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GENDER TROUBLING: VIRGINIA WOOLF AND BRAZILIAN MIGRANT POETS IN LONDON (APPROPOS OF SOLANGE RIBEIRO DE OLIVEIRA'S *VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SILVER GLOBE*)

Eise R. P. Vieira¹

Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira's *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe* (1962), the thesis whereby she was awarded a professorship, it will be argued, introduced into Brazilian scholarship, albeit unnamed, the perspective of women's writing. The focus on her analysis of the novelist's use of the stream of consciousness technique to perfection in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) reveals that she anticipates many issues making up the later agenda of feminist and gender criticisms. Woolf's meditations on the location of the gendered creative self and the exclusion or under-representation of women writers from the British shelves in two essays, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1927) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), grafted into Oliveira's analysis of Mrs. Dalloway, further places London in the 1920s at the heart of the discussion of Clarissa's theatrical and strategic non-positioning of her sexuality within normative boundaries. It is with another historical canvas that this contribution thus revisits today's London. As a gender-inclusive haven in the globalized world, London has provided the pre-conditions for the gendered creativity of Brazilians who thus introduced into the national culture the unprecedented modality of migrant literature. One of them, Naran Barreto, born in Salvador (1966), unlike Clarissa and Woolf, away from the immediacy of familial normative heterosexuality, radically de-performed gender, opted out of the novel and, finding in intimist poetry the genre to affirm himself, puts onto

¹ Queen Mary, University of London.

paper the conjoined pleasure and pains of his homoeroticism. Natan authorized himself poetically and gender-wise. But echoing Woolf – in difference – this contribution concludes interrogating the dearth of Brazilian migrant poets on the British shelves.

Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe, given to me on my graduation in 1973, further consolidated my affiliation to Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira's scholarship. There was indeed more to the gift-giving ritual than the passing of her body of knowledge to me. Her touching dedication, complimenting me for having found my way to Virginia Woolf – in fact, her own trajectory – symbolically constituted me as the inheritor of her authorship. It is in response to this major incentive to one about to begin a career, it is also on the strength of this token of collegiality that I shall refer to the author of the thesis as *Solange* rather than the distancing *Oliveria*.

Affiliation, not a random word choice, contains the Latin *filius*, son. She would affectionally address me, and all her students, as *minha filha*. Levinas's thoughts on filiation are resonant: "To be one's son means to be [...] substantially in him, yet without being maintained there in identity".² Filiation opened this body of knowledge to continuity as, embraced by generations of scholars to come, it availed itself to supplementarity. Affection and scholarship again conflated when, as a guest in Solange's temporary London house, I first visited the city around which this contribution gravitates.

Woolf: from misogyny to androgyny as a creative process

Feminists found in Woolf's essays important discussions on the impact of women's oppression on their creative potential.³ Woolf, noting the exclusion or under-representation of women's writings on the British shelves, discusses in *A Room* the "formidable" material difficulties they have faced, besides their "reprehensible poverty", and meditates on the conditions in their lives that were "hostile to the state of mind" which is "most propitious for creative work". They lack a quiet room, a literary tradition, self-confidence,

² LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 278-79.

³ Critics have pointed out that Woolf also chose the novel over theoretical expressions in that ideas impact more when dramatized through fictional scenes as aggressive sex-consciousness can be an obstacle to women's writing.

encouragement of an audience or criticism, steady and uninterrupted work and rest. Emphasis is placed on the need for women to have a room of their own.⁴ Misogyny, another factor undermining their creative potential, becomes apparent in the "enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually", indeed legitimized scientifically by "a great book upon the mental, moral and physical inferiority of women".⁵ Misogyny is moreover strategic, as "men know that women are an overmatch for them", thus "when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority".⁶ Misogyny also explains why on the 19th century shelves she found several with women's works, predominantly novels; this has to do with the literary training that women had in the early 19th century "in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion".⁷ The representation of homoeroticism, in turn, was cast structurally: "the smooth gliding of sentence after sentence was interrupted. Something tore, something scratched; a single word here and there flashed its torch in my eyes", or in coding "Chloe liked Olivia," I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature".⁸

Solange, in her approach to gender and sexuality via narrative technique, bridges the liberating potential of wandering and shifting sexualities in *Orlando* (1928). Androgyny is an ideal that Woolf expresses through Orlando, the protagonist who, radicalizing her view of the non-unified subject, has many selves: "Turned into a woman [...] enjoying the advantages and points of view of both sexes", she enables "the discussion of man's and woman's relative positions in society [...] or 'the presentation of the androgynous as [an] ideal'".⁹

Woolf picks up the thread of non-positioning of gender as a strategy in *Street Haunting*, an essay which dramatizes conjoined rambling in London,

⁴ WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 11, 17, 26, 31, 38, 25, 38. Originally published in 1929.

⁵ WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 15, 26.

⁶ WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 14-16.

⁷ WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 32.

⁸ WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 39.

⁹ OLIVEIRA, *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe*, p. 90.

androgyny, and inspiration for creative writing. *Haunting* evokes a spectral figure, one that is neither "the appearing [n]or the disappeared", an undecidable who will be eventually "fended off with hostility".¹⁰ This gender-neutral spectrality (just a disembodied I/eye), escaping from identity, for a while enjoys a sense of liberation, however fleeting, and finds creative energy in the freedom and anonymity of London streets. The pretext of buying a pencil becomes a pre-text:

[W]hen the desire comes upon us to go street rambling the pencil does for a pretext, and getting up we say: "Really I must buy a pencil," as if under cover of this excuse we could indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter – rambling the streets of London [...] As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six, we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous tramps, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room [...] The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye [...] Still as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners [...] sheltered and enclosed. Here again is the usual door.¹¹

Clarissa Dalloway: performing gender normativity on a London street

Solange ranks Woolf as a groundbreaking novelist and inscribes her within the pantheon of British novelists. Her intended focus on narrative technique further inscribes her among two revolutionary writers, James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson, who

¹⁰ DERRIDA. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning*, p. 47.

¹¹ WOOLF, Virginia, nd, p. 1, 8. *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* was first published in 1927.

dared to peer into the mysterious depths of the very soul [...] to convey an inner vision, to capture the elusive flow of the mind, to reproduce the direct impact of life upon the conscious or even the unconscious. To this new approach, a new technique must need correspond: the stream of consciousness.¹²

With further subsidies from Psychology, her scrutiny of Woolf's novels draws attention to the ways her characters oppose the idea of the individual as a stable indivisible ego. While pointing to Woolf's increasing command of the stream of consciousness, she brings to light the inconsistencies, fluidities and contradictions of her many-sided characters. Crucially, she stresses that coherence and integration are a quest rather than a goal achieved. With a keen eye for underlying patterns of relationships across novels, she points out those which are symbolic of the characters' quest for a harmonious vision of life: the circle, the globe, a sphere.

In contrast, in her view Clarissa "denies the possibility of inner consistency" and, having an "extreme regard for roles", finds in society an external support as "she tries, disguising all contradictory or undesirable traits within herself, to achieve the appearance of the consistent, unified being [...] It is this appearance she delights in."

She further casts Clarissa's sense of loss of identity in terms of gender roles in society which "absorb the whole of her being. As she once goes up Bond Street, she wonders at her not being Clarissa – the individual woman – any more, but Mrs Richard Dalloway, that is, the politician's wife, known to her peers as the perfect hostess. While reasserting the main thrust of her argument that identity is rarely absolute or immutable, Solange stresses that "sheerly worldly" Clarissa changed over time. A closer look at Clarissa, the "first full-length portrait among Virginia Woolf's great middle-aged women", reveals a "brooding", complex figure, "softened in the reader's eyes by the revelation of her early emotional life". She also suggests the sexual nature of some "obscure flaw, the awful fear gnawing at her heart, her sense of unreality" for which her "social triumphs" could no longer make up: "the symbolic virginity that condemns her to a 'narrower and narrower bed'."¹³

¹² OLIVEIRA, Virginia Woolf's *Silver Globe*, p.13-14.

¹³ OLIVEIRA, Virginia Woolf's *Silver Globe*, p. 66-68.

Yet sexual fluidity, acknowledged in *Orlando*, is left out of the equation in *Mrs. Dalloway* as Solange seems to frame the analysis in heterosexual terms through references to Clarissa's husband and also to Peter Walsh when she outlines its one-day action. Clarissa's changing sexual desire in Woolf's coded references are rendered explicit as lesbian desire by later critics, for example, Martin, who foregrounds the kiss from Sally, a foreclosed romance which awoke her to a lesbian sexuality.¹⁴ This reading, in turn, opens up other interpretations for Solange's perception of her loss of identity, of some obscure flaw gnawing at her heart and the narrower bed. By the same token, Clarissa's not considering "discarding the features she thinks undesirable", but "only not showing them"¹⁵ can also be interpreted in terms of her changed sexuality that challenges English marriage. Clarissa thus performs the culture's fiction of femininity to warrant her privileges derived from her heterosexual marriage.

In Solange's analysis, London's streets in the 1920s, in turn, acquire a spatial and historical concreteness as a social space in terms of class in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Social classes for her have a bearing on the individual's degree of success in handling psychological difficulties. She thus correlates upper class/sanitary and lower class/insanity when describing London's polarized society encountering in its streets:

As she walks through the London streets on her way to the florist's, she passes by Septimus Warren Smith, a former soldier suffering from the deferred effects of shell-shock, and his wife, the little Italian milliner Lucrezia. Two worlds thus silently criss-cross. Clarissa represents not only the tinselly glitter of fashionable society but also the world of sanity. Septimus adds to his lower middle-class stratum the darker sphere of madness. Late in the evening, Sir William Bradshaw, the nerve specialist, attends Clarissa's party. There he alludes to the unknown madman's suicide a few hours before.¹⁶

¹⁴ MARTIN, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, p. 86.

¹⁵ OLIVEIRA, *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe*, p. 68.

¹⁶ OLIVEIRA, *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe*, p. 64.

Decades later, the same street scene will be seen as intersecting class and gender, and expressing a concern with exclusion. Pierce has pointed out that outsiders in different senses abound in Woolf's work. The scene thus regroups into the political centre of a collapsing Empire returnees from the colonies (civil servant Peter Walsh) or from war (Septimus Warren) as well as outsiders to compulsory sexuality, Septimus and Clarissa. The latter, while walking to the florist's, ruminates on her own sexuality and her daughter's passion for Miss Kilman.¹⁷

For Judith Butler, gender instabilities are obscured by a collective agreement to produce and sustain polar genders through reiterated acting; punishments will attend those who do not subscribe to cultural fictions of gender.¹⁸ Solange anticipates this view in relation to Clarissa who, for her, displays a radiant and outstanding social presence, and for whom society is "the watchful eye to which she deems it necessary to present an aesthetically unified face"; her integration is thus "a composed mask, an outward grace, a decorous make-believe".¹⁹ Nesbitt, in turn, has cast a dimension of sex-gender disruption to the mask metaphor while describing how the presence of authority prompted Clarissa's bodily performance. She indeed senses "the voice of authority" when the royalty's car approaches, "momentarily presides over the city", "enforces the disciplinary power of upper class heterosexuality" and she "thinks of her disloyalty to English norms" while "the crowd coalesces into sobriety". She knows

she must repeatedly perform her position, and she is conscious of her body as a spectacle of appropriate womanhood [...] Cathected to her class position, she reacts with panic to the 'shocking' and 'horrible' understanding of the way society treats lesbian women [...] This consummate performer [...] negotiates her identity as she walks so that she is seen as a proper lady even as she thinks about her lesbian attachment to Sally.²⁰

¹⁷ PIERCE, *Joyce and Company*, p. 96.

¹⁸ BUTLER, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, p. 19.

¹⁹ OLIVEIRA, *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe*, p. 67-68.

²⁰ NESBITT, *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars*, p. 32, 34, 36.

Like Woolf in *Street Haunting*, Clarissa is simply relocated into the house: Unlike her, Septimus cannot negotiate his position outside compulsory sexuality".²¹ Clarissa's "problematic embodiment of English wifehood" links her to Septimus Warren's "idea of failing as an English husband", yet, comfortable in her class position, she can erase her non-normative sexuality.²² Shell-shock may not be the only reason for his suicide:

Septimus is also inflexible in the face of authority [...] He does not 'perform' or embody as Clarissa does, rather he feels exposed and unable to control the observation to which his body is subjected. His homosexual experience with the officer Evans in the war convinces him that he deserves punishment for violating English standards of behaviour. Septimus thinks of his desires as crimes against women [...] thus revealing how deeply his understanding of gender roles is related to appropriate performance of Englishness.²³

Ghost/hosts: Clarissa's unsettling of gender positionings in an attic of her own

It is thus in terms of location, artistry and strategic androgyny, also derived from the ghostly Rambler in *Street Haunting*, that I shall address the gender symbology in Clarissa's re-encounter with Peter in the attic. Peter rushes up the stairs, certain that Clarissa will see him, finds her in what I would refer to as the solitary attic room of her own, and kisses her hand. Clarissa is performing her socially expected gender behaviour of sewing to secure her social position. But there are ways in which Clarissa strategically subverts this symbol, pregnant with traditional cultural meanings and, in her case, class meanings. Her sewing staves off Peter who irritated her as an unwelcome suitor, in ways reminiscent of Peggy

Kamuf's reading of Penelope's subversive creativity – silenced by men, Penelope pursues "her deviously interminable work of deferral by daily weaving and unweaving [...] becoming in effect an early woman writer".²⁴

There is a growing incoherence between the gender role she is acting out and her sexual desire. In what follows, I shall draw upon Ann Martin's analysis of the fairy tale scripts in *Mrs. Dalloway* to bring out Clarissa's further artistry in creating a space of sexual undecidability. Mrs. Dalloway "sews herself into the patriarchal order by mending her green dress, Peter, however, locating himself according to a stable system of gender, sees his attempts frustrated in light of her sexual indecipherability; the needle, she continues, 'like the spindle in 'Sleeping Beauty', enables the heroine to put her sexual self to sleep and to repress her desire for Sally Sexton and Peter Walsh in order to remain in a more socially comfortable position".²⁵ Adaptability is also suggested as sewing and mending garments are fitted to specific bodies or updated; Clarissa can be seen to "resituate [...] herself back into her wifery role" inasmuch as "her scissors, needle, and thread suggest that socially constructed identities can be altered".²⁶

Clarissa, in Butler's terms, performs and subverts cultural scripts from within.²⁷ Gender undecidability underlies Clarissa's less than passive reactions. Whilst womanly sewing, she also symbolically matches up to Peter's masculine moves. In other words, in a blow by blow match, Peter opens his pocket knife (a short sword as it were, symbolic of a diminished masculine strength and power) while Clarissa counter attacks by opening her scissors, equally pointed, thus turning a feminine instrument into a manly one; Clarissa, in her androgyny – a heroine and a hero – takes the role of the triumphant prince and kisses Peter when he breaks down; she also "slides across the social and cultural narratives" thereby warranting herself a position of emotional safety and financial security.²⁸

²¹ BROWN *et al.* *Aestheticism and Modernism: Debating Twentieth-Century Literature 1900-1960*, p. 311.

²² NESBITT. *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars*, p. 34, 36.

²³ NESBITT. *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars*, p. 35.

²⁴ PEGGY, Kamuf, quoted in MORAN. *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, the Aesthetics of Trauma*, p. 202.

²⁵ MARTIN. *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, p. 9-11, 12-13.

²⁶ MARTIN. *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, p. 82-83, 87-88.

²⁷ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, p. 185.

²⁸ MARTIN. *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, p. 88.

Artistry also relates to Clarissa as a hostess, when she opens the house and performs appropriate domesticity and heteronormativity. The party is a social and political success. Clarissa "showcases her brilliance and power"; what is already a success is supplemented by the Prime Minister's appearance.²⁹ Clarissa's artistry in performing gender – whether walking on the streets, sewing in the attic or entertaining guests in the living room – combines with what becomes apparent in one of Solange's few quotes from Woolf, which, for that matter, stands out: "To Peter, she has the 'woman's gift of making a world of her own'".³⁰

Natan Barreto in Paris: de-performing gender and affirming bodiliness

As a graduate in Theatre Performance from Uni-Rio just before leaving Brazil in 1990, Natan Barreto's growing distaste for acting combined with an explicit interest in learning foreign languages.³¹ He lived in France for a year, in Italy for six months and has been in London since 1992. Having differed/deferred his creative potential in acting and in the flow of other tongues, he encounters his creative space in the immensity and anonymity of London.

London, for Woolf, "perpetually attracts, gives me a play, a story and a poem without any trouble, save that of moving my legs through the streets".³² London is also directly related to Natan's creative processes. Woolf, a ghostly flâneuse would rise above gender and gather energy and material for her novels. This again confirms that Woolf anticipates the main thrust of Butler's groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble*, that performance can be disruptive of received gender scripts.³³

²⁹ NESBITT, *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars*, p. 36, 38.

³⁰ Quoted in OLIVEIRA, *Virginia Woolf's Silver Globe*, p. 68.

³¹ All references to Natan Barreto's statements and quotations of poems come from the following book: VIEIRA, Elise R. P. (ed.) *Poetas à Deriva: Primeira Antologia da Poesia Brasileira Pós-Nacional (Bilingual/Poets Adrift: First Anthology of Brazilian Post-National Poetry (Bilingual))* (forthcoming)

³² WOOLF, Virginia, quoted in PENNER, *The Construction of Identity: Virginia Woolf's City*, p. 272.

³³ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

Natan gives a step forward de-performing and reinstating bodiliness as pre-conditions to poetic expression. Circumstances may have been a catalyst to his shift from performance to radical corporeality as self-assertion that his "body matters", in turn reflecting the thrust of Butler's reinstating of the body in her revised thinking.³⁴ He has recounted his process of shedding off masks and encountering a new relationship with the bare body as a pre-condition to writing.

Even if with stage perfection, hiding the self behind characters whose motions diverged from his or theatricalizing gender identities at odds with his own ended up depersonalizing Natan. A few failures compounded his decision to leave the theatre stage. He intimates, "No longer wishing to be an actor, not wanting to show how lost I was [...] I decided to lose myself in the world". Unlike Clarissa in the attic, who disrupted the sex-gender-desire coherence from within the cultural codes, Natan, through migration, stepped out of the code-generating context.

His work posing as a nude model for students of painting reduced him to anatomy, provided him with a non-representational stage on which he was also stripped bare of the actor's artifices of costumes, make-up, movements and gestures. Also stripped of the clothing that symbolizes gender, he was, in Butler's terms, a body, contours, fixity – "fully material".³⁵ Extending the possibilities of his body, he further asserted its legitimacy away from the Christian views of flesh equated to sinfulness (see below).

This quite corporeal but facially, gesturally and vocally motionless event operated the transition from acting to writing. Stripping performance to the naked actor, according to Innes, shifts the focus to the psyche.³⁶ Natan, accordingly, says, "to be freed from the pain of prison-like postures [...] I tried to think of words and sentences to express what I was doing. The writer, hidden within the naked actor on the stage, began to utter his first silent words". Both actors and poets produce signs but those of the actor are mediated by the dramatic text (someone else's words). Borrowed words provided him with a hiding place behind the themes of others, but not an adequate expression for the themes that first impelled him to write: love, death, languages, and being a citizen of city after city.

³⁴ BUTLER, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*.

³⁵ BUTLER and SALIH, *The Judith Butler Reader*, p. 151-54.

³⁶ INNES, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde*, p. 9.

Hamid Nacify has made two important points about exilic dislocation:

the first one is that it can be experienced at profound corporeal levels; the second is the centrality of spatial imagery in the articulation of the migrant experience.³⁷ Natan's potentialized corporeal experience when he worked as a model upon first arriving in Paris thus correlates with his very tactile poetic cartography and the centrality of body images in his poetry. Lucy Irigaray is resonant: gender "politics does not erase but speaks the body".³⁸

In a sequential enchainment of city with womb, Paris, a city-become-body, is briefly embraced, penetrated, but, unlike London, violently disappoints. In "Paris me pariu" / "Paris gave me birth", the poet attempts to penetrate the city's maternal body to be reborn, and, as an infant, to surrender to its cares. But its cold entrails are neither hospitable nor life-giving:

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| Para me receber, Paris, às avessas, me pariu. Mas o seu útero era frio. Penetret-a de corpo e alma. Seu frio me deu na cara um tapa. | To take me in, Paris gave me birth, inside out. But its womb was cold. I penetrated her body and soul. Her coldness was a slap in the face. |
|--|---|

He expected a womb-like bodily reciprocity and rebirth out of Paris's maternal body:

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|---|--|
| Meu cordão umbilical se prendia ao seu umbigo e eu lhe entregava meu olhar de recém-nascido. Morrer passava a ser renascer. | My umbilical cord was struck to her navel and my newborn gaze surrendered to her Astride a grave, I was born anew. |
|---|--|

He gains no intimacy from this tactile contact. Paris shelters neither his alterity nor his infant-like vulnerability. His fleeting caress cannot dominate the city's hostile slapping:

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|--|--|
| Meus pés a pisavam suavemente à procura de um caminho. Tudo em mim, nesse momento era uma forma de carinho. Por Paris eu caminhava e ao caminhar a acarinhava. | My feet trod her softly looking for new paths. Everything in me at that moment was a kind of caress. Around Paris I walked, and by walking I caressed her. |
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³⁷ NACIFY, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, p. 35, 28.

³⁸ IRIGARAY, *Sexes and Genealogies*, p. 9.

Natan in London: relocating gender and poetic expression in rooms of his own

The image of the city as a uterus resurfaces in London. The self-donating city reaches out for the migrant. He amorously surrenders to and takes full possession of this city-become-body. In the early hours – symbolic of transition and pointing to his rebirth – the city's aura and his own merge:

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|--|--|
| Londres então era minha. Naquelas horas primeiras Londres a mim se dava inteira. | London was not only mine. In the early hours London gave herself to me entirely. |
| Eu me entregava aos seus cuidados, Ao seu corpo de cidade. E a sua aura tão fria Pairava sobre a minha. | I surrendered to her cares, To her city-become-body, And its very cold aura Hovered over my head. |

Receptive London had anticipated his arrival. He found a room of his own and discovered the full range of his self-expression. Upon moving out of his first London room, he meditates on emptying a room as a form of opening new possibilities:

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|--|--|
| O lugar em que vivi vive vazio de mim, lugar que já me esperava antes mesmo da minha chegada. Mas há outros lugares que me esperam chegar. | The place where I lived lives on empty of me, a place waiting for me even before I arrived. Other places are waiting for me. |
|--|--|

Woolf would encode expression or dramatize the unrepresentability of lesbian desire. In contrast, Natan would gradually displace the metaphor of the maternal body while increasingly establishing sexuality at the centre of his intimist poetry. In "Opostos iguais" / "Equal opposites" he disavows the heterosexual coherence between sex, gender and desire:

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|---|---|
| Dizem que os opostos se atraem. Meu oposto me é igual. Meu igual é o meu oposto. [...] Atrair ou ser atraído não é voluntário gesto, não é gesto escolhido. | They say that opposites attract. For me, my opposite is my equal. My equal is my opposite. [...] To attract or to be attracted is not a matter of will, not a chosen gesture. |
|---|---|

For a while he continued to meditate on situadness from a sex-conscious perspective. In a poem on auto-eroticism, he further validated his body. Post orgasm, when his body was reduced to ontology, through a metaphor that equates body and space ("caio no chão do meu corpo, carne inerte" / "I fall on the ground of my body, flesh dead"), he also meditates on aging and loss of corporeal radiance. In "Árvore genealógica" / "Family tree", he thinks his body and the ways his sexuality, by eliminating the procreating act, in a chain, also does away with the masculine role of creator of life and hence fatherhood. The freedom of *dissemiNation* was also an option out of the law of in-semi-nation. Fecundity is a relation to the future that gives continuity to history.³⁹ Defining a notion distinct from continuity, he interrupted the family history and its patriarchal lineage.

Dis-placing the ritual of confession to London

Natan chooses to give expression to the pleasures and pains of his homoeroticism not in the theatre but in confessional writing. Foucault has in fact elaborated the view that society has become extraordinarily confessing and sees the urge to confess sexuality as an inheritance from Christianity. Confessing produces truth about sexuality. Confession is also liberating, in that it "produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems [...]" liberates him; but, even if spontaneous, the ritual of confession furthers domination, it unfolds a power relationship, "for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession".⁴⁰

Through reminiscences, Natan resituates guilt in London, the location of potential freedom. In "Os espelhos de meu pai" / "My father's mirrors" he ingeniously condenses the father as a real person, one who sold mirrors, and the father as the symbolic function. The Christian ritual of confession permeates his poetic dramatization of his internalized mandate to confess his sexuality to the father. He kneels before the mirrors, a metonymy for

the father. Noteworthy is that the act of kneeling does not correlate with body, but with "carne" (flesh) which in Christianity equates sin:

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|---|---|
| O meu silêncio, feito de carne e sangue, pleno de medos e segredos flutua e em silêncio se entregava de joelhos ao silêncio de espelhos [...] | My silence, built from flesh and bones, flowed with secrets and fears and in silence, prostrate, surrendered to the silence of mirrors |
| Eu me aproximava do meu rosto visso de fora para me ver por dentro | I drew near my face, seen from without, to see myself within |

His specular image has already become an image of another. Poetry thus turns into a cipher of becoming:

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|--|---|
| A alma de quem eu era se evaporou no vazio de espelhos [...] | The soul of the one I was vanished into the emptiness of mirrors |
| e os meus antigos reflexos já não refletem quem eu sou. | and my childhood reflections no longer reflect the one I was. |

Power weighing down the urge to confess is a theme taken up in another moving poem, "As cartas que meu pai me escreveu" / "The letters my father wrote me". It is in diaspora that, in a letter of confession he articulates the truth, expecting his biological father to assume the symbolic paternal function:

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|---|---|
| cartas me falando dele e se dando de presente a mim, para que dele eu cuidasse, como um pai cuida de um filho. | letters telling me about himself giving himself as a present to me, so that I would take care of him, as a father takes care of a son. |
|---|---|

But paternal power reduces to silence the son's attempt to unburden filial guilt. He gives the son the "no of the father", not *le non du père*, the symbolic function of father:

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|---|--|
| Ontem quase fiquei triste por meu pai nunca ter me escrito uma carta | Yesterday, I was almost sad because my father never wrote me a letter |
|---|--|

The son still tries to sublimate. The missing letters are not quite the father's expression of interdiction. He misrecognizes the as yet unreceived replies as incompleteness, a draft, which, by its very nature, allows space for correction:

³⁹ LEVINAS. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 269.

⁴⁰ FOUCAULT. *The History of Sexuality*, p. 61-2.

mas na verdade ele escreveu sim.
Ele deve ter escrito muitas:

[...]

Só não as recebi,
nem as pude ler,
por ele não as ter passado a limpo.
O que ficou escrito foi o rascunho,
rascunho de inefáveis linhas
enroladas num abstrato carretei;

but in fact he did write.
He must have written several:

Only I didn't receive them,
nor could I ever read them,
as he never got past the first draft.
What was written was a sketch,
the first draft of ineffable lines
rolled up on an abstract bobbin;

But no self-correction came. He eventually grasped the "no of the unforgiving father":

Mas de uma forma outra,
além dos olhos e da vista,
li todas essas cartas
que nunca foram escritas.

But in another form,
beyond eyes and sight,
I read all these letters
that were never written.

Updatings on *A Room of One's Own*

In his early London poems, parallel with the expression of his sexuality, Natan would also recreate the family through words and tactile images as metonyms for the caressing touch that was no longer within reach. Other themes gradually found a place in his London room. A later major theme is ineffability, upon the death of the dear ones, for those who have shifted the geography of their identity: the beloved ones are now out of touch and sight, "at rest in the place of immobility from which [they] measure all their journeys and all distancings".⁴¹

In turn, many of his increasingly metalinguistic poems were about language and literary creation in a multilingual context: some dramatizing Babel through the grafting of foreign words. Yet, they are still written in Portuguese: his metaphor is that English does not caress his poetic expression with the affective touch of the mother tongue. He has been translating poets from different languages into Portuguese, also as a poetic exercise.

He has established another connection with the stage as one of the trustees of the Anglo-Brazilian Theatre Company Stone Crabs. He has also been setting up and contributing to several dramatic readings of poetry

in London, in which theatre and poetry converge. He has also written about the stage but no longer from the perspective of de-performing gender. A recent poem is a meditation on how an actress with an artificial glass eye sees the reality of the world from the stage.

Recently, he finalized an autobiographical novel in English, both authorizing himself in Woolf's preferred genre, the novel, but hiding himself behind the foreign language. He is seeking an outlet for the novel in the UK which has become an extremely competitive and demanding editorial circuit in terms of cultural capital.

Natan de-performed gender, and is now in full possession of a gendered expression and of poetic idioms across languages. But he remains a gap on the British shelves amidst a pantheon of exiles – James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie – who, before him, had found artistic stimulation in London and a room in its publishing houses. The young migrant poet Natan has embraced the literary city, but remains a guest in rented rooms of his own.

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⁴¹ DERRIDA. *Of Hospitality*, p. 87.

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