

## **Tough Geography / *Dura geografia***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the novel *O Meu Poeta* [*My Poet*], written by the Cape Verdean author Germano Almeida, to propose an interpretation of laughter as a tool to decipher and analyze postindependence Cape Verdean society. The purpose of this essay is to identify, based on the definition of text as a discourse parody, its political and moral assumptions and colonial remnants in the authoritarianism that sustains it.

**KEYWORDS:** Cape Verde; Germano Almeida; Parody; Carnival; Laughter

### **RESUMO**

*Este artigo analisa o romance O meu poeta, do escritor cabo-verdiano Germano Almeida, para estabelecer uma proposta de leitura em que o riso se revela uma ferramenta de decifração e crítica da sociedade cabo-verdiana pós-independência. A proposta deste trabalho é identificar, a partir da definição do texto como uma paródia do discurso, seus pressupostos políticos e morais e os resquícios coloniais no autoritarismo que o sustenta.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Cabo Verde; Germano Almeida; Paródia; Carnavalização; Riso

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The intent of the present essay on *O Meu Poeta [My Poet]* (1992), by the Cape Verdean author Germano Almeida, mirrors paradoxes that will be partly its own object. As an anticipation of purposes, it is worth saying that what I will try to do is to offer, from a very specific approach, some general remarks about a novel whose multiplicities seem to be on the brink of fracturing its own structure and whose power lies precisely on the subtlety with which the author weaves an intricate web of cohesion between different paths and their vantage points towards one another. This research delimitation, in turn, results from the choice to avoid a reading that would reduce the novel to a merely functional or didactic scheme of theories whose appreciation would be conditioned to a prior knowledge of the Cape Verdean history, power structures, and political issues. That is, it aims to avoid an approach that would restrict the reach of the novel and that would simultaneously establish, with a historicist agenda, the critical intentions of the author.

Finally, I am going to attempt to demonstrate how a character (Isménia – or Isba, or even Dura) emerges as a rejection by breaking the authoritarian framework imposed by a narrator who, in trying to fit her into his moralist and naive preaching, ends up revealing the weaknesses of the *discourse* that is the cornerstone of Cape Verde's political precariousness in the postindependence period. By *discourse* we should understand a set of moral judgements that legitimize political institutions and the public intentions of those who, by claiming (either honestly or not) to adopt it, aspire to be recognized as flagbearers of these moral judgements deemed acceptable. The notion of *discourse* should not be taken rigorously, i.e., as a *stricto sensu* Bakhtinian Theory of Discourse. The *lato sensu* appropriation of the expression stems from the need to approach the linguistic construction together with the social context thus observing the relationship between two distinct ways of understanding *ideology* (VOLOŠINOV, 1973):<sup>1</sup> official and unofficial ideology, a connection situated precisely in the strata where the popular (unofficial) enunciations fuse with the dominant (official) ideology. There is, thus, one dimension of this moral set (constituting the discourse) that is integrated into the utterances agreed by the social group and that attempts to display its emitter as a subject able to represent the society which has defined such values as legitimate.

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<sup>1</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.

In *The Book of Imaginary Beings*,<sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges (2007, p.100) makes precisely the point that “the idea of a house built so that people could become lost in it is perhaps more unusual than that of a man with a bull’s head.” It is necessary that Borges give us the perspective of the labyrinth as a house so we can realize its strangeness or absurdity. The labyrinthine construction of Minos and Daedalus, made to shelter and to conceal, is so terribly a trace of human mind that the twentieth century literature is still contemplating it, revealing its structure repeated in our contemporary social organizations between old amusements and new truisms.

The labyrinth in *O Meu Poeta* is the discourse of an unreliable narrator, as conceived by Wayne Booth (1961) and explored by Paul Ricoeur (1988). Germano Almeida’s inventiveness suppressed its walls, turning them into a set of imaginary demarcation lines tracing winding paths by which losing oneself, besides delaying the arrival *ad infinitum*, also means finding new points of view towards other paths. The Secretary, fantasizing walls, incorporates into his text (correspondence to the Publisher) the biography he is writing; he incorporates Vasco’s diaries and general opinions exposed by either his endorsement or denial (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.28). He incorporates the Poet’s poems and opinions and, in this multiplicity, walks - bit by bit and through multiple paths - the labyrinth inside which these discourses can be glimpsed - by anyone who does not partake of his imaginary walls - always through a perspective imposed by the Secretary himself. That which I have called in *Revolução, camarada porco!* [*Revolution, pig comrade!*] (BORTOLOTTI, 2015) *multiple instantiations* repeats itself here in a new arrangement. In Manuel Rui’s tale, each instance of country’s representation (the building, the man, the pig) allows the identification of an intrinsic characteristic in their relationship to the following one. This structure fulfills the function, identified by Mikhail Bakhtin in his studies on carnivalesque humor, of repealing the point of view of the whole, the impartiality of a third party to which “there is no place (...) in the world of becoming” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.416).<sup>3</sup> In *O Meu Poeta*, this structure is horizontal, but fulfills a similar function. What is fundamental to these observations is, however, that horizontality here results from the characteristics of this unreliable narrator and, as we will see further, points to his immature beliefs, which are also reflections of the beliefs of the social context.

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<sup>2</sup> BORGES, J. *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

By incorporating other discourses into the text, the Secretary, denying his manipulation, claims to be forced to clarify them, “replacing the truth” (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.28).<sup>4</sup> His *intention*, therefore, is to create a vertical instantiation of the multiple voices around the Poet’s public life and Mindelo’s social life.<sup>5</sup> In her article *O riso do Meu Poeta: o riso do meu autor* (2006b, p.67), Jane Tutikian brings attention to this “effective demiurgic condition”<sup>6</sup> of a narrator who, in a position of ulteriority, brings order to the chaotic substance of the represented world. By writing about the very text he is producing, the Secretary’s winding narrative paths weave this maze, allowing the appraisal of different points of view that, despite their existence only in a framework imposed by him, have their importance exacerbated as they reveal themselves biased, imprecise, dishonest, or simply insufficient.

If the demiurge is a fraud, his world must be put to the test. His world, a literary object, bears, however, horrifying similarities to the real world to which the text alludes. The Secretary’s intention to subordinate the remaining discourses to his sham authority fails. Germano Almeida’s parody, therefore, is not an assertive opinion about what is or what is not true in a certain political or social situation, unlike the references that the secretary solely approaches with bias (the rumors that are mentioned as a pretext for their own denying). What I propose here is a reading of *O Meu Poeta* as criticism not towards the political institutions themselves, but rather towards the *discourse* that sustains them.

Now, for a long time, at least since labyrinths stopped being the prisons (or houses) of mythical creatures and became bucolic pastimes in parks and gardens, it has been known that the wonders promised to those who solve them are usually a false premise to the adventure of solving them. That is why *O Meu Poeta* has less success as a metaphor of a destiny, of a present or of a past, than as a rigorous description of irrationalities upon which we build our institutions. The novel’s depth stems from the notion that the narrator (the Secretary) is a subject fully devoid of irony, because, as observed Gilles Deleuze in his *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997, p.68),<sup>7</sup> on *Bartleby*, “the comic is always literal.” And it is in the literality of the Secretary’s writings that we

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<sup>4</sup> Source text: “repondo a verdade.”

<sup>5</sup> Here we can see an example of the dialectic relationship between different ideological sets.

<sup>6</sup> Source text: “condição demiúrgica efetiva.”

<sup>7</sup> DELEUZE, G. *Essays Clinical and Critical*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

have found indications of the lapsed values of a society whose ethical precepts must be scrutinized. Thus, this misguided biographer tells, literally, that there exists a country where a poet is raised to literary glory as a translator of people's dramas and desires, who is made their representative, deputy and ambassador, not only by his cultural relevance but also by his moral dignity. The Secretary knows that the Poet is a naive scoundrel, of thoughtless and stout political virulence, and it is perhaps only through this awareness that the reader can also share this knowledge. However, each revelation on the humbug that the Poet is is made possible by the unmeasured efforts of the Secretary to conceal it and to be convinced of the opposite. Whether we find ways of disavowing it in each of his manipulations, that does not come from a fine, careful and strategic irony, an irony impelled by his ethical or intellectual virtues, but from a side-effect of the belief that his costly expenditure of energy was enough to consolidate the labyrinth's walls, making it impossible, then, to see what happens beyond.

Germano Almeida's text contains no overstatements, and the Secretary's contains no ironies. In the literary text, the recipe for the absurd is to connect two concomitant truths (on the one hand, the undeniable fraud that the hero is and, on the other, his acclamation), and this recipe is mirrored in the world. The coexistence of these truths, unthinkable in the Secretary's idealized world, is banal in our political, religious, and social organizations. Transforming reality into humor requires an arrangement capable of disguising it under the obvious and then revealing it for the sake of surprise. Germano Almeida turns the character into a solution to his intricate puzzle by giving the narrating Secretary the role of *assuming to himself the faults and, chiefly, the illusions of a society*.

Henri Bergson wrote that "the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human" (1914, p.3).<sup>8</sup> By introducing humor into Cape Verde's literature, Germano Almeida reconfigures the ways literature plays its critical role. The drama of the sea surrounding the isles, imposing permanence and evasions,<sup>9</sup> and the drama of rain

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<sup>8</sup> BERGSON, H. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914.

<sup>9</sup> Poema do Mar, by Jorge Barbosa (1989): "The sea! / inside us all, in the Morna, / in the brown girls' bodies, / in the black women's quick thighs, / in the desire for travel that remains in people's dreams! // This incessant invitation / Sea makes us to evasion! // This despair of wishing to leave / and having to stay!" Source text: "O Mar! / dentro de nós todos, no canto da Morna, / no corpo das raparigas morenas, / nas coxas ágeis das pretas, / no desejo da viagem que fica em sonhos de muita gente! // Este convite de toda hora / que o Mar nos faz para a evasão! / Este desespero de querer partir / e ter que ficar!"

scarcity and soil dryness are incorporated into the man who, subsuming the dramas of the environment and history, became a figure to whom we cannot, at least for a few instants, lend any kindness. As Bergson observes: “I do not mean that we could not laugh at a person who inspires us with pity, for instance, or even with affection, but in such a case we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity” (1914, p.4). The laughter, therefore, demands the suspension of kindness, which must give room to an appreciation of intelligence. The option for humor makes it so that the man, inserted in a reality determinant of the evolutions of his actions and ethics, is comprehended *within* and *by* these circumstances, and also as an individual for whom there must remain a radically powerful principle of liberty, as these circumstances, although glimpsed and conceived, shall not reduce him to a mere victim, to a subject at whom you cannot laugh because he only inspires pity.

Bergson’s remarks interest us for two different, yet intimately related and interdependent, reasons: firstly, they propose the text’s direction to a rationality that the text itself does not contain, and secondly, as they place every flaw and mistake of a society into an individual, they allow us to observe that the parody exerts humor in Germano Almeida’s text as it assigns, to a collective conception, the human characteristics that should, in Bergson’s terms, make it laughable.

But for the novel’s success, these reductions cannot be diminished to merely allegorical reproductions. There is a *momentary rupture between entirely similar discourses*: that of a society, and that of a man, both rather accommodated with the partial successes of a political and social progression, which resume reactionary practices and positionings, living the neurotic fantasy of a completeness whose protagonisms are nothing but conveniences. The rupture must be only momentary so that the literary text, by allowing criticisms to the narrator, may bring them back to society. As remarked by Margaret Rose (1993), there is incongruity between the copy and the copied, an inversion from which critical possibility emerges. The discourse of a social and political class and that of the Secretary get split briefly and only in what is necessary for the recognition of the deceitful and illusory.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “The borders between art and reality are indeed challenged” – it is worth observing, however, the author’s reservation - “but only because the borders are still there – or so we think” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.221), once there is the purpose to differentiate this *proximity* between real and fiction from a synthesis between literature and life to the point of suppressing the differences.

The syllogism that allows the secretary to deny his intuition and recognize the Poet's greatness has, as a first premise, an empty imposition of authority: everything the authority says is true. Authority says that the Poet is wonderful. Therefore, it is true that the Poet is wonderful (ALMEIDA, 1992, pp.40-41). Over the text, there is no lack of evidence for the precariousness of this first premise compelling the Secretary to concede to the literary quality of his friend's and biographee's poems: "Freedom of speech, you say? They don't have it enough, then? What they really need is jail, spanking, police after them. The freedom to sing, dance, serenade is not enough, then" (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.80),<sup>11</sup> says the Poet towards *The Herbivorous Revolt*, his first chronicle to be published in the prestigious *Voz di Povo*. The very association between the publication of a complimentary review on his poems and a visit from his beautiful wife to one of magazine's directors suggests that the incorruptibility of the prestigious medium may be overrated.

I have insisted on a reading towards a parody of discourse because metadiscourses are at the forefront of Germano Almeida's novel: the Secretary's reflections about how to better tell the Poet's story and, chiefly, the disparity between the supposedly frank text of his letters to the Publisher and the text in the biography is constant throughout the novel. The institutional-political context, hinted at in a few particulars of the Poet's climb to power, appears always tied to the very discourses that sustain it, being assigned to it the irrevocable legitimacy of the fight for independence (ALMEIDA, 1992, pp.78-79).

Multiple discourses appear framed by the Secretary's whims;<sup>12</sup> in his attempt to redress or endorse, he becomes, himself, an authority. Several times in his writings to the Publisher, the biographer claims the right to establish the other discourses' truth or not. But the reader, acquainted with his nature, sees that the Secretary is not capable of the soundest of reasoning, for sometimes facts are missing, sometimes honesty is

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<sup>11</sup> Source text: "Liberdade de expressão, dizes tu? Então já não têm a suficiente? O que de facto precisam é de cadeia, pau, polícia atrás deles. Então não lhes chega a liberdade de cantar, dançar, fazer serenatas".

<sup>12</sup> In some cases, the Secretary will remark the occasion on which he "would like to pass, but [the Poet] demands to be shown perfectly described and registered" (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.64). And yet, as the text given to the reader is not the biography itself, but the biographer's correspondence to the Publisher, we will have the biographer's vision overtaking the narrative. A couple of pages later, one reads: "But at last and just between the two of us, what he wants, in fact, is to see himself on stage" (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.66). Source text (p.64): "sobre a qual queria passar, mas que ele faz muita questão que aqui apareça perfeitamente descrita e retratada." Source text (p.66) "Mas por fim e cá entre nós, o que ele de facto quer é ver-se em palco."

missing. It is in this weakness from the subject who has the pretension to assess the truths of the world that the other discourses slip away, acquiring a new dimension and restituting the world's multiple voices. Germano Almeida displays his critical prowess by unleashing these voices - right or wrong, regardless - from the fetters of a narrator whose literary success resides on a very specific kind of failure, both ethical and intellectual, which cannot be a mere allegory of what it represents, lest it reduces the novel to debauchery.

The humor introduced by Germano Almeida to Cape Verdean literature breaks away from the idea of man limited by environment and history; additionally, it breaks away from the remnants of colonial authoritarianism that attempts to monopolize truths, subordinating reason to political authorities and moralisms. By reproducing the *discourse* sustaining the country's political sorrows, the author reveals through humor the gaps through which innumerable possibilities of reinterpretation of the world escape, possibilities set free from the prison of the frame, which parody contests by merely relativizing.

I believe it is very safe to say that *O Meu Poeta* can be read as a *discourse* parody, and exploring its constitutive elements, through a formal perspective or even from its contents, would yield a number of different approaches. For the purposes of this essay, however, I want to focus specifically on a characteristic that, for the sake of offering general considerations, comes in handy because, as it portrays the shortcomings inside the *discourse* that aspires to be superior, this characteristic also reveals moral assumptions imposed upon the Secretary's reasoning during his costly attempt to praise the Poet's glory and truthfulness.

Paula Gândara (2002, p.75) pointed to the fact that "one of the characteristics of postmodernist writing in general, and of Germano Almeida's writings in particular, is the ability to juxtapose paradoxes."<sup>13</sup> Her concern about emphasizing that this confluence does not come from "reconciling them, but making them inhabit the same space,"<sup>14</sup> is key to comprehend that the tensions of these antagonisms produce an identity that is not, in any way, a Hegelian synthesis.

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<sup>13</sup> Source text: "uma das características da escrita pós-modernista em geral, e de Germano Almeida especificamente, é a capacidade de fazer confluír paradoxos."

<sup>14</sup> Source text: "não necessariamente conciliando-os mas simplesmente fazendo-os habitar o mesmo espaço."



The same relationships between opposites that Gândara identifies in Germano Almeida's text are found by Jane Tutikian in Cape Verdean society itself.<sup>15</sup> Referring to the motto "must leave wishing to stay and must stay wishing to leave,"<sup>16</sup> the researcher formulates that "this dilemma is part of the archipelago's mental structure" (TUTIKIAN, 2006a, pp.60-61).<sup>17</sup> Now, evoking it means introducing the constant drama of scarcity and its consequences both into the identity of a people and into its very perception of the world and of itself.

What we will see now is the distancing between *discourse* and reality by identifying that the confluence of these paradoxes, strongly constitutive of Cape Verdean identity, is rejected by the Secretary who, in the condition of reproducing the *discourse* that legitimize political institutions in the text, needs to cleanse it from the tensions that could possibly threaten its idealistic stiffness and constancy. If paradoxes are the real world's striking expression of its complex reality, for the fantasy world of neurotics, they are its refutation.

If the Secretary is going to incorporate the mistakes of a society, it is Dura who will tell the truth of apparent opposites, refuting the split idealizations with which the Secretary intends to decipher the world. The narrator cannot conceive the possibility that the Poet is, simultaneously, both the literary and political pride of the nation and a fraud, and forces himself to operate a disjunction that must result in only one of the two terms (it is either political and literary pride or a fraud). He validates the former appealing to the authority of *Voz di Povo* magazine and disregards the latter as if both had irreconcilable incompatibilities. The Secretary does not realize that there is no incompatibility, or that it is not necessary to be a fraud in order also to be proud: fraud pertains to undue reputation, not to quality. The bad poet who has no prestige is only a bad poet, not a fraud.

The Secretary needs to make a choice between two predicates that he thinks are antagonistic: to be a *fraud* or to be *people's hero*. We have already observed that being people's hero is not, in any way, a status impeded by fraud; there is, then, an assumption in this formulation, and it is a straightforward argument. It seems clear, even to the

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<sup>15</sup> Pierre Rivas (1985, p.292) has also identified this dilemma as a paradoxical composition in the Cape Verdean identity.

<sup>16</sup> Source text: "ter de partir querendo ficar e o querer partir tendo de ficar."

<sup>17</sup> Source text: "Esse dilema faz parte da estrutura mental do arquipélago."

Secretary himself, that people can be deluded about heroes (for instance, the Poet's indignation with all the "energy disrupted in memory of a man [John Lennon] who is not even known in the islands" (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.65)).<sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>We conclude, then, that it is not the people who ensure legitimacy to the status of heroism. As we have seen here, it is rather *Voz di Povo's* review that invalidates the biographer's aesthetical judgements, who, in turn, starts to recognize, through the opinion offered by the magazine, the authority to say that the Poet is indeed a great writer. The disjunction occurs, then, between being a *fraud* or being a *legitimate hero* – a hero of the people, but legitimized by the institutions that, *according to the Secretary*, are the legitimating institutions. Now, even if it is reasonable to conceive of the possibility of an individual elevated to the status of a national hero despite his being a fraud, the qualification of legitimacy forces both the Secretary and the reader to operate this disjunction as exclusive. It is either fraudulent or legitimate. The disjunction is exceptionally exclusive, and its tautological formulation conditions the limitation: the truth of one of the disjunct terms implies necessarily the negation of the other, since they are contradictions. It is illegitimate (a fraud) or it is legitimate (not a fraud). To the secretary, *Voz di Povo's* opinion ensures the truth of the second term (not a fraud). The reader, who surpasses the Secretary's limited view, that of a prisoner in his fantasy walls, operates the same disjunction and obtains, from an inverse polarization of the disjunct terms, a distinct result from the one upon which the biographer will produce his persistent defense of the Poet.

The Secretary will do the same to Dura. This character interests us especially because, along the novel, her psychological constitution, actions and wishes are going to be freed from the repeated attempts and reaffirmations of the Secretary, who insists on reducing her to one of the terms of an exclusive disjunction, a disjunction from which he assigns his truths to the world. However, beyond constantly escaping the narrator's proposed framing, demeaning him in the text for parodial effect, Dura will also show us the role that a naive, authoritarian and patriarchal morality plays in the mentality of

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<sup>18</sup> Source text: "energia desbaratada em memória de um homem [John Lennon] que nem sequer era conhecido das Ilhas."

<sup>19</sup> Although it is the Poet who attacks the commotion with the foreign singer, his biographer does not remark any necessary incompatibility in the accusation made by the biographee.

those who, when faced with what their narrow moral limits convert into antagonism, will need to forcibly operate a disjunction that negates one of its terms.

With Dura, the disjunction operated by the Secretary in his argument seems less valid. If, in the first case, the reader could preserve the exclusive structure and arrive at a different conclusion, namely, the Poet is a fraud, in the following case it seems that the Secretary's and the reader's conclusion may be the same (Dura's good value and definitive importance). There are, however, divergences between the polarity of each premise. For the Secretary, the Poet's wife seems authorized to feminine raptures that are merely temperamental (such as burying her nails into the flesh in a moment of outrage (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.30)). In case there is the possibility of a more definitive action - and through sexual channels - taken by Dura, aiming the Poet's ascent towards institutional, literary and political prestige, it is necessary to repeal it. Why? So that her moral nobility is not defiled? To sever her from any active merit in the Poet's poetic and political career? The disjunction, which granted the poet the literary genius that, in turn, justified his prestige, must deny Dura the role that is beyond that of a dedicated, loving and mostly understanding wife. Dura is, then, a *good wife* or *something else*. But what then? A deceiving adulterer? - considering that her potential adultery would have been extremely advantageous to both the Poet and the Secretary? An opportunist? - if her probable actions were key to the meager glory about which both the biographer and biographee boast? The Poet and the Secretary's deceptions and opportunisms comprise their rather unconvincing accountability to honesty. Occasional slips, always cushioned, is justified by a pressing need to make *see* a larger truth; in order to replace its wholesale truth, the best (or shortest, or most convenient) path may be through some retail lies. One waives sincerity in favor of honesty - or vice-versa, depending on how they want to mobilize the signifiers in order to justify their ambitions. However, what is a customary practice in the political lives of these two men, namely transgression while insuring the presumption of dignity, seems to be denied to Dura. Dura, who was fated to poverty and political and social proscription due to gender, birthplace, economical condition, the war, horoscope and all other circumstances, has the protagonism of her own ascension negated. With so many setbacks in her path, Dura shaped her fate by shaping first a man who, complicit with these molds, benefited from gains and vanities that he managed to extract from his wife's resolution.

Both the Poet and the Secretary, by transgressing in search of a purpose, relativizing the transgressions in such way that it becomes impossible to quantify how much betrayal and dishonesty (either ethical, matrimonial, intellectual or political) there is, entail, in absentia, the circumstances which thwart their judgements towards Dura, to whom the silence becomes a powerful voice. The world we glimpse through Dura's action is different from the world revealed by the Secretary's discourse: if the former infringes through action, thus in the present and to the future, reaping the results of her choices, the latter infringes through the imaginary sterility of a past that he believes to be able to shift along the convenience of others' hypocrisies. This difference between action and discourse is expressly denounced in the text when the Poet flips it to accuse another character, also a woman, saying that the Publisher was *preaching* the revolution, all the while he, in turn, was *making* it (ALMEIDA, 1992, p.35).

Each time the biographer introduces himself as the Poet's personal Secretary, his dignity is tributary to the very dignity of the one he works for and the institutions that legitimize him. Denying Dura her protagonism does not only mean to morally settle the role of wife, but also to reserve, for the Poet and thus for himself, the protagonism of their success. The disjunction imposed by the Secretary to Dura, so that one is able to extract an epistemological value from it, stems from the misguided assumptions of this narrator. The truth or falsehood of each of the terms of the disjunction does not condition, in any way, the truth or falsehood of the other term. The disjunctive *or* applied to Dura is a differentiating function to which matters are connected, matters that, not being necessarily similar, are neither necessarily antagonistic. To operate, in a limitative character, a dysfunction between terms that are not contradictory in themselves demands one to assume passively the moral suppositions that antagonize its terms. The discourse produced is also a discourse that reclaims and accepts old formulations.<sup>20</sup> For comic effect, the Secretary produces, with his conveniences and

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<sup>20</sup> In *Velhas identidades novas* [*New old identities*] Tutikian remarks: "the author proposes a general demystification of the very process of remythification, stemming from the apprehension of reality by naively realist groups - represented by the poet - finding in themselves explicative principle, beyond the ideological sacralization, inside which they place the identity by negation or camouflage of historical contingencies, which leads to the ad infinitum repetition of anachronistic and populist discourses" (2006a, pp.54-55). Source text: "o autor propõe a desmistificação geral do próprio processo de remitificação, a partir da apreensão da realidade pelos grupos ingenuamente realistas – representados pelo Poeta – encontrando neles mesmos seu princípio explicativo, além da sacralização ideológica em que colocam a identidade pela negação ou camuflagem das contingências históricas, o que implica a repetição ad infinitum de discursos anacrônicos e populistas."

vanities, the discourse that a society echoes and replicates in each of its engenderings. Similarly, the sterile Poet simply reproduces discourses whose personalisms attempt to reclaim aspects of originality.

The notion that political representatives must be men of high nobility emphasizes another nuance of this personalism that meddles with the public sphere: as if the nobility and the allure of the institutions were a given; one must not perfect them, rationalize them, but rather honor them, bestowing them to men who are at their level. In *O Meu Poeta*, the wretched Secretary was given the task to operate not only the support of this idea, but also, in a roundabout way, its recantation. Thus, he shows himself as a neurotic man, whose very passion retreats into a state of discursal-reminiscential euphoria, which he pours over the Publisher, his beloved, between cravings and sorrows, without, nonetheless, ever truly striving to possess it.<sup>21</sup> The Secretary, who experiences his love just through discourse, and never otherwise, experiences the dignity, ethical values and idealization of the public institutions.

If the past is overly painful or humiliating, the subject plots a new one. The illusion can be less or more solitary. What is offered to those with whom we assemble a new truth? What solaces and reservations are condoned in the indolence of accepting a discourse whose pretension of absolute truth does not withstand a minimally honest or careful examination? Dura's political marginalization is her gender, which refutes these feeble agreements because it does not enjoy the amenities that architect them. To her, the path is always more arduous and the intentions are always disparate. From poverty to financial comfort, to decent dwelling, to trips, to the petty-bourgeois dignity of the middle class cafes, her journey is marred with transgressions that, like a wrench in the works, makes it clear that the presumption of an essential dignity of political institutions is a folly of those who enjoy it or those who, not belonging to outcast social groups, are able to (or dream of being able to) enjoy it.

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<sup>21</sup> "A patient suffering from hysteria or obsessional neurosis has also, as far as his illness extends, given up his relation to reality. But analysis shows that he has by no means broken off his erotic relations to people and things. He still retains them in phantasy; i.e., he has, on the one hand, substituted for real objects imaginary ones from his memory, or has mixed the latter with the former; and on the other hand, he has renounced the initiation of motor activities for the attainment of his aims in connection with those objects" in: STRACHEY, J. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works. II-VIII. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957.

The individual who abstains from reality can take with them a whole people, or, more specifically, a whole generation to whom the struggle was not enough to become free and perfect. To turn the bearer of a society's political and ethical utterances into a neurotic does not lend, by any means, the diagnostic of the individual to the collective. However, society and individual partake of a method and, above all, of the epilogue of the same tragedy: the consented abandonment of reality.

As a small digression, it is worth noting that the relationship between Vasco and Her also offers an important platform to observe the polarization that Germano Almeida establishes between the ideal and the real and, again, the opposition existing between a man and a woman. Bakhtin (1984, p.45) noticed that “the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of (...) copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth (...) to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place.”<sup>22</sup> Anyhow, Vasco's idealized love is realized only partially through intercourses that do not develop into promises of eternal love in Her part, who, in turn, abiding to love, embodies it, placing it into the tangibility of the world, stripped from temporal abstractions of a lover paralyzed by eternity, a love made organic and imprisoned in the life cycle that has death as a certain end.

It is still worth noting that this struggle, in which man must transpose the realization of love to a transcendental plane, in which both he and his object of desire have, properly agreed and established, the eternal quality and with idealized features of the relationship, is also presented to the reader in the form of discourses: Her discourse, referred to in Vasco's diary; Vasco's himself; and the Secretary's discourse, which does not shy away from meddling with a relationship that he himself was never able to establish with the Publisher. Although Vasco's passion yields its own approach to the tensions that I intended to highlight in this study - some of which are already well explored by Gandara (2002), appropriating it here as a note has the function of corroborating two aspects of the parodied discourse: the first one is of a moral character and refers to the urgency to impose, upon Her explosive and libertarian sex, the subordination of something noble and elevated - love - and its social institution - union; the second, in turn, refers to the need for a discursive agreement that imposes itself to

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<sup>22</sup> For reference, see footnote 3.

reality, that, in the molds of the Secretary's discourse, establishes a fabrication that reconfigures reality, making it (and here, notice, morality reinserts itself) morally more adequate.

"The idea of a house built so that people could become lost in it is perhaps more unusual than that of a man with a bull's head," writes Jorge Luís Borges (1974, p.100).<sup>23</sup> What we have in the biography written by the Secretary is, precisely, a narrative that distorts, or rather, contorts the real to the point of unidentifiability, which compactuates and corrupts, compromising all other narratives, and that is perhaps even more frightening than the truth that it tries desperately to conceal. However, the completeness imposed by the presumption of the Secretary's authority is not convincing. His labyrinth is incomplete and devoid of walls, and the revolution that freed his country and resulted in political glory for the Poet, a worthy representative of the people of Cape Verde, also lies unfinished. The character who fails compactuates with the ethical idealizations of a society and the official views perpetrated by political institutions, but it is this very same society that produces its contestation. The social organism contorts and bears human features setting up humor and reinstating politics at a more elemental level, in which its divides expose a meticulous construction that uncovers the illusions of a society, reinaugurating a literature. By the witty use of parody, Germano Almeida's humor in Cape Verdean fiction comes to terms with reality.

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<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

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