

**The Female Discursive Trajectory in Lúcio Cardoso's *Mãos vazias*
[Empty Hands] / *O caminhar discursivo do feminino em Mãos vazias, de
Lúcio Cardoso***

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the first novel of Lúcio Cardoso, *Mãos vazias*, from 1938. Lacan's and Freud's psychoanalysis will assist the approach to literature in order to increase reading possibilities by means of the interpretive trajectory. The focus is on the main character, Ida, and her attempt to become the subject of her desire. Moved by her yearning to escape, she uses the few signifiers she has to bring up her story of dissatisfaction and transgressions: her name and the spatial path of a few blocks. Ida meets what her name portends (Ida means 'gone' in Portuguese), repeating the act of arriving and leaving, imprinting her desire on the entire city, producing the novella in the "movement of going."

KEYWORDS: Literature and Psychoanalysis; Lúcio Cardoso; *Mãos vazias* [Empty Hands]; Women; Desire

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a primeira novela de Lúcio Cardoso, Mãos vazias, lançada em 1938. Durante o percurso interpretativo a psicanálise de Freud e Lacan auxiliará a aproximação com o literário, de modo a ampliar as possibilidades da leitura. O enfoque recai sobre a personagem principal, Ida, e sua tentativa em tornar-se sujeito de seu desejo. Marcada pelo desejo de fuga, ela usa os parcos significantes que tem para tornar visível sua história de insatisfação e transgressões: seu nome e o percurso espacial de algumas quadras. Ida cumpre o anunciado por seu nome, na repetição do ato de chegar e sair, inscrevendo seu desejo por toda a cidade, compondo a novela no movimento de ir.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Literatura e psicanálise; Lúcio Cardoso; Mãos vazias; Mulher; Desejo*

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The Importance of *Mãos vazias* [Empty Hands]

Carelli (1988) stated that the novel *Mãos vazias*, by Lúcio Cardoso (1912-1968), was a laboratory for his most polished novel, *Crônica da casa assassinada* [Chronicle of the murdered house] (1959). Considering Lúcio's writings from the 1930s on, I propose an inversion, or rather a challenge: are the novels *Maleita* (1934), *Salgueiro* (1935), and *A luz no subsolo* [A light in the underground] (1936) a "laboratory" for his most important book in the period and one of the best books that he wrote alongside *Crônica*?

Indeed, *Mãos vazias* represents the literary maturity conquered by Lúcio during the 1930s, not because of chronological reasons, but for its literary merit. The novel symbolizes the overcoming of the indecision about the controversy between "intimacy" and "regionalism." If *A luz no subsolo* announces the possibility of introspection, *Mãos vazias* performs it thanks to a prose in which affections, feelings and thoughts of the characters about the world and its events prevail. In addition, the central issue of this project seemed to be the female character, who enables the emergence of collective and intimate issues at the same time. Ida is an emblematic figure of such a proposal.

This reading, as it will be seen, is only possible due to the integration of literature and psychoanalysis, once Freud's studies help to understand the way the articulated unconsciousness works within language. Many psychoanalytic tools and ideas shed light on literary texts regarding this issue. In the case of Lúcio Cardoso's work, a cooperation between the two sciences is fruitful, especially for expanding the reading of its intimate, or introspective, literary devices which are usually interpreted within a scope of unlikelihood or gratuity. Supported by the psychoanalytic knowledge, one may unfold textual biases and unveil poeticities hitherto unnoticed. *Mãos vazias* is exemplary.

1 Contours of Femininity

Mãos vazias begins with the death of Ida's son, Luisinho, who had tuberculosis at the age of six. She has been married to Felipe for seven years and, with the boy's death, a latent crisis deepens and comes to the fore. The duration of the plot is three days and three nights, in which Ida wanders the small fictional town of São João das Almas in search for an answer and a way out of her inner questionings. The (omniscient) narrator

shows Ida as being an introspective and bored woman, a devoted mother, a wife who is unhappy with her marriage. During her childhood and youth, she was known as being “strange”: she did not like embroidery and spent her time reading novels. She was also friends with women of *questionable* reputation, such as her cousin Maria, who had come from a big city and used to have fun at the waterfall with her male friends. Another friend of hers was Ana, who lived with a man but was not married to him. This was an unacceptable marital status in the 1930s and 1940s.

Everyone in São João das Almas warned Felipe that his marriage to Ida might not be happy. However, Felipe insisted on it. He had never accepted the very peculiar and silent character of his wife; he just got used to it. For Ida’s despair, getting used to things and accommodating to them are characteristics of Felipe and other *Mãos vazias* characters. She wonders, stunned, “Why has God surrounded me only by ordinary creatures?”¹ Felipe, a local bank manager, suspects of his wife's feelings, but cannot imagine how much his wife despises him and his exaggerated passivity.

Being a complex woman, Ida constantly surprises other people with her ideas and behavior. Felipe, on the other hand, can be defined with one word: conformism. Up to the end, he accepts everything and begs Ida to follow him in this endeavor. However, instead of sharing the placidity of her partner, she became increasingly exasperated with his platitude. Such characteristics made their life together unbearable.

In the morning after Luisinho’s funeral, Ida, after having a sexual intercourse with the boy's doctor while Felipe slept in the living room, awakens and, still in bed, reflects upon her husband. Ida is unsatisfied with her supposedly happy marriage, which is, actually, the hideout of a weak man living with activities that sublimate the failure of their marriage and a woman who is silently suffocated by everyday life.

However, Ida makes one last attempt to change the situation, confessing her affair with the doctor to her husband. She provokes Felipe up to the limit, waiting for a reaction. Still, nothing happens: Felipe praises the fact that she has told him about everything and says that they should sleep, because “tomorrow we will think about it.”² “Tomorrow” is a long time for her. At the same night, she leaves home and begins a peculiar path. Felipe,

¹ TN. In case there is no published English version of the work, we will translate direct quotes into English and provide the text in the original language as footnotes.

Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Por que será que Deus cercou-me apenas de criaturas mediocres?”

² Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “amanhã pensaremos nisso”.

after a pilgrimage to find her, eventually brings her back home, but the two of them end up arguing at the gate. He insists on leaving everything as it was before; Ida, on the other hand, feeling terribly hopeless, jumps into the river that runs at the back of their house.

The suggestion of death refers to the ultimate process of emptying. However, the novel narrates a gradual process. Ida, in her path, tries to separate herself from social and symbolic roles which connect her to the reducing life that she despises. This intent indicates her desire to escape from the burden of social roles, which are above her.

With the death of her child, she stops being a mother; with the affair and the abandonment of her home, she resigns from the wife script; moreover, with a declared disagreement with her only friend, her total opposition to the society surrounding her is shown, thus discarding her most sociable feature. Although “trying to reject” these masks, they return constantly. The mother role reappears in the pain of grief while her marriage and social life surround her from all sides. *Mãos vazias* discusses the intricacies of women's constitution as subjects of their desire, setting the tiny and reducing place reserved for femininity in society. Ten years after Simone de Beauvoir announced that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1973, p.301).³

To set up such femininity, which the narrator wants to set up independently, the narrator makes her walk through a curious path, relocating elements to provide the emergence of a female subject that does not necessarily need mother, wife or lover attributes to exist as such.

In this context, Ida's primary attitude is the transgression. Two moments in the novel appear as essential for the development of her uprising actions: the sex night with her son's doctor and the abrupt marital separation. It is not by chance that these two scenes of *Mãos vazias* are the ones seeming to intrigue and bother the readers the most, especially at the time it was released.⁴

³ BEAUVOIR, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Press, 1973, p.301.

⁴ The comments by the critics Mário Cabral and Oscar Mendes are perhaps the most emblematic regarding the surprise caused by Ida's attitudes. The first expressed straightforwardly the overall impression on the book: “Lúcio Cardoso's heroine actually suffered from a disease called, in plain Portuguese, naughtiness [...] One can say it is undoubtedly a gesture or an attitude which do not belong to the standard of ordinary existence. It is however unreasonable that two characters such as the ones presented by the author, with social and spiritual formation similar to that of all people in small urban areas, would exhibit, without any plausible reason, these false psychological determinants” (CABRAL, 1943) [Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “na realidade a heroína de Lúcio Cardoso sofria de uma moléstia chamada, em bom português, pouca vergonha [...] Admite-se, sem dúvida, um gesto ou uma atitude fora do estalão da existência comum. Torna-se ilógico, porém, que duas personagens como as que apresenta o autor, de formação social e

These are striking points of the novel, closely linked to the disease and the death of Ida's son. They are facts that make Ida rethink her life, resulting in her refusal to be committed to the mediocrity she thinks is surrounding her. In the midst of memories and reflections, she has an intercourse with the family doctor. This starts, as a result, what is called her *first move*: her leaving her bedroom, walking amid the domestic space, walking with Ana, returning to the domestic space, and again to her bedroom. The sex scene with the doctor, Ida's dream and her account of the adultery also happened in her bedroom. In this place, Ida decides to run away, starting the *second move* of the novel. This includes her passing through the cemetery, the pharmacy, the railway station, her friend Ana's house, the doctor's house, back to Ana's house, and, finally, returning to her own house, where she jumps into the river.

Ida's path is characterized by an apparent inconsistency, from the gestures – such as the natural choice of destinations – or the long wait at the rail station – although not intending to get in when the train arrives – to the stimulating tone of her actions, transgressive and conciliatory at the same time. The two scenes considered key helped the understanding of this contradiction, because they are transgressive – to the extent that they precede change actions and go against what is recommended for everyday life, going beyond the limits imposed – but also conciliatory, since they seek consolation for mourning.

In the first scene, the sex scene, Ida is a woman who wishes to go beyond the rules and experience freedom, but also to defy death. At the same time, the excitement of breaking the rules and the opportunity to make contact with life, as opposed to death, move her on. In both cases, this man is a vehicle for Ida, a means to achieve something. Although the sexual act has brought her an “unknown joy [...] in the depths of her conscience” and was responsible for a “heat radiating [of] her body,” when she thinks of her partner, her reaction is of indifference. As stated by her when she remembers what

espiritual semelhante a de todas as pessoas dos pequenos aglomerados urbanos, exibissem, sem razão plausível, essa verdadeira série de falsas determinantes psicológicas”]. Oscar Mendes also considers some acts foolish, such as Felipe's search for his wife: “It is also not understandable that Ida's husband, on the day she ran away, in a countryside city where everyone knew each other, would have searched for her in every house, and not in the house of Ida's only friend. This is clearly an artificial situation created by the novelist” (MENDES, 1982, p.318) [Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Não se compreende também que o marido de Ida, no dia da fuga desta, numa cidadezinha do interior onde todos se conhecem, a tenha procurado em todas as casas menos precisamente na da única amiga de Ida. É um arranjo evidente do novelista”]. It is worth noting that, even today, scholars who study Lúcio Cardoso agree with such comments, such as Cássia Santos, who considers Mendes statements to have “reasonable grounds” (SANTOS, 2001) [Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “bastante propriedade”].

has happened, “she had been with the doctor with no feelings, without any desire.”⁵ What moves her is the act itself, not any affection for the young doctor.

Nonetheless, in this scene, the mourning appears as a denial for the first time, hidden by the intention of transgressing, of being free from her marriage and its limiting rules.⁶ The following scenes, which are part of the *first move*, reaffirm that end, but the mourning returns subliminally. Likewise, her abandoning her home seems to be directed to the affirmation of a new life without marital ties. However, in the subsequent acts (*second move*), Ida visits places that remind her of her son and are connected to mourning. This time, grief is responsible for paralyzing her and ends up covering up and denying her freedom and transgression goals, which will reappear in the mirrored narratives remembered by Ida in two of her destinations.

This way of moving around, structuring the plot, is articulated by Ida's name (which means gone in Portuguese), which announces her errant destination. Many aspects are involved here, but in this article, the interpretation will pursue the effects of the signifying chain which traverse Ida's desires.

⁵ Excerpts in the original in Portuguese, in order of appearance: “alegria desconhecida [...] no fundo da sua consciência”; “calor que irradiava [do] seu corpo”; “tinha se entregue ao médico friamente, sem nenhum desejo”.

⁶ By way of illustration, I transcribe some excerpts of “Decálogo da esposa,” [A manual for wives] cited by Maluf and Mott, published at the *Revista Feminina*, a high-impact journal for the female audience during the first decades of the twentieth century. “I - Love your husband above all things on earth and love your neighbor the best way you can, but remember your home belongs to your husband and not to your neighbor; II - Treat your husband as a precious friend, as a guest of high regard, and never as a friend whom you tell the small setbacks of life; III - Wait for your husband with your home always tidy and with a smile on your face; however, do not grieve excessively if he sometimes does not notice it; [...] V - May your children be always well-dressed and clean; may he smile of satisfaction when he sees them this way, and may this satisfaction make him smile when he remembers his family when he is away; VI - Always remember that you got married to share the joys and sorrows of life with your husband. When everyone has abandoned him, stay beside him and tell him: Here I am! I am always the same; [...]” (MALUF and MOTT, 2008, pp.394-396) [Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: I – Ama teu esposo acima de tudo na terra e ama o teu próximo da melhor forma que puderes; mas lembra-te de que a tua casa é de teu esposo e não de teu próximo; II – Trata teu esposo como um precioso amigo; como a um hóspede de grande consideração e nunca como uma amiga a quem te contam as pequenas contrariedades da vida; III – Espera teu esposo com teu lar sempre em ordem e o semblante risonho; mas não te aflijas excessivamente se alguma vez ele não reparar nisso; [...] V – Que teus filhos sejam sempre bem-arranjados e limpos; que ele ao vê-los assim possa sorrir quando satisfeito e que essa satisfação o faça sorrir quando se lembre dos seus, em estando ausente; VI – Lembra-te sempre que te casaste para partilhar com teu esposo as alegrias e as tristezas da existência. Quando todos o abandonarem fica tu a seu lado e diz-lhe: Aqui me tens! Sou sempre a mesma; [...]].

2 Links of the Desire: Impossibility and Repetition in Ida

The issue of desire is a complex issue. It starts with its main feature: the desire is invincible, unconquerable, since it is never realized; it is always reappearing. This concept is central to the reading of *Mãos vazias* and illustrates how the connection between literature and psychoanalysis extends the interpretation of the artistic discourse. Thus, we will address the issue of desire, following the psychoanalytic point of view with some general and panoramic considerations.

For psychoanalytic knowledge, desire is not an objective need of biological nature linked to the body, which can be satisfied through the achievement of a concrete object (e.g. hunger–food, thirst–water); it is connected to memory. It is important to remember that we are talking here of the Freudian memory connected to the unconscious mind. As such, it benefits from the principle of pleasure and is linked to language. Just as we do not remember the event or trauma itself, but only versions of what happened [it is in this sense that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences,” (FREUD, 1895/2004, p.11)⁷], we will never reach the object of desire itself, but only replacements, representations of it.

Therefore, it is under the incessant and inseparable relationships among the unconscious mind, memory and desire that, for Freud, desire is always unconscious desire. His most fruitful work on the subject is *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he considers the field of desire closer to delusion than to reality (concrete and tangible existence), by postulating that “Dreams are the disguised fulfillment of a repressed, infantile wish” (FREUD, 1900/2010, p.149),⁸ a sentence that indicates the satisfaction of desire in the *symbolic*⁹ domain.

⁷ FREUD, S. and BREUER, J. *Studies in Hysteria*. Translated by Nicola Luckhurst. New York: Penguin Classics, 1895/2004, p.11.

TN. Freud’s texts will be quoted with the year of its first publication.

⁸ FREUD, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. Philadelphia: Perseus Books Group, 1900/2010, p.149.

⁹ The term “symbolic” is highlighted to reinforce that for Freud the representation of the object does not happen through the direct relationship with the thing itself, but through language (especially through representation using words). For him, the primary object is lost and what we have are pictures of pictures that will be represented through speech (if we agree that the psychoanalytic therapy is the place of the talking cure) through free association of ideas, in an infinite chain of meanings. This subject is present in Freud's work since 1891, in the article The interpretation of aphasia.

If Freud does not follow the steps of philosophy,¹⁰ preferring to embrace the concept of desire in the context of the unconscious mind, Lacan comes to a third term, combining psychoanalysis and philosophy. It is the interpretation made of Hegel by Alexandre Kojève that mainly influences the concept of desire in the work of the French psychoanalyst and leads him to postulate the motto of desire as the desire of the Other.¹¹ The phrase, in the Lacanian thought, encompasses the idea that for the subject to recognize himself in the desired object, it is necessary that he accepts this demand — there it is a mirrored procedure involving subject-object-subject. Lacanian desire is born where need and demand are separated and, at the same time, united, imprisoning the subject of desire in the Other's desire. It is in this context that Lacan states that “the Freudian world isn't a world of things, it isn't a world of being, it is a world of desire as such” (1991, p.222).¹² He says later on that “the desire [is] not being therefore a good in any sense of the term [...] You understand of course that this discourse supposes that the realization of desire is specifically not the possession of an object” (LACAN, 1960-1961, p.58).¹³

From this perspective, the one under which desire will never be owned, desire is bound to only find something that replaces the desired, thus postponing its *satisfaction* endlessly. To the extent that it can exist as desire without ever being settled, desire is never fully *satisfied*; as postulated by Lacan, it “is satisfied in another fashion than in an effective satisfaction” (1991, p.213).¹⁴

¹⁰ I am talking mainly about Hegel, in his *The phenomenology of spirit*, who understood desire as being connected to the issue of consciousness, which only is recognized as consciousness in another one, denying it to make it similar to itself, and this search for the desiring awareness of another desiring consciousness only multiplies the desire (HEGEL, G. W. F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by J. B. Baillie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹¹ Lacan attended Kojève's lectures on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, by Hegel, held at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris from 1933 to 1939. The meetings were published in 1947 as *Introduction to the reading of Hegel*, largely drafted by Raymond Queneau, from notes taken during seminars. In one of his classes, Kojève said that desire is the desire of the other (KOJÈVE, A. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. New York: Cornell University, 1980), a postulate embraced by Lacan within the unconscious logic. In his *Seminar X, Anxiety*, Lacan pays special attention to the argument about the differences between his concept of desire and Hegel's. In the present article, this debate is not important, but we highlight the reference, especially in the second part (Anxiety, sign of desire), of the mentioned seminar (LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Anxiety*. Book X. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Malden: Polity Press, 2014).

¹² LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. Book II. Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1991. p.222.

¹³ LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Transference*. Book VIII. 1960-1961, p.58. Unofficially translated by Cornac Gallagher. Available at: <www.lacaninireland.com>. Access on: 19 feb. 2015.

¹⁴ See footnote 12.

Another aspect involving the concept is also of interest for the interpretation being developed now. The subject of desire¹⁵ (unconscious subject) has its wishes stopped by the social subject (conscious subject): the subject is divided, and the great question in dispute between the parties is the realization of the desire. In other words, it is part of those wishing to possess mechanisms that act against the fulfillment of their wishes, “and the first ambivalence proper to every demand is that in every demand there is also implied that the subject does not want it to be satisfied, aims in itself at the safeguarding of desire, testifies to the blind presence of the unnamed, blind desire,” argues Lacan (1960-1961, p.197).¹⁶ Thus, desire’s fulfillment or failure implies resistance and censorship.¹⁷

These contours are brought to this article to the extent that the psychoanalytic traits mentioned above are literary metamorphosed in *Mãos vazias* and help to understand the character and plot, contributing to the expansion of literary criticism, which insists on seeing in the work a mark of unlikeliness. It is possible to see this, for example, when Ida desires, refuses her desire, and then desires again. In fact, despite waiting an entire night for the train, she does not get in. Ida rejects her desire to leave, and stays. However, her desire is still present. What holds Ida in São João das Almas?

¹⁵ Psychoanalysis does not work with the notion of individual in the sense of unity. Regarding this knowledge, what exists is the subject divided in conscious subject and unconscious subject, respectively, the subject of the utterance (*I go, I live*, subject expressed in the speech) and the subject of enunciation (subject of the content that is on the utterance, but which is unknown, repressed). The first says that he wants, the second wants, the one who enunciates does not know about the other; and the psychoanalytic therapy is dedicated precisely to the highest amount of knowledge possible about this (not) knowing: “The self-conscious being, transparent to itself, which classical theory places at the centre of human experience, appears, from this perspective, as a manner of locating, in the world of objects, this being of desire who cannot perceive itself as such, except in its lack. If this lack of being, it perceived that it is lacking being, and that the being is there, in all the things which do not know themselves to be. And it imagines itself, for its part, as one more object, for it sees no other difference. It says - I’m the one WILD knows that I am. Unfortunately, if it does perhaps know that it is, it knows nothing at all about what it is. That is what is lacking in every being” (LACAN, 1991, p.224; see footnote 12).

¹⁶ See footnote 13.

¹⁷ Resistance and censorship are not equivalent terms. Freud states that resistance is everything that disturbs the continuation of the analyst’s work, i.e., resistance is all that is opposed to the meeting between analyst and patient. It may be psychological, social or casual, as the death of a family member or a change of city. Censorship also prevents analysis, but this opposition is full of meaning, which contributes to the understanding of the subject of the unconscious mind, because behind a censorship there is its message. The French psychoanalyst exemplifies such relationship with the dream of the British subject who considered the king an idiot, but did not know that by law he could not express his opinion, under the penalty of being decapitated, and finally he dreams that he is without his head. However, both terms (resistance and censorship) have a strong relationship because censorship is a quality of resistance, and it is possible to talk about censorship resistance: “The resistance is everything which is opposed, in a general sense, to the work of analysis. Censorship is a special qualification of this resistance”, summarizes Lacan (1991 p.134; see footnote 12).

In the scenario built for the final departure, Ida stays. Why does that happen? The desire of getting in the train decreases when she faces censorship, metaphorized by the public opinion, condemning the case of the swindler (comment soon) and that, consequently, would reprove Ida's attitudes. At first she does not care about the disclosure of her actions, "they are surely commenting, soon the whole town would know. This assumption left her indifferent, as if all *that was about someone else*"¹⁸ (CARDOSO, 2000, p.251).¹⁹

Nonetheless, her act of leaving the train platform, under the disapproving eyes of society, shows another version of the story. Concurrently with the arrival of the train, some old ladies gather and talk about a scandal, "one of the old ladies boldly stared Ida [...] the quizzical look of the woman *was not unnoticed by her*. She passed under the lamp and hit the gate to the road [...] slowly walked along the cars and returned to the starting point" (p.253, emphasis added).²⁰ The sentence is interesting, not only because of the ambiguity of the word "start," since the "starting point" can be read as the split point (for the subject?), but also because it anticipates the end of the novel, when Ida will return home. What the narrator does not anticipate, and the reader will only find out when reading it, is that Ida will not give up this fight of not returning home. She will complete a double path of *resistance*, in the psychoanalytic sense of preventing the wish of being fulfilled (since her trajectory is marked by failed movements for achieving her civil and psychic liberties), and in the current meaning of opposition, fighting in defense of something, of refusal.

The word "resistance" seems to have a contradiction in it. It is, however, in this node that desire tries to be held. In other words, if stopping the fulfillment of the desire is a resistance of the conscious subject who censors, repeating is the subject who wants to insist. From this point of view, what generates repetition is the resistance of the split subject regarding the fulfillment of her desires. Transposing in literary terms, Ida wants to leave and because of that she decides to stay; however, as desire is indestructible, it

¹⁸ From now on, every time a reference to *Mãos vazias* appears in the text, it will be in quotes, but, to avoid repetition, there will be no more indication of the edition, which will always be from 2000, from *Civilização Brasileira*.

Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "de certo estariam comentando, em breve toda a cidade saberia. Essa suposição deixou-a indiferente, como se tudo aquilo *se referisse a outra pessoa*".

¹⁹ The emphasis is used to highlight the textual suggestion of the uncentered subjectivity.

²⁰ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "uma das velhas fitava Ida atrevidamente [...] o olhar zombeteiro que a mulher lançou *não lhe passou despercebido*. Passou sob o lampião imóvel e ganhou a porteira da estrada [...] caminhou vagarosamente junto aos carros e voltou ao ponto de partida".

insists, making her wish and repeat the movement wish-resist-wish / leave-stay-leave indefinitely, or even to the (suggestion of) death.

Lacan summarizes the issue: “the resistance of the subject [...] becomes at that moment repetition in act” (1998, p.51).²¹ Thus, the psychoanalytic knowledge indicates a reading of Ida's path beyond the unlikelihood and immorality issues (paths taken by most literary criticism of the work), enabling the interpretation of her journey, especially the *second move*, thanks to the repetition of concepts and the signifying chain.²²

In *Mãos vazias*, the fact that Ida is constantly arriving and departing, returning “to the starting point,” in a circular way, is a repetition which form a signifying chain that can be interpreted, as this act represents the way the novel is told [by the way, Lacan says that “*acting-out* does call upon interpretation, but the question is one of knowing whether

²¹ LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Book XI. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1998, p.51.

²² In Freud studies, repetition is one of the representations of the repressed material that can circumvent the resistance and the conscious censorship. In repetition, this material puts on the most varied forms, or rather the forms it is allowed to put on, such as physical symptoms, social behaviors, speech gaps among others. They are all expressions of repression and help in psychoanalyst treatment, especially in cases in which the subject cannot remember the possible scenes of the original trauma — the less someone can remember, the more things repeat. Since the Dora (1905) case, Freud says that the subject can, instead of remembering, act out, restate through actions the moment of pain so well stored in memory, to the point of it seeming to be forgotten. In his text Remembering, repeating and working (1914), the psychoanalyst concludes: “we may say that the patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing he is repeating it” (FREUD, S. Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through, 1914/1950, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 12. Translated by Joan Riviere. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976, p.150). However, in an article from 1920, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, the question persists from another angle: how can the subject repeat something that makes him ill, for example, in dreams with traumatic scenes or nightmares? The question is important because it is in a seeming contradiction with the Freudian assumption that the dream is the fulfillment of a desire. How can anyone want to suffer? Freud's answer is that repetition promotes reexperiencing, recreating the trauma and giving the dreamer a new chance to take control and find another route for her fate. In his *Book XI*, however, Lacan points out that, since the subject is divided, there is no way to know who is in control: “To master the painful event, someone may say—but who masters, where is the master here, to be mastered? Why speak so hastily when we do not know precisely where to situate the agency that would undertake this operation of mastery?” (LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Book XI. Translated by Alain Sheridan. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1998, p.51). For the French psychoanalyst, more important than recognizing the repetition commands is Freud's proposal that repetition is a phenomenon consisting of the symbolic material of the subject. He adds that, in addition to being derived from the subject, repetition makes him what he is: “Since this repetition is symbolic repetition, it turns out that the symbol's order can no longer be conceived of there as constituted by man but must rather be conceived of as constituting him” (LACAN, J. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W W Norton & Company, 2002, p.34). It is in its condition of double determination that repetition is the greatest puzzle, according to Lacan (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Book XI. Translated by Alain Sheridan. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1998). Repetition is the core concept for Lacan's signifying chain: circular movements of an element that is repeated, producing effects and articulating the other components, thereby forming the chain mentioned. See the Seminar on *The Purloined Letter* (LACAN, J. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W W Norton & Company, 2002).

the interpretation is possible” (2014, p.125)].²³ A strong indication of this way of writing is the verb *to leave* — a constant movement in Ida's path — being part of her name. The signifier IDA has many senses that converge to the suggestion that this woman-subject is linked to the change of place.

IDA is the feminine participle of the verb *to go* in Portuguese, denoting among its many meanings the ideas of movement, passage from one place to another, departure, withdrawal and death, or simply “act or movement of going,”²⁴ as it is in the dictionary. However, it should be noted that Ida is not the only one, nor the first character of Lúcio marked by the obsessive thinking of displacement.

The need of getting around, of traveling, of exploring new places and especially of moving is always present in Lúcio Cardoso's characters. The place where they live, a small town in Minas Gerais or the lively Lapa in Rio de Janeiro, is identified by them as the reason of the easy life that they take. This theme is present in both the narrator of *Maleita*, who, not satisfied with visiting new cities, has to found them, and in Jaques, from *Dias perdidos* [Lost Days], whose excuse to make a living leads him to run through the backcountry world in search of satisfaction. Furthermore, in *Inácio*, much of the title-character glamour comes from its disappearance, and Rogério, inspired by the father, greatly values the ability of mobility. Finally, it should be noted that the mysterious and alluring aura of the traveler (namesake text) comes from the mystique surrounding the man constantly on the move.

With regard to female characters, this characteristic takes on greater and more revealing proportions of the melancholic atmosphere of the author's work, as either they cannot move, or, when they can, they have to face great social barriers coming from marriage, local society, and the fact that they cannot financially support themselves, among others. This is, for example, Marta's case (*Salgueiro*), who yearns and is able to leave Salgueiro hill, but she has to go against her whole family and work as a prostitute to stay in the city. Rio de Janeiro is also the promised land of Diana (*Dias perdidos*) and Nina (*CCA*), but marriage, financial problems and bad health prevent them from definitely leaving the surroundings of Serra da Mantiqueira, the scenario of Madalena's unforgettable horseback ridings (*A luz no subsolo*) with her chariot: for a few moments,

²³ LACAN, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Anxiety*. Book X. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W W Norton & Company, 2014, p.125.

²⁴ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “ato ou movimento de ir(-se)” (FERREIRA, 2010).

during the journey from her mother's house to her husband's house, she experiences freedom. Insisting on displacement as the hope for a better future, Lúcio mirrors in his prose one of the most common aspirations of women from the early twentieth century: a change of environment in order to be happy. Perrot, a scholar studying this subject, stresses that “the offset is surely a necessary condition, certainly, but not enough for the change and even for the release. It indicates a willingness to break through that creates possibilities for a future” (2005, p.297).²⁵

Ida is an example of this universe because of the way her drama is developed and the fate inscribed in her name since the associations with the verb *to go* are reinforced by the idea of restlessness and the desire for change, linked to the act of being busy or working in a laborious activity. They are all indicated in the Germanic origin of the name Ida, which in old Norse is *idjha*, meaning *to work* (NASCENTES, 1952). Even the maternal facet of the character of *Mãos vazias* is in the nymph who raised Zeus — Ida — who also named the mountain or the hill where god grew up safely. It is also curious remembering that Ida is the real name of Dora, a patient who was the focus in the article *Fragments of an analysis of a case of hysteria — Dora*, from 1905, a classic text in which the Viennese psychoanalyst reports the analysis of Ida Bauer. Freud reviewed his procedures with the young woman and admitted his mistakes only twenty years later. The analogy proves to be true in other similarity between Freud's Ida/Dora and Lúcio's Ida: both are diagnosed by young physicians interested in the “diseases of the soul.”²⁶ The impact of finding an emotional doctor deeply touches Ida: “All her thoughts revolved around the words said by the doctor. It was the first time she heard one of them speaking about the soul” (p.271).²⁷

²⁵ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “o deslocamento é condição necessária, certamente, mas não suficiente, para a mudança e até mesmo para a liberação, indica uma vontade de ruptura que cria as possibilidades de um futuro”.

²⁶ The reader may find strange the association of the word “soul” with the writings of Freud, but as Bettelheim explains, the term is present throughout Freud's work, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) to *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1926). According to Bettelheim, “By evoking the image of the soul and all its associations, Freud is emphasizing our common humanity” (BETTELHEIM, Bruno. *Freud and Man's Soul*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983, p.71). However, the translation of Freud's work into English replaces the word “soul” by “human mind” or “mental,” according to Bettelheim, probably to make Freud's text more scientific. Obviously I am not trying here to find equivalence between the term “soul” for Freud and Lúcio Cardoso, because one cannot deny Lúcio's religious background and despise Freud's atheism. However, by eliminating the radicalization of each of them, it is possible to make a connection between the use of “soul” by both in the sense of something designating the mysterious and defining portion of the human being.

²⁷ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Todos os seus pensamentos giravam em torno das palavras que o médico lhe dissera. Era a primeira vez que ouvia um deles falar em alma”.

In this context, the name Ida becomes the signifier of the chain as it is an articulator of senses along with the woman named by it. This is true as long as we agree with Lacan that the signifier is not just someone's sign, “but in the same moment of the signifying principle, of the signifying agency, to make a sign of someone — to ensure that the someone for whom the sign designates something assimilates this someone to himself, that this someone himself also becomes this signifier.”²⁸ Thus, it is not just the word IDA that represents or names Ida, because the woman also represents and “names” the signifier of IDA. It is in this sense that the signifying chain repeats itself, simultaneously determined and determining the subjects going through it.²⁹ However, if in the signifier instance the represented and the representation do not get apart, who defines whom? Alternatively, by bringing the matter to the field of interest outlined here, how can Ida be configured in a field with no definition?

Under the Lacanian perspective, the signifier is something whose meaning is made by the movement it engenders.³⁰ In that context, it is not defined as an intelligible unity, but as an articulator.³¹ Thus, Ida, being a signifier, can only be understood as a being in motion, and because she is constantly changing places, she cannot be conceptualized outside the movement. In other words, without its trajectory, Ida is undefined. In turn, if we agree with the idea of desire as being unfulfilled, her trajectory defines her only as a subject of desire, i.e., a subject of absence.

²⁸ Here is the full quote: “A signifier, is it simply to represent something for someone, which is the definition of the sign? It is that but not simply that, because I added something else the last time when I recalled for you the function of the signifier, which is that this signifier is not simply, as I might say, *to make a sign to someone*, but in the same moment of the signifying principle, of the signifying agency, *to make a sign of someone*. To ensure that the someone for whom the sign designates something assimilates this someone to himself, that this someone himself also becomes this signifier.” (See footnote 13.)

²⁹ There are countless references by Lacan to the importance of the signifier. It is worth mentioning one of them: “If what Freud discovered, and rediscovers ever more abruptly, has a meaning, it is that the signifier's displacement determines subjects' acts, destiny, refusals, blindnesses, success, and fate, regardless of their innate gifts and instruction, and irregardless of their character or sex; and that everything pertaining to the psychological pre-given follows willy-nilly the signifier's train, like weapons and baggage” (LACAN, J. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W W Norton & Company, 2002, p.21).

³⁰ Lacan addresses the issue of the automatism of repetition as a signifying chain: “Here then, the letter's singularity, reduced to its simplest expression, is ‘simple and odd’, as we are told on the very first page of the story; and the letter is, as the title indicates, the true subject of the tale. Since it can be made to take a detour, it must have a trajectory which is proper to it—a feature in which its impact as a signifier is apparent here. For we have learned to conceive of the signifier as sustaining itself only in a displacement comparable to that found in electronic news strips or in the rotating memories of our machines-that-thinklike-men, this because of the alternating operation at its core that requires it to leave its place, if only to return to it by a circular path.” (LACAN, J. *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W W Norton & Company, 2002, p.21).

³¹ “The signifier is an articulation in a chain, not an identifiable unit” (JOHNSON, 1977, p.495).

3 Misunderstanding Speech: The Femininity Enigma

Literary criticism dedicated to Lúcio Cardoso's works has indicated his narrator as one of the most exemplary elements of his prose to the extent that the narrator would bring together important aspects of the novelist's work, such as the divine-moralist omniscience of a narrator who tells exemplary stories of sin, guilt, grief, regret, and forgiveness.

Adonias Filho, for example, states that the hero in Lúcio Cardoso "is not an individualized person in any of his novels" (1958, p.91).³² Álvaro Lins, analyzing Lúcio's production until the mid-1940s, points out that "in the dialogues, however, we see that all characters, as different as they might be, speak often this way: in the personal way of the novelist himself" (1963, p.121).³³ Similarly, Nelly Novaes Coelho believes that "above all things, his characters seem to serve as an 'instrument' for a stronger presence: the voice of the narrator [...]" (1996, p.778).³⁴ And the work of José Américo de Miranda Barros, perhaps the only one dedicated exclusively to the narrator in Lúcio's prose, concludes that "its position [of narrator] is privileged: he has access to the inwardness of all characters" (1987 p.79).³⁵

In fact, we can agree that Lúcio's narrator at first seems to want to have complete control over his subjects and stories. One only needs to observe how often he uses omniscience and the distance created between himself and his characters through moralistic judgments.³⁶ However, the interpretation of Lúcio Cardoso's prose with

³² Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "não é uma figura individualizada em qualquer dos romances".

³³ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "nos diálogos, porém, vemos que todos os personagens, por mais diferentes que sejam, falam quase sempre dessa mesma maneira: a maneira pessoal do próprio novelista".

³⁴ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "acima de tudo suas personagens parecem servir de 'instrumento' a uma presença mais forte: a voz do narrador [...]"

³⁵ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "sua posição [a do narrador] é privilegiada: ele tem acesso à interioridade de todas as personagens".

³⁶ In *Mãos vazias* there is a small collection of them. For example, I cite the most striking ones (the text in English is followed by the original in Portuguese): "Some people come before fame as noise before floods" ["Certas pessoas precedem a fama, como o ruído antes da enchente que passa"] (p.203); "The thing is that in certain people love dresses itself with the same features as cruelty" ["É que em certas pessoas o amor se reveste dos mesmos aspectos que a crueldade"] (p.208.); "She belonged [Ida] to a women's class too proud to hide their own weaknesses" ["Pertencia [Ida] a uma classe de mulheres orgulhosas demais para esconderem as próprias fraquezas"] (p.232.); "Oh! This heroism drop that certain souls seek in the vilest acts..." ["Ah! Essa gota de heroísmo que certas almas procuram nos atos mais vis..."] (p.235.); "She [Ida] was one of those women who had her fate in her face" ["Ela [Ida] era uma dessas mulheres que trazem no rosto o seu destino"] (p.242.); "Certain souls go through years of decomposition and then it is impossible to recover the plots that were left along the way" ["Certas almas atravessam anos em decomposição e depois é impossível reter as parcelas que tombam pelo caminho"] (p.259).

emphasis on female subjects adds a new aspect to its narrator as they seem to resist to omniscience, remaining the masters of their secrets and revealing themselves only vaguely.

The narrator of *Mãos vazias* is connected to Ida. This empathy is evident both in the connection of their voices — to the point of, in certain passages, being difficult to identify the speaker, the narrator, or the main female character³⁷ — and in the effort of the narrator to configure male mediocrity, especially in Felipe. However, despite this proximity, suggesting the narrator's intention of telling Ida's story from her point of view, it is worth noticing his insistence on emphasizing the misunderstanding that surrounds her. Everyone claims to be unable to understand her. Felipe comes to the point of uttering complete inability: "There were things in Ida that [Felipe] *would never understand*" (p.226; emphasis added).³⁸ At one point of the novel, Ida becomes almost mythological due to the mystery surrounding her: "Ida began to look like a myth to Felipe. He had a vague intuition that there was in all that a *much deeper mystery than it seemed*" (p.288; emphasis added).³⁹ At each look, Ida was no longer the same: "Seeing her get in, Felipe felt dazed, *without recognizing her*. It was a strange woman the one standing before him, an Ida he had never seen in his life [...]" (p.301; emphasis added).⁴⁰ He vainly tries to question his wife: "*I cannot understand, Ida, we lived well, there was nothing missing. How could everything suddenly change like this?*" (p.303; emphasis added).⁴¹ Felipe, desperate, suspected of being the only ignorant, and Ana comforts him: "It is strange, but I [Felipe] have the impression that I am the only one who does not know Ida [...] We must, we must not lose heart! There are women like that... *Not even themselves know what*

³⁷ This happens, for example, in the following excerpts (the text in English is followed by the original in Portuguese): "Certainly [Ana] thought there was not a time as inconvenient as that for a couple's separation. Ana was one of those women who do not believe certain facts happen despite our hunches" ["Decerto [Ana] achava que nenhum momento poderia existir tão inconveniente quanto aquele para uma separação entre o casal. Ana era uma dessas mulheres que não acreditam que certos fatos se processam à revelia dos nossos pressentimentos"] (p.257.); "We only accept, from the judgment of others, that which somehow justifies our attitudes" ["Só aceitamos do julgamento dos outros o que de qualquer modo nos justifica"] (p.271). Subtly, Ida's voice is added to the narrator's. The most touching example, "Hurry, hurry, before he would return" ["Depressa, depressa, antes que ele voltasse"] (p.308), connotes his company in Ida's final run.

³⁸ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "Havia coisas em Ida que [Felipe] *nunca chegaria a compreender*".

³⁹ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "Ida começava a adquirir para Felipe o aspecto de um mito. É que vagamente tinha a intuição de existir naquilo tudo um *mistério bem mais profundo do que parecia*".

⁴⁰ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "Ao vê-la entrar, Felipe sentiu-se aturdido, *sem reconhecê-la*. Era uma mulher estranha a que estava diante dele, uma Ida como nunca vira na sua existência [...]"

⁴¹ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: "*Não posso compreender, Ida, vivíamos bem, nada nos faltava. Como de repente tudo pode ter se modificado desse modo?*"

they want” (pp.295-296; emphasis added).⁴² However, even Ana is surprised by the many personalities of her friend: “Ana had just told Ida what she had done [looked for Felipe]. She had a great deal of excuses, expecting her to react with violence, but, instead, what she found was a different, passive creature, blocked by a coldness that was at the *limits of misunderstanding*” (p.299; emphasis added).⁴³ Moreover, the doctor, representing wisdom and having the answers to questions of life and death, admits his uncertainty about Ida: “Listen, I am nothing but a poor country doctor. I do not understand these disorders... these nerves... *but it seems to me...*” (p.267; emphasis added).⁴⁴

The insecurity of Ida’s doctor refers to Freud’s and Lacan’s positioning. Freud, unable to get to a definition, lets the female enigma to poets; Lacan concludes that one can only know the woman partially because she happens inside language, and language is the space where full knowledge escapes.

The narrator of *Mãos vazias* seems to have noticed this characteristic of the female being because, while other characters cannot accept the fact of not understanding Ida, urging her to get adapted, Felipe makes her a direct request: “after all, Ida, you must settle” (p.305).⁴⁵ The narrator turns that absence of definition into a relevant element of the plot. Through the articulation of this not knowing, he is able to portray her, placing her in the area of the generating mobilization of uncertainties.

The emphasis put on Ida being misunderstood leads to the hypothesis that, in addition to describing and configuring a woman in *Mãos vazias*, there is an urgent need to make apparent the lack of understanding about her. Thus, at first the narrator is concerned about emphasizing the story of misunderstanding which permeates Ida's life.

It is in this context that the novel is narrated in two complementary tones: one made from the reflections of the other characters, showing their impressions on Ida, and the other one made from where the narrator has full powers — the plot organization, the way the story is organized, emphasizing the effects that Ida causes in her costars. It is

⁴² Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “É curioso, mas tenho [Felipe] a impressão de que sou o único que não conhece Ida [...] É preciso, é preciso não desanimar! Existem mulheres assim... *Nem elas próprias sabem o que desejam*”.

⁴³ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Ana acabava de relatar a Ida o que tinha feito [buscar Felipe]. Armazenara uma grande dose de argumentos, esperando que ela reagisse com violência e, ao contrário, o que tinha vindo encontrar era uma criatura diferente, passiva, bloqueada por uma frieza que atingia os *limites da incompreensão*”

⁴⁴ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Escute, nada sou senão um pobre médico do interior. Não compreendo esses distúrbios... esses nervos... *mas parece-me...*”

⁴⁵ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “afinal, Ida, é preciso que você se conforme”.

here that he tells his version of events to the readers: Ida can only be understood and narrated within her movement. By making Ida literally circulate, articulating the facts, the narrator emphasizes her main feature: a constant displacement, making it possible to view her only when in the action of going. To understand this sequence, it is necessary to see the order of facts from another point of view (from memory and unconscious mind). The narrator guides the reader:

Felipe forgot that the events happen just outside our expectation. Also, they are not only non-linked events, but rather they branch out in a tumultuous rise to a denouement which is able to precipitate the consequences to an extraordinary depth (CARDOSO, 2000, p.234).⁴⁶

The reader is led to consider new perspectives, because, just as the events can only be understood “at the margins of our expectation,” Ida is a female subject who articulates facts while moving and does not give them a separate meaning. In this context, one can say that, in Lúcio Cardoso’s prose, femininity is not present only as a theme, but also as an impression registered in its textual composition. Females’ intrinsic characteristic of not being definable because of their conceptualizing area (language), which is placed, by definition, outside certainty, is imprinted on Ida’s wandering nature, always escaping, fleeing definitive understanding, but at the same time articulating the chain and thus generating effects.

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⁴⁶ Excerpt in the original in Portuguese: “Felipe esquecia-se de que os acontecimentos se dão exatamente à margem da nossa expectativa. Além disso, não permanecem apenas como acontecimentos desprovidos de ligações, mas, ao contrário, ramificam-se de origem tumultuosa até um desenlace capaz de precipitar as consequências a uma extraordinária profundidade”.

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