

## Brazilian Regional Fictionalists: Universal Truth

### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนับนี้ศึกษาแนวโน้มร่วมสมัยสำคัญของการวรรณคดีบราซิลสามเล่มที่เขียนโดยกราซิลิอาโน รามูส คลาริซ ลิสเปกตอร์ และ ออตран โดราดู จุดมุ่งหมายของบทความนี้ต้องการสะท้อนให้ผู้อ่านเห็นถึงความเป็นสากลของงานเขียนที่ถึงแม้เนื้อเรื่อง ตัวละคร และฉากหลังจะเกิดขึ้นที่บราซิล แต่ผู้อ่านทั่วโลกก็สามารถเข้าใจถึงประสบการณ์และใจความสำคัญที่ผู้เขียนต้องการสื่อได้ ผลงานของกราซิลิอาโน รามูส เรื่อง *ชีวิตแห่งแล้ง* สะท้อนถึงความยากลำบากของคนชั้นล่างในสังคมทางภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของบราซิลที่ชีวิตขึ้นอยู่กับสภาพอากาศที่แห้งแล้งอีกทั้งยังโคนอารักເວเปรียบจากพ่อค้าและนายทุน งานเขียนเรื่อง *สายสัมพันธ์ครอบครัว* ของคลาริซ ลิสเปกตอร์ โขมตีสถาบันครอบครัว และสถาบันสังคมที่คาดหวังให้ผู้หญิงเป็นเพียงมารดาและ ภรรยา งานเรื่องสุดท้าย เรื่อง *นุ่ย* โดย ออตран โดราดูสะท้อนความเป็นจริงของทุกสังคมที่ต้องการแพร่รับบางสิ่งที่ผู้เขียนเปรียบเทียบความเหมือนของแนวโน้มทั้งสามเล่ม ไว้ต่อน้ำท้ายของบทความ

**คำสำคัญ:** แนวโน้ม, วรรณคดีบราซิล

### Abstract

This paper surveys three important works written by modern Brazilian novelists: Graciliano Ramos, Clarice Lispector and Autran Dourado. The three papers aim to show how the three writers manage to impart the universal truths through their works, focussing on Brazil and its people. Ramos's *Vidas Secas* tells the story of a poor family from the North-eastern part of Brazil. Their fate and survival rely on Mother Nature who does not regularly provide rain for their agricultural lands. They are also taken advantage of by sly and greedy townspeople. Lispector's *Laços de Família* bravely challenges the found a times of society by scrutinizing the most fundamental unit, the family unit. The questions of the roles, positions and responsibilities of women are raised in a poignant manner. Dourado's *A Barca dos Homens* deals with man-hunting in an imagined community. The purest character is victimized and killed in the end. The three books share some similarities which are also discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Brazilian novelists

## Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed great changes in the course of Brazilian history, as well as literature. Getúlio Vargas<sup>1</sup> came to power with promises of improving the lives of his people, and of leading Brazil to prosperity and modernity. His *Estado Novo*,<sup>2</sup> in which the centralization of power played an important role, turned the country into a dictatorship and also led to disaster. Foreign investment was encouraged in the hope that it would help stimulate the economy. However, the outcome turned out to be contradictory. Brazil was saddled with growing debts. The national economy collapsed and people were left unemployed. Rich people took an opportunity to make money, while the poor, got poorer, especially those from North-east the Northeast. They were marginalized without any access to education or public services.

These were the specific truths of Brazilian history which were clearly portrayed by many Brazilian writers, who did not overlook their country's social and economic problems. Rather, they acted as a mirror, reflecting the negligence and indifference that affected the people who became social victims because of their government's bad management, and were paying a price with their lives. As Clarice Lispector puts it, 'Não existe escritor, pintor, ou qualquer artista, que não

reflita sua época'<sup>3</sup> (There are no writers, painters or artists who do not reflect (what happens in their period of time.) Their works very well illustrated the events and situations that took place in Brazil, and with their powerful voices, they managed to break out of the regional settings of some specific parts of Brazil, described in their work. Their objective was to impart universal truths that we, as international readers of English-language published books, can all identify with.

Writers of the time, such as Graciliano Ramos, Clarice Lispector and Autran Dourado, succeeded in doing this and, therefore, their intentions and messages were conveyed to and comprehended by readers whose background and experiences may possibly be completely different from those of the Brazilian authors. Ramos's *Vidas Secas (Barren Lives)* (1938) explicitly deals with an impoverished Northeastern family, abandoned by the government, which tries to escape from drought and famine. Clarice Lispector's *Laços de Família (Family Ties)*, as the title suggests, is an account of family ties, in which women's lives, roles and problems are discussed. Autran Dourado's *A Barca dos Homens (A Human Boat)* depicts man-hunting on a fictional island of Boa Vista.

This paper will focus on how the aforementioned writers successfully manage to bring us into their creation of a timeless world, in which we can all recognise and identify with its eternal truths and universal meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> Vargas ruled Brazil from 1930-1954. He turned Brazil into a form of dictatorship, and used populist policies, which stated that workers could become the basis of a new form of political power.

<sup>2</sup> *Estado Novo* or New State was the name of the authoritarian government installed in Brazil by President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, which lasted from 1937 to 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Vieira, Nelson. *Jewish Voice in Brazilian Literature: A Prophetic Discourse of Alterity* (Gainesville: Florida, 1995), p. 112

## Graciliano Ramos and the Lives of the Oppressed

Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953), one of Brazil's greatest novelists, is moved by the lives of the abandoned poor people of the Northeast, the area where he himself grew up as a child. His own experiences with drought and famine become a source of inspiration for him to tell those problems to the outside world. *Vidas Secas*, therefore, is meant to both narrate a real story and, at the same time, draw public attention to the conditions in the dry, arid and ultimately barren Northeast. As the title of the book suggests, *Vidas Secas* describes the characters' lives which are not worth living. Fabiano, the main character, is the purest and most tranquil of the novelists' creatures because of his remaining apart from civilization.<sup>4</sup> Through Fabiano, Sinhá Vitória and their children, Ramos translates into human terms the tragedy of life as it must be lived in the *sertão*, arid backland, the skills of the *vaqueiro*, cowboy, upon which his livelihood depends, the physical conditions of existence under the threat of the great climatic monster, at whose whim all live, flee, or die- the periodic *seca*.<sup>5</sup>

The story is set in a remote area of Northeastern Brazil, probably in the North-eastern region of Ramos's own childhood hometown, Quebrângulo in Alagoas. Readers, however, are not confined to this specific area. Ramos's entire reliance on the psychoanalytical third person narrator clearly reflects the characters' inner thoughts and effectively lures his readers to the character's humble position in modern

Brazilian society, in which industrial growth and urbanization prevail. Words of dialogue are rarely found. The characters are only brought to life by the narrator who appears to be endowed with the same temperament.<sup>6</sup> One unique feature of the book is the way the story is loosely linked together by each disconnected scene. Each chapter has its own unity, its own near-independence, and its study of the characters' minds.

To examine the book more closely, we can start by looking at the second chapter which is entirely dedicated to Fabiano and which is a very clear portrait of his character as a victim, cast out from the modern world. The narrator describes him as 'vivia longe dos homens, só se deva bem com animais. Os seus pés duros quebravam espinhos e não sentiam a quentura da terra. Montado, confundia-se com o cavalo, grudava-se a ele. E falava uma linguagem cantada, monossilábica e guttural, que o companheiro entendia.'<sup>7</sup> (He lives far apart from other human beings; consequently, he is familiar with animals. His feet can endure thorns and stand the heat of the ground. His horse has become his only friend, to whom he can communicate, but only with guttural and monosyllabic sounds.)

Fabiano finds it difficult to utter long words to people. He tries hard, but in vain, to imitate the spoken language of people around him, but is unable to. Even he himself doubts his own humanity.

<sup>4</sup> Ellison, Fred. *Brazil New Novel: Four Northeast Masters* (Berkeley: California, 1954), p. 129

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ramos, Graciliano. *Vidas Secas* (Lisboa: Portugália Editoria, 1982), p. 37

He tells himself ‘(v)ocê é um bicho, Fabiano.’<sup>8</sup> (You are an animal, Fabiano.) His being human is also questioned because the animals in the story are clearly humanized and possess thought processes, that he and his family seem to lack. Baleia, his dog, is portrayed by Ramos as a rescuer of the family, during the drought season, as it always tries to think of how to feed its incapable owners. Baleia would bring dead birds home, when Fabiano is too depressed with his life to find some food for his wife and children. In so doing, Ramos probably confirms his character’s status as equal to that of the animals.

Fabiano represents the conditions of the people in Northeastern Brazil in general under Vargas’s rule. The government’s promises of educational access for all seem to be empty, as Fabiano does not get any education nor social welfare. He is a marginalized citizen who is taken advantage of by people in the higher social hierarchy, due to his being unable to manipulate the skills of human communication. The third chapter, “Cadeia” (Prison), is a very good example of how he gets into trouble in town, where ‘humans’ live when he cannot respond to the *soldado amarelo*, yellow soldier, to defend himself. Fabiano goes into town to do business with a vendor. When he receives a small sum of money, he spends it drinking and gambling. On the way home, drunk, he comes across a soldier in a yellow uniform. Not being able to answer simple questions posed by the soldier, he is put in jail for a night. Once in prison, the narrator

describes ‘(h)avia muitas coisas. Ele não podia explicá-las, mas havia.’<sup>9</sup> (There were a lot of things. He could not explain them, but there really were.) The narrator clearly points out the reason for Fabiano’s lack of communication skills. It is due to the fact that ‘(v)ivia tão agarrado aos bichos. Nunca vira uma escola. Por isso não conseguia defender-se, botar as coisas nos seus lugares.’<sup>10</sup> (He was leading a life with animals. He never went to school. That was why he could not defend himself, let alone explain things that are not in his place.) The chapter also deals with the dark side of urban life which results from modernization; gambling and drinking which partly cause Fabiano a lot of troubles. All the temptations of the city seem to take away his ability to protect his already vulnerable self and without the power to resist the temptation of the bright lights, he gives in and becomes victimized. Ultimately, this chapter is a good examination of on the relationship between defenseless local people and the abusive authority, commonly found in Brazil during the dictatorship.

Chapter 10, “Contas” (Bills), is the last chapter to be discussed here. It revolves around Fabiano being cheated on the bills by his boss, for whom he procures supplies. He does not know how to calculate or add. He, therefore, may be considered as a victim of capitalism, in which rich people seem to benefit most, while the poor have to accept and live with injustice. The narrator effectively and sympathetically describes Fabiano’s fate as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.58

*Nascera com esse destino, ninguém tinha culpa de ele haver nascido com um destino ruim. Que fazer? Podia mudar a sorte? Se lhe dissessem que era possível melhorar de situação espantar-se-ia... Era um desgraçado, era como um cachorro, só recebia ossos. Porque seria que os homens ricos ainda lhe tomavam uma parte dos ossos?<sup>11</sup>*

(He was born with this destiny. No one was to be blamed for him being born with this ruined destiny. What to do? Could he change his fate? If they had said that it was possible to better one's situation, he would have done it. He was a disgrace. He was like a dog only receiving bones. So why were the rich still taking a part of those bones away?)

The narrator is truly sympathetic to the character whose fate cannot be changed. The last question is asked by Ramos, but no answer is given. In some of the following chapters, the narrator describes Fabiano's increasing anger, caused by being maltreated. However, his anger does not last long. He compromises his vengeful desire towards authority (i.e. the yellow soldier) and the rich, with his excuses of his responsibilities as a father and a leader of the family. After all, he knows and so do we, that he cannot change his fate anyway. As the story unfolds towards the end, Fabiano can no longer stand the climatic disaster and the barrenness of the land to which he devotes himself. He and his family decides to move to *São Paulo* (Sao Paolo), Brazil's biggest city. They hope that they will better their situation with menial jobs and

the children will get enough education to earn their living. The migration from the Northeast to the big cities in the South is nothing new in the twentieth century in Brazilian history, or, we might add, to the history of our modern world. It is a vicious cycle of people moving, hoping for better lives and ending up being disappointed and lost.

In using psycho-analysis technique, which is transmitted through the third person narrator, Ramos makes sure we cannot deny that we, as readers, get to know, understand and sympathize with Fabiano's life and position in Brazilian society. Broadly speaking, Fabiano does not only represent the Northeastern Brazilians, but also the oppressed in general. Attacks against authorities who abuse their power, the rich who exploit the poor and the negative side of modernization and capitalism automatically make the book universal. The *sertão* around Quebrângulo, say, is a small stage representing the world at large where those problems confronted by Fabiano happen all the time. Once we stand in the character's shoes, we are able to see similar things revolving around us, not just a specific part mentioned in the book. Moreover, we can identify with the way the question of language is treated. Ramos very well points out the idea that language is what gives people power over their own lives. On the other hand, he also shows us the consequences when one lacks the ability to benefit from it. Fabiano's inability to manipulate his verbal expressions becomes an obstacle for him to lead a normal life. We can see it from many chapters of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.155

The book when he is either maltreated or deceived by those who can speak the language properly, such as the boss and the authorities.

### Clarice Lispector and Gender Issues

Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) is an internationally acclaimed Jewish Brazilian writer, well-known for her innovative, stream-of-consciousness novels and short stories. Lispector's approaches to modern Brazil and the lives of its people are somewhat different from Ramos's. Although she addresses her concerns to social problems like Ramos, as illustrated in her other work, *A Hora da Estrela* (*The Hour of the Star*)<sup>12</sup>, she also pays a lot of attention to the issues of gender that, at the time, were neglected or intentionally avoided by most people. Psychoanalysis tells us that the family assigns and enforces gender.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in *Laços de Família*, one of her most famous and enduringly popular works, Lispector pursues an enquiry into relationships within the sphere of the family, in an attempt to shake her readers out of their serene and comfortable assumptions

with regard to the family unit.<sup>14</sup> Her scrutiny of gender roles entails a critique of the family, in which she places her characters and their intimate crises. After these crises, when the recognition of their restrictions gives the protagonists a glimpse of greater freedom, many pull back, returning to the confinement they cannot or will not change.<sup>15</sup> The female protagonists are mostly middle-class women in an urban setting. They range from youth to old age. Through them, Lispector represents another variant of the oppressed, urban women whose limited roles as daughters, wives and mothers are always expected by the Brazilian society.

The opening story of the book, 'Devaneio e Embriaguez duma Rapariga' (The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman), features a woman breaking from her daily domestic routines and daydreaming. She '(a)cordou com o dia atrasado, as batatas por descascar, os miúdos que voltariam à tarde das titias, ai que até me faltei ao respeito!, dia de levar roupa e cerzir as péugas, ai que vagabunda que me saíste!, censurou-se curiosa e satisfeita, ir às compras, não esquecer o peixe, o dia atrasado, a manhã pressurosa de sol.'<sup>16</sup> (awoke late, the potatoes waiting to be peeled, the kids expected home that

<sup>12</sup> *A Hora da Estrela*, translated as *The Hour of the Star*, was written in 1977. It was her last work. The book portrays the life of Macabéa, a poor woman living in Rio de Janeiro, which is described by a narrator called Rodrigo S.M., a fictional writer. *A Hora da Estrela* diverged from the themes and style of most of Lispector's work, instead directly and explicitly focusing on poverty and marginality in Brazil.

<sup>13</sup> Peixoto, Marta. 'Female Power in *Family Ties*', in *Passionate Fictions: Gender, Narrative and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1994), p.25

<sup>14</sup> Alonso, Cláudia. 'Defamiliarization and Déjà Vu in *Laços de Família*', in *Closer to the Wild Heart: Essays on Clarice Lispector* (Oxford: Legende, 2002), p.73

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Lispector, Clarice. 'Devaneio e Embriaguez duma Rapariga', in *Laços de Família* (Rio De Janeiro: Rocco, 1960), p.12

same evening from their visit to the country. God, I've lost my self-respect, I have! My day for washing and darning socks. What a lazy woman you've turned out to be! She scolded herself, inquisitive and pleased...shopping to be done, fish to remember, already so late on a hectic sunny morning.) Her waking up late makes her fail to take up her responsibilities as a wife and mother, who has to go shopping to buy some food, to wash clothes and to prepare a meal for her husband and her kids, while waiting for them to come home. However, she feels really satisfied with carrying out her duties. As we read on, the protagonist is looking at herself in the mirror in which she sees herself, reflected as another who rebels against the social conventions imposed upon her, by preferring to stay in bed rather than to assume her duties.

‘Amor’ (Love), the following story, is about Ana’s awakening, of her awareness of her desire for freedom. After having done all the shopping, the protagonist boards the tram to go home and carry out her everyday duties. Ana has nice children, as described by the narrator, and she feels perfectly secure in her chosen position. It is explained that ‘(n)o fundo, Ana sempre tivera necessidade de sentir a raiz firma as coisas. E isso um lar perplexamente lhe dera. Por caminhos tortos, viera a cair num destino de mulher, com a surpresa de nele caber como se o tivesse inventado.’<sup>17</sup> (Deep down, Ana had always found it necessary to feel the firm roots of things. And this is

what a home had surprisingly provided. Through tortuous paths, she had achieved a woman’s destiny, with the surprise of conforming to it almost as if she had invented that destiny herself.) We can clearly see that Ana conforms very well to her destiny as a woman, so well that it is as if the destiny were created by her. However, on that very day, a sudden encounter with a blind man chewing gum, seems to destroy the calm life she has been leading. His mechanical indifferent acceptance of his fate perhaps mirrors for Ana her own blindness and restriction.<sup>18</sup> The blind man can be said to be a victim of nature, whereas Ana is a victim of society. The blind man cannot see anything, while Ana fails to see the real world as she only sees it from indoors. They are both forced to adapt as passive spectators. Perhaps the blind man is luckier than she is as no one actually expects anything from him. Rather, people in general provide him with help and support. Ana, in contrast, is expected to provide her support to the family without getting it in return. Her rest in the botanical garden, after getting off the tram, takes her away from the world of conventions and expectations. She is attracted to the vastness of nature, though prearranged, and there she finds tranquility again as well as her real desire for personal freedom. She questions for the first time her immanent family world, the seeds she plants that will be growing into trees when she sees decay that encroaches upon ripeness:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.20

<sup>18</sup> Peixoto, Marta. ‘Female Power in *Family Ties*’, p.29

*Nas árvores as frutas eram pretas, doces como mel. Havia no chão caroços secos cheios de circunvoluções como pequenos cérebros apodrecidos. O banco estava manchado de sucos roxos. Com suavidade intensa remorejavam as águas...A crueza du mundo era tranquila. O assassinato era profundo. E a morte não era o que pensávamos.*<sup>19</sup>

(On the trees, the fruits were black and sweet as honey. On the ground, there lay dry fruit stones full of circumvolutions like small rotted cerebrums. The bench was stained with purple sap. With gentle persistence the waters murmured...The rawness of the world was peaceful. The murder was deep. And death was not what one had imagined.)

The real world is brought back to her when she thinks about her children. The momentary negligence of her wifely and motherly duties now disappear when she rushes home. When she meets one of her children, she tells him '(n)ão deixe mamãe te esquecer'<sup>20</sup> (Don't let mommy forget you.) It clearly shows that she is on the verge of escaping. However, this flame does not last for long after an ordinary secure evening at home. Just as her husband puts it '(d)eixe que pelo menos me aconteça o fogão dar um estouro,'<sup>21</sup> (You can't prevent the stove from having its little explosions.) her escapist thoughts on the tram or in the botanical garden are allowed as they do not do any harm. We can interpret this notion in two ways. First, it shows Ana's, as well as Brazilian women in general's, inability to escape from their

destiny, so there is nothing for the men to worry about. Their desire for freedom can sparkle from time to time, but will evaporate in the end, as they, submissive and powerless, cannot change anything. Or second, women do not deserve such attention at all. They are only destined to pursue their restricted roles.

From the two stories discussed above, Lispector's issues of social expectations towards women very well reflect how Brazilian women are supposed to behave to fulfill the assigned roles. Having children and bringing them up do not only mean that a woman succeeds in being a 'woman', but also in confirming her own identity, though marginal and passive, in society. Expectations, in this sense, therefore, also cover women's biological function as a bearer of children. In 'Uma Galinha'(The Chicken), the third story and the following story, 'A Imitação da Rosa' (The Imitation of the Rose), Lispector gives her readers very clear examples of such expectations. 'Uma Galinha' questions the maternal role on a metaphoric level. A hen's life is spared when she unexpectedly lays an egg. Just like women in general, the hen becomes valued by society for her reproductive capacities.

The same argument can be applied to the next story, 'A Imitação da Rosa'. The protagonist, Laura, has just recovered from a mental illness. She keeps herself busy with activities so as to feel tired. She is obsessed with cleanliness and chores every trivial detail pertaining to the household tasks, so that she can tell herself that she is 'well.' In so doing, we

<sup>19</sup> Lispector, Clarice. 'Amor,' in *Laços de Família*, p.25

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.26

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.29

can say that she is also trying to fulfill her identity as a housewife, whose duty is to take care of the family. However, her childlessness is hauntingly thrown back at her, when she stares at herself in the mirror, which again vividly echoes her (non)- identity.<sup>22</sup> The narrator describes that ‘alguém veria nesse mínimo ponto ofendido a falta dos filhos que ela nunca tivera?’<sup>23</sup> (perhaps someone might have seen in that ever so tiny hint of sorrow the lack of children which she never had?). With the lack of children, Laura is different from most female characters in the book as she has no maternal role to play. Instead, to maintain herself as a motherly figure, she feels that she has to give something to someone. She offers a bunch of beautiful roses, which she herself likes very much, to her close friend. The act of giving is another recall for her identity, because society always has a view of women as a person who gives. Although Laura does not want to give up the roses, she has to do so in order to conform, and be accepted as a part of society. Nonetheless, there is a price to pay for conformity. In Laura’s case, she loses her own independence. Madness, therefore, is the only way out for her to assert her real existence, just as when she tells her husband that ‘(v)oltou, Armando. Voltou.’<sup>24</sup> (It came back, Armando. It came back.) What comes back is her insanity as, judged by society. Ambiguity lies here as we, as readers, never learn that Laura’s madness as depicted by the narrator, is a real mental illness or just a difference

she makes by being her own self. The husband’s view of Laura in the end represents stereotypical views towards women who are ‘different.’

*Ele sabia que ela fizera o possível para não se tornar luminosa e inalcançavel... Da porta aberta vista sua mulher que estava sentada no sofá sem apoiar as costas, de novo alerta e tranqüila como num trem. Que já partira.*<sup>25</sup>

(He knew that she had done everything possible not to become luminous and remote. With fear and respect he watched her. Aged, tired, and strange. But he did not even have a word to offer. From the open door he saw his wife sitting upright on the couch, once more alert and tranquil as if on a train. A train that had already departed.)

He sees her as luminous and unreachable. Calm as she is, she comes to the point of no return. Her metaphorical train of madness has already departed, since other departures are beyond her capacity.

The last story to be discussed here is ‘Feliz Aniversário’ (Happy Birthday). We witness an elderly woman, whose reproductive roles and maternal duties have been completed, and now has nothing to look forward to, even on her birthday. The woman passively observes her children, all adults, who come to her eighty-ninth birthday party for a superficial annual reunion, and boast about their wealth and their businesses. She remains

<sup>22</sup> Alonso, Cláudia. ‘Defamiliarization and Déjà Vu in *Laços de Família*, p.75

<sup>23</sup> Lispector, Clarice. ‘A Imitação da Rosa’ in *Laços de Família*, p.42

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.52

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.53

silent until asked to cut the cake. By cutting the cake, her power is once again asserted, as described when ‘..de súbito a velha pegou na faca. E sem hesitação, como se hesitando um momento ela toda caísse para a frente, deu a primeira talhada com punho de assassina.’<sup>26</sup> (unexpectedly, the old lady grabbed the knife. And without hesitation, as if by hesitating for a second she might fall on her face, she dealt the first stroke with the grip of a murderer.) As soon as her power revives, her rage and anger follow straight away. She looks at her children and ‘como a presilha a sufocasse, ela era mãe de todos e imponente à cadeira, desprezava-os.’<sup>27</sup> (She was mother to all of them. And as her chain was choking her, she was mother to all of them, and, powerless in her chair, she heartily despises them.) She despises them all, since now she has no power to control them and their lives anymore. The mother’s love is therefore difficult to bear, as one of her children suggests. Her most shocking action, however, is when she spits on the floor and asks for a glass of wine. It is obvious here that Lispector untraditionally portrays the roles of mothers. The act of violently cutting the cake, spitting, and cursing erases the image of mothers as a domestic angel. These actions would have been manifested in a more subtle and polite manner, had she been in her prime. It, therefore, can be said that these crude actions are caused by the loss of her power to command. Her dominance only once stemmed from her personal capacity to play the most powerful role that the Brazilian society allows: that of a mother in a mother-dominated extended family.<sup>28</sup> Such power,

controlled by others; namely, social conventions, is certainly not enduring and that results in the false perception of love that can entrap women as well as their families.

Lispector’s *Laços de Família*, as previously stated, raises questions that were ignored. The female protagonists’ inner thoughts that are expressed through the narrator allow us a space to closely join the debate of gender and roles. In so doing, Lispector has always been considered ahead of her time, and the turning point in twentieth-century Brazilian literature, and probably world literature at large. Her portrayal of constrictive social demands and expectations towards women can be widely understood, as the family unit is something people all around the world have in common.

### Autran Dourado and the Story of Hunting

Autran Dourado’s *A Barca dos Homens* is a story of the lives of human beings, withdrawn and relatively isolated, who exist on the margins of society. The main character, a mentally-retarded man/child,<sup>29</sup> Fortunato, lives on the fictional island of Boa Vista along with his mother, Luzia who works as a servant for a family led by Godofredo. He is accused of stealing a revolver by Godofredo, and is hunted down by the whole community, including soldiers and vigilantes, since they see him as a threat. They believe that he must be killed before he harms someone. At the end of the story, he is killed for the sake of the community.

The novel works on two levels which clearly divide the time structure

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.59

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.60

<sup>28</sup> Peixoto, Marta. ‘Female Power in *Family Ties*’, p.32

<sup>29</sup> It is the term employed by Daphne Patai.

of the story. The first eight chapters in which the story takes place during the daytime, revolving around Fortunato's actions, are narrated through the third person, whereas the second part of the book is conveyed through Fortunato's interior monologue, and takes place overnight. Although *A Barca dos Homens* is set on an isolated, fictional island, it is not too far-fetched for the reader to understand the message that Dourado tried to imply. Set on an imaginary island, the location is perfect for a myth to take place and be universalized. The author's desire to move from the specific to the general can be seen from his two epigraphs. Dourado begins the book with Thomas Browne's quotation: It is in the power of every hand to destroy us, and we are beholden unto everyone we meet, who doth not kill us.<sup>30</sup> This notion is also echoed in one of the characters' voice, Frei Miguel's: 'Os homens matam e morrem, é esse o destino dos homens. Cada um pode matar o outro. Cada homem pode destruir o próximo. É um destino do homem, a sua liberdade.'<sup>31</sup> (Men kill and die. This is the destiny of men. Each one can kill others. Each man can destroy others. This is a destiny of a man, his own liberty.) To clarify it, it is the truth universally acknowledged that each man can kill or destroy others for their own interests. The second epigraph states: 'Esta é uma história de caça e pesca.'<sup>32</sup> (This is a story of hunting and fishing.) The combination of the two directs our attention to the theme of the hunting of a human being by other human beings.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Dourado, Autran. *A Barca dos Homens* (Lisboa: Livraria Bertrand, 1975), p.7

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.129

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>33</sup> Patai, Daphne. *Myth and Ideology in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction* (New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1983), p.193

In addition, the main character Fortunato also contributes to the universality of the book. He is introduced to the reader as '(a)ssim Fortunato naceu sem pai...o espírito ficava para trás como espiando alguém que ia fazer uma longa viagem. Se não fosse a violência de que às vezes era possuído, aqueles olhos grandes e ingénuos apenas dariam a visão de uma alma criança. Na verdade ninguém podia dizer quantos anos tinha.'<sup>34</sup> (he was born without a father. His spirit is retarded, as if looking at someone who was about to make a long journey. If it was not the violence that sometimes pushed him, his big, ingenious eyes would be a vision of a baby. In fact, no one could tell how old he was.) Fortunato, as stated here, is simple-minded. Sometimes, his eyes are similar to the baby's which signify innocence. Indeed, he is an innocent child/man, untouched by the malicious nature of the civilized world. Instead, he belongs with nature. Therefore, it is very ironic when Godofredo develops his negative attitudes towards Fortunato. Godofredo is a man who prefers the straight line, meaning he feels uncomfortable with something that he cannot explain. Fortunato's thoughts and behaviour which are not understandable for him, therefore, prove to be harmful and need to be got rid of. Fortunato, therefore, serves as a scapegoat on the margins of society that the community must have to secure their position at the centre.

Another important aspect of Fortunato's character lies in his juxtaposition with Christ which leads to the universal myth of sacrifice, death and rebirth. Throughout the book, Dourado emphasizes the continuity of life in which death and birth, destruction and renewal, form an

<sup>34</sup> Dourado, Autran. *A Barca dos Homens*, p.17

endless cycle. There are three important points to be made accordingly. Firstly, both Fortunato and Christ can be considered sacrificial figures, though in a different way. Christ sacrifices himself to redeem man, whereas Fortunato is sacrificed to redeem the normal daily lives of the people on the island. Secondly, the hunting of Fortunato is based on the story made up by Godofredo. No one, except Godofredo himself, knows if Fortunato is innocent or guilty of the theft of the revolver, but the reader can see that the whole community mobilizes to eliminate the so-called 'threat' very rapidly. The form of belief, therefore, has greater durability than the content itself. Because of this, it is undeniable that both Fortunato and Christ are the victims of man's brutality. Frei Miguel, probably, representing the author's voice, clearly expressed it that 'todo dia alguém crucifica alguém',<sup>35</sup> (every day someone crucifies someone.) In his eyes, he views Christ's crucifixion and Fortunato's death as consequences of a brutal man's habitual action. They are then scapegoats, rather than redeemers. Finally, Christ's resurrection emphasizes the continuity of birth and death as an endless circle. His resurrection means a spiritual regeneration for all people, according to Christian belief.<sup>36</sup>

Paradoxically, the birth of another 'Fortunato', by a prostitute at the end of the book, symbolizes the endless need of society to find a scapegoat.

Ultimately, female characters in the story are not to be overlooked, especially Maria, Godofredo's wife. Similar to Lispector's female

characters, Maria is bound by social rules and conventions around her. She is expected by her husband to moments submissive and to perform wifely and motherly duties. However, she has some escapist moment for her real self and feelings. In a quarrel with Godofredo, she expresses her hatred for him and reveals an aggressive side that has long been hidden. She also develops her fascination with Fonseca, one of the police officers, and ends up sleeping with him. But as we see from Lispector's works, those moments are limited and the characters know very well how far they can go, and how little things can change. Maria is no exception because, in the end, she has to return to her submissive character and pursue her daily conventional role as a wife and mother.

As a consequence, because of the book's mythical functions, *A Barca Dos Homens* can easily transmit universal truth to the reader. We can all identify with the themes as knowledge of the Bible or Christianity is rather common. The escapist theme which also appears in Ramos's and Lispector's works helps us understand the specific picture in a clearer way. Dourado, therefore, can be said to succeed in his transformation of truth in the form of a novel.

#### Towards Intertextuality

To take a closer look at the three novels which have been discussed, we can see that they share some similarities which are worth noting. First of all, in terms of the escapist moment experienced by the characters, we can recall Fabiano in *Vidas Secas* who becomes angry with the injustice that is inflicted on him and wants to take revenge. His rage, however, does not last long. He retreats from the violent thoughts with the excuse of his responsibilities as a

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.139

<sup>36</sup> Patai, Daphne. *Myth and Ideology in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction*, p.204

father and a leader of his family. And above all, he knows very well that nothing can be changed or done. In Lispector's and Dourado's works, female characters have the desire to run away from the repetitive roles they are forced to play. Whereas some characters of Lispector choose to sit in the park when they are supposed to be home cooking for the family, or spit on the ground, Dourado's character, Maria, commits an act of adultery. Those different levels of rebellion reflect their escapist moment which is at last interrupted and destroyed by reality.

In addition, the endings of the three books convey the same message; the never-ending cycle of life and fate. In Ramos's *Vidas Secas*, the story ends with Fabiano's family moving into town. The final statement mentions the perpetual temptation of town that will allure and ensnare innocent people from the country. Those people, wanting to better their lives, will go to town, without knowing what is awaiting them. It is an endless cycle of country people succumbing to poverty, barren lives and neon lights. Lispector's *Laços de Família* demonstrates the same ending. Despite their effort to break through social conventions and expectations, they are tied down and brought back to their position in society. It is after all, the so-called 'women's destiny.' In Dourado's *A Barca dos Homens*, Fortunato is not so fortunate as his name suggests. He is killed for the sake of the community and is immediately replaced by a new-born Fortunato. The endless need for a scapegoat, or someone to blame, always exists in a society. The cycle of hunting will not be stopped.

## Conclusion

Difficulties in telling the universal truth through a novel with some specific setting seem to be overcome by the three writers discussed. Ramos's *Vidas Secas* clearly portrays the lives of the marginalised Northeastern people of Brazil. The unfortunate lives those people lead are effectively transmitted to the reader with the third person narrative voice and with this style of writing, we are invited to step into their world of poverty, drought and deception that can actually happen everywhere. Lispector's *Laços de Família* is one of the most debated books in the Brazilian literature. It questions the functions of the most secure unit; the family unit. Along with the issues of family ties, the question of gender is posed throughout the book. The universality of the book lies in the fact that people all over the world, no matter which ethnic group they belong to, have at least one family in which women are demanded by their society to perform wifely and motherly duties. Because of that, the reader can very well understand the truths acknowledged by Lispector. Dourado's use of myth as a universal truth works very well. Juxtaposing his main character to the figure of Christ allows the reader to relate their experiences with the story. Man-hunting, false accusation of innocent people and a search for scapegoats are common in any human community. His discussion of female characters also relates to those of Lispector's. After their real desires explode for a while, the characters retreat and perform the roles they are

supposed to do. To sum up, we can say that all of them have very well managed to break out of the regional settings of their works to impart truths that we can identify with. And that

makes their names remembered as a group of writers who represent the new course of their (inter)national literature.

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