intensely, will lead them to loneliness, to the impossibility of self-realization, to the suffocation of erotic desire. They tie themselves to a vain illusion of happiness, while in truth the complexities of their personalities could never allow the existence of paradise without freedom. Destiny, thus, will be fatal to them. Both characters will not be able to live with the consequences of this choice.

The notion that exists behind this idea of movement and the paradoxical relation between freedom and paradise will bring to surface the notion of the impossibility of concretization of desire, as a form marked by a character of mutability and impossibility of configuring itself in a totalizing manner. This impossibility of satiation, of conclusion, of stopping the streetcar in a final stop, evidences a dialogue between the works under analysis and the Freudian theorizations regarding mutability and insatiability of human desire.

Regarding that conception of psychoanalysis, Maria Inês França enlightens us in affirming that:

The realization of desire has, in the Freudian canon, the statute of being partial, because never satiated, taking for itself an insistent and repetitive sarch. That way, desire and its effects are a truth in motion, eternal rebirth, a going-beyond that is perpetuated and has the dream as witness. This “real thoroughfare” that leads to the unconscious testifies the perennial nature of unconscious desire as a determinant source and movement that animates us.
(FRANÇA, 1997, P.99)

Perhaps this perception of the inability to park Eros permanently in a static configuration stuns the characters more than the comprehension of the impossibility of associating the necessity of being free to the concretization of desires. The non-satiation of desire becomes something even more merciless when there is the comprehension that it will be useless to give up liberty in favor

of society, once that that satiation is utopic.

It is at this moment of perception of desire as insatiable and, consequently, of relations built upon desire as fleeting and unfruitful that will present to these two characters a crisis in the construction of their subjectivity. Desire is, to Blanche and as well as the journalist, the great element of strength in their identities and, at the same time, the main focus of their existential and identity related anguishes.

As if it was not enough that there is the conflict promoted by the comprehension of the impossibility of the satisfaction of erotic desire, there is also the social element that, in both works, shows itself to be of extreme importance to the silencing of desires and the following crisis of the individuals. It is because of the pressure promoted by the social-cultural context that Blanche will repress her intimate desires at any cost, going to the extreme of solitude and madness. Two moments that evidence this anguish in the work, are, respectively, that in which blanche will try to seduce a young newspaper salesman (1) and that in which the new persona is constructed with the goal of managing her impulses towards what would be socially acceptable to the standards of the time, a mask of artificial beauty that evidences the extreme of madness (2)

(1)

Blanche: Well, you do, honey lamb. Come here! I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth.

[Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his.]

Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good - and keep my hands off children.

(WILLIAMS, 1974, p. 84)

(2)

It is a few hours later that night.

Blanche has been drinking fairly steadily since Mitch left. She has dragged her wardrobe trunk into the center of the

bedroom. It hangs open with flowery dresses thrown across it. As the drinking and packing went on, a mood of hysterical exhilaration came into her and she has decked herself out in a somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers with brilliants set in their heels.

Now she is placing the rhinestone tiara on her head before the mirror of the dressing-table and murmuring excitedly as if to a group of spectral admirers.

(WILLIAMS, 1974, p. 122)

The journalist however, sees himself involved in the same type of problem, once that the silencing of his homo-erotic desires is necessary for the maintenance of a status quo amidst a society marked by prejudice and exclusion. It is important to remember that the historical distancing between the plots is relatively short, the narrative of *A Streetcar Named Desire* passing at the end of the 40s, while *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga* takes place in the late 80s. In both socio-cultural contexts we can see a dominant ideology in which it is needed to evidence the necessity of erasing any reference to certain types of conducting erotic desire that promoted the marginalization of the characters.

The relation between a sensuality that is not accepted socially and the consequent repression, as observed, presents itself as one of the strong points both in Abreu's novel and Williams' play. This Transitory Eros as a pulsation and the consequent comprehension of the impossibility of the completion of desire will evidence a second element that is the link between the works under analysis: the madness, or the identity crisis that leads to it.

On one side we have a Blanche that is in a state in progressive degradation and close to total madness. The fragmentation of the character's identity makes her situate herself in two processes of change that lead her to a moment of total rupture of the self ("I"), the shock between two possibilities of existence:

the first identity, the idealized, tied to traditional southern values and in touch with what the social realities of the time expect from a woman; the second, a woman of strong impulses, indifferent to what is proposed by traditional views, given to the concretization of her own desires.

Sexuality, In Tennessee Williams' play, is one the main factors that lead to existential conflicts, to the shock between Blanche's identities. In the unfolding of the play, the conflict between the two characters of Blanche puts her in front of a series of conflicts, intimately ties to desire and repression, a sexuality that, in the words of Londré (1997, p. 48), is "a sexuality with the power to redeem or destroy." In the case of Blanche, we can say that it is the power of destruction that prevails.

Another definition from Londré seems very valid, in what regards this process of destruction and madness that takes over Blanche as the narrative progresses:

Blanche might be said to have entered "the broken world" when her young husband Allan Grey died many years before the action of the play begins. His was the brief "visionary company of love," the loss of which – and the desire to "trace" or recapture it – leads her to make so many desperate choices.

(LONDRE, 1997, p. 49)

In synthesis, the conflict in Blanche is internal, but intimately marked by external movements. I.e., Blanche only lives through an identity conflict because her ideal of life does not adhere to what a social role idealized by the world she belonged to. The force of social tradition, in this case, is a lot stronger than Blanche's desires and promotes a shock so deep with the exterior world that the interior one shatters, goes mad.

In the case of the protagonist from *Dulce Veiga*, we see a contrary relationship: there is no total destruction of the self, but a subject that survives a great existential crisis,

and, from a moment of epiphany, ends up comprehending a certain personal existence in the impossibility of self-definition. The character discovers himself, and the impossibility of adapting to a social role is no reason to deliver oneself into the abyss.

What happens in the work, generally speaking, is a contradictory process, painful but vivifying, of the search for identity, for totality, for an essence that takes the characters to self-discovery, a little as it may be. A process that in the words of Lima Braga Júnior (2006, p.136) would be “a type of post-modern tempest, that makes itself viable as deconstruction of all sorts of unity”. Even if in the end the protagonist arrives at an epiphany, to a brief moment of comfort for his personal uneasiness in meeting Dulce Veiga, from another perspective many characters seem to sink more and more in their internal abysses to arrive at the extreme of displacement. It is what happens, for example, with the character Saul that, unable to bear the loss of his muse, shatters his own identity and tries to reconstruct it, sewing the pieces into a mimicking image of Dulce Veiga.

It is worthy to note that Saul's transformation into Dulce Veiga evidences not only a process of identity built on madness, but also a process of conflict between the character's own gender identity. The social representations of gender are constantly problematized in the work, in what is evidenced by the references of strong symbolism in contemporary culture, like the way of dressing, of behaving, of directing sexual desire. What is perceived in this case, if we become aware of the work's setting and the time period in which it was written, is the literary representation of a “structural change” in contemporary society that, according to Stuart Hall (p. 596), “is transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century”.

The social change presented by Hall brings to light a process that “is fragmenting the

cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality which gave us firm location as social individuals” (p. 596). What we have, then, is the birth of a new subject, marked by profound alterations in their personal identities, that were before solidly established. “this loss of a stable ‘sense of self’ is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject” (p. 597, our highlight)

“I SHOULD SING”: HETERONORMATIVITY AND MALE IDENTITIES

If the identity of the subject is no longer seen as something constant, centralized in a single constitution, but as something that is built from the exchange of the subject with the society and respective discursive relations, it is possible to perceive a cyclical relation: as the subject seeks an identity and tries to represent it in discourse, the dominant discourses appropriate of views centered on subject to create stereotypical identities. It is from this viewpoint that a compaction of a society of spectacle is situated, in which “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” or in other words “a world view transformed into an objective force.” (DEBORD, 1994 p.5)

The strong criticism towards the representations of gender as an element of control, domination and marginalization is an element that is also strongly present in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche is a woman in a post-war heteronormative society. This factor, by itself, already shows that the impossibility of concretizing desires is even bigger. What is observed in Williams' work is the imposition of an chauvinist ideal, of excluding views. Blanche's voice is silenced, the abuses she suffers are inverted to the view of the dominant discourse, the masculine

discourse, the discourse of Stanley:

From Stanley's point of view, it is Blanche who provokes the attack, first when she imagines a threat where none had existed, virtually planting the suggestion that he might "interfere with" her, and then when she smashes a bottle in order to "twist the broken end in your face!".

(LONDRE, 1997, p.60)

The fact that the guilt of the rape is directed to Blanche, instead of Stanley, and the character's own epilogue reveal an entire social reality built on an ideology of domination that massacres the minorities. The religious values that masquerade as false moralism and the vertical relationship between man and woman are elements constantly evidenced in the play, which recall the social context in which Tennessee Williams conceived the play and tries, with that, to promote a reflection about such constructions.

If in *A Streetcar Named Desire* the madness of the character is intimately tied to the extreme repression of desires promoted by an external social factor; in *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?* not only is the movement of madness different, but also the factors that construct it are more tied to the intimate world of the protagonist, especially to memories. And for the analysis of this element, we return to the character of the journalist in which the story centers.

What we have in Caio Fernando Abreu's work is a character in constant search of himself, in a conflict for not understanding his own desires, his own identity. The exterior environment, in reality, is very given to the manifestation of desire: the character lives in a repressive and heteronormative society, but just the fact of being male and financially independent is something that puts him in a level of social inclusion much beyond Blanche's.

While Blanche sees herself lost inside of a world that does not comprehend her

desires, the journalist is lost in himself, in a world that lends itself to the discovery of new desires, even if it marginalizes them. It is the possibility of experiencing these desires that puts him into conflict, when he sees himself in front of a psychological confusion promoted by the incomprehension of which desires he decides to live through - something that is intensified when the elements of memory come to surface in the narrative.

It is the recourse of memory that brings the madness of the journalist into the narrative, when it reveals elements of the past that are of extreme importance towards understanding the crisis the character is going through at the time. The memory brings to surface the presence of Dulce Veiga, which will make the man give himself to a search that is maddening, exasperating. At the same time, come the memories of Pedro, his only lover, memories that latent the homoerotic desires and, consequently, a sexual identity crisis. Inclusively, when questioned about his own sexuality, the journalist answers that he doesn't know - and that not knowing is what characterizes the fragmentation and the crisis. (ABREU, 2007, p. 189)

Here, then, are two interesting contrasts in the works, regarding the memory element and the way in which the characters, gradually, are maddened by the dampening of their own desires: in Blanche, the narrative is built by the necessity of erasing the past for social inclusion; in the journalist, the memories are important to a search of self that is essential to the protagonist's development. In Blanche, the madness intensifies because of the incapacity of adaptation to traditional social structures; in the journalist, the madness intensifies when there is the search for Dulce Veiga, but disappears as the search nears the end. In Williams, there is destruction; in Abreu, liberation. That is evident if we observe the ending of both texts:

(1)

All in white, Dulce Veiga was standing still at the doorstep, next to the dog. A macaw landed on the tree near her. The first rays of the sun made shine that strange crown – tiara, diadem – that she had in her blonde hair.

I blinked, baffled. She raised her right arm to the sky, the hand closed, just the index finger pointing up high, like a dart. She then yelled something or other that stranded in the morning air.

It sounded like my name.

Beautiful, it was my name.

And I started to sing.

(ABREU, 2007, p. 238)

(2)

Blanche [holding tight to his arm]: Whoever you are - I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

[The poker players stand back as Blanche and the doctor cross the kitchen to the front door. She allows him to lead her as if she were blind. As they go out on the porch, Stella cries out her sister's name from where she is crouched a few steps upon the stairs.

Stella: Blanche! Blanche! Blanche!

[Blanche walks on without turning, followed by the Doctor and the Matron. They go around the corner of the building.

(WILLIAMS, 1974, p. 142)

After meeting Dulce Veiga and going through a process of epiphany-like reflection and liberation, the journalist finds a kind of peace that is evidenced by the elements constituting the setting (which is calm, soothing), as well as the reference to singing. It can be observed that Abreu's narrative takes place in a musical world and, in the beginning of this narrative, the protagonist affirms "I should sing" (ABREU, 2007, p. 15). The act of singing, therefore, presents itself as a moment of liberation, of concretization of desire, of realization.

The end of Tennessee Williams' play happens in the day-to-day, with friends playing cards. To Blanche, however, this end is not so

routine, neither calm nor liberating. Blanche is massacred, handed over to institutional control, because the incomprehension and the repression of a phallogocentric society do not permit her to gain voice and this voice be heard.

The biggest representative of this masculinity power display, in the social context in which the narrative of *A Streetcar Named Desire* takes place, is Stanley. The character, interpreted by the actor Marlon Brando both in the initial staging of the play and in the filmic adaptation, represents the entire stereotype constructed around the representation of a perfect model of masculinity. Stanley is strong, virile, the man that feeds the family and satiates all the needs of the wife – he is also the firm man, that is not misled by feminine trickery and is extremely loyal to his friends.

The constitution of Tennessee Williams' character would be a perfect example to demonstrate a social structure on which we previously commented on, when we referred to Guy Debord's text. To the author, spectacular society builds stereotypes that promote a reality that "erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real", or in other words, a "reciprocal alienation [that] is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists." (DEBORD, 1994, p 6)

One of the objectives of cultural and gender studies, of feminist and masculinity criticism, of queer theory and gay studies is exactly to break from the alienation promoted by a society of spectacle and promote the problematizing of essentialist definitions. These theories present the incapacity of the subject to adequate to single gender and sexuality patterns and the multiplicity of identities that are socially built.

Badinter (1993, p. 27), in realizing an analysis about masculine identity, proposes a discussion about the "shattered masculinity"

or “the rejection to the idea of a single masculinity”. Masculinity is no longer seen as an essence, to be instead perceived and studied as an ideological constitution, intimately associated with the relations of power. The “man being”, then, starts to be problematized from the mutability and relativity of such conception throughout time. The author’s thesis is that “a polyphonic individual, produced from successive crisis, emerges in the contemporary scene”

This position presented by Badinter is also reinforced by researcher Sócrates Nolasco, in the work *The Deconstruction of the Masculine*. Nolasco places masculine condition as the center of discussion in his work, presenting a series of visions regarding the social representations of masculinity, of masculine aesthetic and the relationships between masculinity, power and behavior. (NOLASCO, 1995, p. 16). From this relation of crisis emerges a movement in which, “in face of the process of fragmentation lived by the post-industrial societies, masculinity no longer aggregates value to what the individual experiences, serving only as a recourse of language to refer to the experience.” (NOLASCO, 1995, p. 19)

In order to visualize with more clarity the representation of the process presented by Badinter and Nolasco regarding masculinities, we can observe the two images displayed below, representing, respectively, Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, interpreted by Marlon Brando, and Saul, in the movie *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*, interpreted by Carmo Dalla Vecchia. In the second image we can also see, with his back to the camera, the actor Eriberto Leão, interpreter of the journalist (named Caio in the movie)

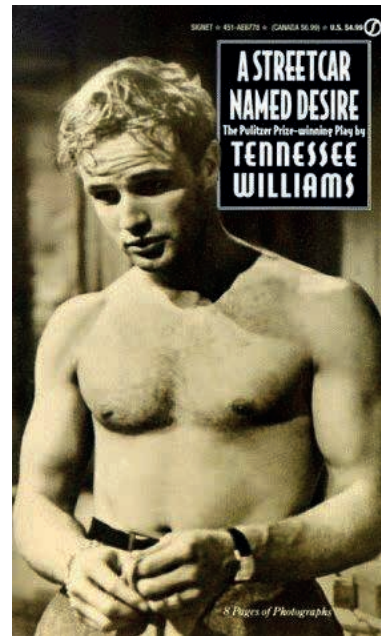


Figure 1: Marlon Brando as Stanley on the cover of the book *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams.



Figure 2: Eriberto Leão, as Caio, and Carmo Dalla Vecchia, as Saul, in *Whatever Happened to Dulce Veiga?*.

If we observe the first image, in which the actor Marlon Brando exhibits his full aesthetic perfection of macho man, we can see that in this moment there is the construction of a masculine image based in a traditional model of what it is to be a man, a model of power that, using the words of Bernardo Jablonski, is the representation of a “social conditioning” established during millennia, that makes us associate “masculinity to independence, autonomy, self-confidence, leadership on gender relations and aggressiveness.”

(JABLONSKI, 1995, P. 158)

In Abreu's work, we can see the construction of an opposite process: the character finds his own identity starting from the image of Dulce Veiga. The man is lost in the fragmentation of self, only to identify himself with what would be, according to social models, essentially feminine. In Williams, the representation of a stereotyped masculinity as a criticism of a phallic, repressive society. In Abreu, the deconstruction of that masculinity to achieve the same objective. In both cases, the crisis, the fragmentation, as a picture of a society that finds its constituent bases in ruin.

What we can perceive from this brief analysis of the works by Tennessee Williams and Caio Fernando Abreu is that the subject in crisis manifests him/herself in different configurations that recall the presence of a conflicting identity that cannot be localized in a repressive society. However, in Williams, we notice that destiny is fatal to the subject, since society constitutes itself as an object of a repression so intense that there is no salvation for the characters. In Abreu, the larger prison is internal. In this case, the liberation of the subject is carried out through the way the subject builds knowledge about himself, in a process of epiphany – is this process takes place in searching.

The constant search for something more is an essential element for us to trace a comparative profile between the works here studied. The search for pleasure in a repressive society, the search for a freedom that distances itself from the notion of paradise, but, above all, the search for a totality that ends up being unattainable to the characters but is nonetheless turned into a center amidst the fragmentation. Maybe paradise is utopian, but the realization that something is independent from utopia itself is inherent to the individual that comprehends his own fragmentation. What that something would be we will never

know completely.

If the search for the self is what makes up the fragmentation of the postmodern subject, it may be because humanity's own essence (if such a thing exists) is in mutability and dynamicity. It is from this conceptualizing that we can, in some way, situate the subject as a part of a constitution that is perceived as handed over to the abyss of existence itself, but, at the same time, part of a network constitutes itself in the spectacle.

And if the subject is delivered to the abyss, if it is not possible to centralize him, it is because the movement that is instituted in dynamicity goes way beyond a duality in the conception of a postmodern subject versus a cartesian subject. There is, before that, a decentering of the self that transcends the existence of the self in the face of a construction that is discursive, social and historical of itself. Shattered, the postmodern subject is the shadow of his own existence, the emptiness of the incomprehension of an abyss, and at the same time, the comprehension of this abyss as inherent to the human condition.

CONCLUSION

We see the possibility of concluding the present work with the comprehension that even amidst fragmentation and madness, it is possible to find an existence, dependent on the construction the subject makes of the self, but goes towards the comprehension of the human being as constituent of a social and ideological existence that situates him in complex web of discursive significations. From there, we retook an idea by Debord, in which the spectacle is the essence of its own constitution.

The thesis here proposed may be a little pessimist in present a vision of the subject as a co-dependent element of several other constructions, but, at the same time, throws to the studies about identity and

gender a discussion about questionings that may become, because of so many other perspectives, essential to contemporary critics. We do not aim, with this work, at defining the postmodern subject, but at promoting a debate that goes beyond the individual conclusions to establish itself as a point of ample reflection.

Stays here, then, the idea the literary criticism itself goes beyond a raw analysis of elements intrinsic to the text, to establish itself as a moment of human reflection. Maybe the process is more important than the actual result. There exactly is the importance of the search, and it is, in searching, humanity's own essence. Let us be, then, constituents of an inquietude that is not built on totality, but on madness itself, to use the words of Dulce

Veiga, by "something else" (ABREU, 2007, p. 66)

With no political leanings, we opted for an idea constructed on the text, in the discourse, to go way beyond these. If man is given to the undefinable self, it is up to that same man to fight for a reality that does not allow this fragmentation to be an object of control. If Blanche is silenced, if the journalist finds liberation, both characters present us with the same notion of existence: there is repression, but there is still an "I". Fatal or liberating, existence always presents us with the opportunity to try, even if partially, to discover the essence of ourselves.

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