Serendipitous Encounters at the Margins of Texts: Errantry and Decentralization in Ana Maria Gonçalves's *Um Defeito de Cor*

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Abstract

Since the turn of the century, several Afro-Brazilian writers have taken to engage critically with Brazil's colonial past and the absence of Afro-Brazilian voices in historical and literary discourses. Ana Maria Gonçalves's 2006 published novel Um Defeito de Cor *is a paradigmatic example of this emerging corpus as it recuperates the history of the Malê Revolt in Salvador (1835) and envisions the life of its leading figure, Luísa Mahin. This article looks into the representation of hegemonic spaces of centre and periphery in* Um Defeito de Cor *and the intertextual relations drawn in the narrative through the lens of the Afro-Caribbean philosopher and writer Édouard Glissant's* Poetics of Relation*. It argues that* Um Defeito de Cor *builds on the motif of serendipity to carry out a narrative of errantry and decentralization and disclose concealed Afro-Brazilian discourses in intertextual relations.*

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, alguns autores de literatura afro-brasileira se propuseram a rever criticamente narrativas do passado colonial brasileiro e a ausência de vozes negras na constituição de discursos históricos e literários. O romance Um Defeito de Cor*, publicado em 2006 pela escritora e jornalista Ana Maria Gonçalves é um exemplo paradigmatico deste emergente corpo literário.* Um Defeito de Cor *aborda a história da Revolta dos Malês em Salvador em 1835 e imagina a vida de uma de suas líderes, cuja real existência ainda é debatida, Luísa Mahin. Esse artigo se propõe a analizar a representação de espaços hegemônicos de centro e periferia em* Um Defeito de Cor *e nas relações intertextuais explicitadas na narrativa com base no trabalho teórico do filósofo e escritor caribenho Édouard Glissant desenvolvido em* A Poética da Relação*. Um argumento central nessa análise diz que o romance se vale do conceito de serendipidade para construir uma narrativa de* errance *e decentralização, com a qual traz a tona discursos afro-brasileiros em relações de intertextualidade.*

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Ana Maria Gonçalves's second and prize-winning novel *Um Defeito de Cor* tells the saga of the female protagonist, Kehinde, from her survival from a family massacre in Savalu, through to her kidnap into the flourishing transatlantic slave trade in the Dahomey Kingdom. It follows the decades she spent in Bahia – where she comes to bear a central role in the historical Malê Revolt, until her return to Africa, resettling at the Benin Coast as a wealthy businesswoman. Kehinde's first-person narrative is rendered on her deathbed during her last journey to Brazil – where she hopes to meet once again her son, Luis, and leave him "[the time] that has past […] as an inheritance" (Gonçalves 617, my translation).[2] Telling Luis in extensive letters the "things which I would have told you if we had been together" (557, my translation),[3] Kehinde intends to make up for her absence and the breaches in family history since their early separation.

The protagonist's desire to pass on her story underscores *UDdC*'s concern with narrative reparation and the recuperation of absent voices – a concern with regards not only to the protagonist's family context but also to Brazilian history and the literary canon. Making the stance of an enslaved African woman the focal point of narrative, *UDdC* renders a counter-narrative of Brazilian history – representing the Brazil's past "from bellow", i.e. from the perspective of the oppressed, the enslaved. However, while *UDdC* can be seen to clearly take issue with hegemonic relations in the production of History, it is in its overt intertextual dialogues with literature that the novel makes its counter-narrative discourse more productive. As Eduardo de Assis Duarte explains, "[t]he Brazilian novel displays, as a rule, a considerable male hegemony, be it in authorial terms, in protagonism, or in the represented universe" (Duarte 22, my translation).[4] In Kehinde's first-person narrative, Gonçalves' novel claims its own space within this predominantly male – and whitened – Brazilian literary production, where the Black feminine voice has been made invisible by hegemonic discourse. *UDdC* takes issue with these matters of narrative focus and authorship in Brazilian literature in an elaborate intertextual dialogue with canonical texts by established authors such as Jorge Amado and Joaquim Manuel de Macedo.

As this article will argue, *UDdC's* narrative of slavery blurs the boundaries between history and literature but also between hegemonic notions of centre and margins, employing intertextuality as a device for a literary decentralization of Brazilian textual

[2] "[o tempo] que já passou e que eu gostaria de te deixar como herança".
[3] "[coisas] que eu contaria se estivéssemos juntos".
[4] "O romance brasileiro ostenta, por via de regra, uma considerável hegemonia masculina, tanto na autoria, quanto no protagonismo ou no universo representado."

BRASILIANA: *Journal for Brazilian Studies*. ISSN 2245-4373.
Double Issue Vol. 8 Nos. 1-2 (2019).

production. This concern with decentralization in the novel's handling of white male authored intertexts evinces a deep congruence of the Afro-Brazilian contemporary novel with the critical thought of the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant.[5] This essay sets out to more closely investigate *UDdC*'s engagement with the main concepts of Glissantian theory in the intertextual sphere, tending to *UDdC*'s explicit dialogues with the Brazilian canon in the prologue and main narrative. In this analysis, I hope to stake out how the novel's narrative strategies engage with Black Diasporic postcolonial discourse to reclaim Afro-Brazilian female voices within the Brazilian literary landscape.

Serendipity

'You don't reach Serendip by plotting a course for it.
You have to set out in good faith for elsewhere and lose
Your bearings serendipitously.'
John Barth, em *The Last Voyage of Somebody, the Sailor (Nova York, 1991)*
(Gonçalves 9)

Accompanied by the announcing exclamation "Serendipities!", John Barth's aphorism opens the prologue of Ana Maria Gonçalves' *Um Defeito de Cor* and urges the reader to tend to the contingency of discovery pervading the novel. The prologue, written in Gonçalves' voice, begins by informing the reader that the story they are about to read derives from the reminiscent pages of Kehinde's letters to her son, found by chance in the small and poor village of Itaparica, Bahia, and edited into the final version of the novel. By account of these fictional encounters, the reader is deceptively misled into believing the artefactual status of Kehinde's testimonial account, encountered by Gonçalves in a moment of serendipity.

Originally coined by the British writer Horace Walpole, in 1754, the term serendipity derives from Walpole's interpretation of a Persian tale translated as *The Travels and Adventures of Three Princes of Serendip* (1722). As Walpole's version of the story goes, the ruling king sends away three princes on an expedition and:

> […]as their Highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents or sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered

[5] See Silva for another reading of Glissant's theory, concerned with *UDdC's* memory work.

BRASILIANA: *Journal for Brazilian Studies*. ISSN 2245-4373.
Double Issue Vol. 8 Nos. 1-2 (2019).

> that a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right (Walpole qtd. in *Serendipity* 2).

Reflecting on the "accidental sagacity" of the wandering princes – able to track a one-eyed mule through their sole attention to its unusual trail, Walpole dwells on the accidental workings behind these eventful discoveries, which he accordingly names "serendipities". Conceived as the unusual combination of sagacity and accident, serendipity comes to address any situation where unheralded discovery takes place as a result from the oscillation of these two ingredients.

After its initial mention and a brief contextualization of Walpole's neologism, *UDdC* makes a point in rendering its own definition of the term. Serendipity comes to refer then to:

> that kind of situation in which we discover or find something while we were looking for something else but for which we already had to be, so to say, ready. That is to say, we need at least a bit of knowledge about what we have 'discovered' so that the happy moment of serendipity does not pass by without us noticing"[6] (Gonçalves 9, my translation).

Although it does not foreclose the role of keen perception accentuated in Walpole's first mention, the prologue's narrative voice refrains from further engaging in the individual merits of sagacity, rephrasing it to a readiness of the mind, which requires only little preparation – "a bit of knowledge" to realize the "happy moment". Hence, serendipity does not necessarily come to illustrate those situations clearly marked by one's exceptional wits, but rather those which, closer in meaning to John Barth's epigraph, presuppose receptivity and a propensity for diversion. Moreover, framing it with apostrophes, *UDdC* seems to suggest a relativization of the act of discovery in serendipity, suspending its realization – Did we "discover" it? And, did "we" discover it? Or else, did discovery come upon us?

[6] "Serendipidade [então] passou a ser usada para descrever aquela situação em que descobrimos ou encontramos alguma coisa enquanto estávamos procurando outra, mas para a qual já tinhamos que estar, digamos, preparados. Ou seja, precisamos ter pelo menos um pouco de conhecimento sobre o que 'descobrimos' para que o feliz momento de serendipidade não passe por nós sem que sequer o notemos".

Following these subtle hints of doubt, *UDdC*'s prologue offers two episodes which will foreground other elements integral to the workings of serendipity.

Serendipitous Encounters with Texts

"*Um Defeito de Cor* is a product of serendipity" (ibid., my translation),[7] claims the prologue, and presents the reader with two serendipitous discoveries which culminate in Gonçalves's final encounter with Kehinde's letters. The first unexpected discovery takes place in a bookshop, where Gonçalves was looking for a travel guide for Cuba and, suddenly:

> Separating some travel guides to go through them with more calm, several of them fell from the shelf as domino pieces, and I could only hold on to one, before it too would fall to the ground. It was Jorge Amado's *Bahia de Todos os Santos – guia de ruas e mistérios*. There, my first serendipity took place (10, my translation).[8]

After rescuing Amado's Bahia de Todos os Santos: Guia de Ruas e Mistérios da Cidade de Salvador ("Bahia of all-saints: a guide to the streets and mysteries of Salvador", 1945) from the avalanche of books, Gonçalves's look briefly diverts to the pages laid opened in the prologue, "Convite" ("Invitation"):

> 'And when the guitar weeps in the hand of the serenade singers on the frantic street of the most agitated city, do not, lady, linger any minute on indecision. Answer the call and come. Bahia waits for you in its daily fest. […] come and I will be your guide' […]
>
> I just had no idea of what to do in Bahia but, when the moment is of serendipity, things just happen. That is why, a few pages ahead, I found the following text:
>
> 'Of Alufá Licutã, who knows the name, the traces, the knowledge, the gesture, and the face of the man? He commanded the revolt of enslaved blacks for four days and the city of Bahia had him as his ruler as the Malê nation rose to the dawn of liberty, breaking the shackles, and wielded the weapons declaring the equality of men. I don't know of a story of struggle more beautiful than that of the Malê people, nor of a revolt repressed with such violence.

[7] "*Um Defeito de Cor* é fruto da serendipidade".

[8] "Separando alguns guias para ver com calma, vários deles, como peças de dominó, caíram da prateleira, e consegui segurar apenas um, antes que fosse ao chão. Era *Bahia de Todos Os Santos – guia de ruas e mistérios* do Jorge Amado. Foi aí que aconteceu a primeira serendipidade".

> […]
> About the revolt and its leader not much is known. At the most, silence. It is the case of asking where are the young historians from Bahia, some of such quality and intellectual courage, who do not take up to research the Malê Revolt, and who do not bring up the magnificent figure of the leader? […] Topic for a great novel…' (10-1, my translation). [9]

Weaving Jorge Amado's *Convite* into the prologue's narrative, *UDdC* summons *Bahia de Todos os Santos* as a pre-text and pretext for the writer's unheralded engagement with the story of Bahia's Malê Revolt. *Convite* renders two approximations of historiographical approaches that set the pillar for Gonçalves's upcoming project. First, it replaces the historians' missing work on the Malê Revolt with the vision of "a great novel", acknowledging an analogous value between historical and fictional representations of the past, which propels the author's research in Bahia. Secondly, as an invitation that simultaneously proposes a touristic visit and historical *re-visitation* – *Convite* introduces an approximation between local and narrative explorations, which will pervade *UDdC*'s narrative.

Lingering on Amado's conclusion over the failure or disinterest of native historians in engaging with the Malês' history and its remediation through the creative contributions of visitors that would come to form a great novel, Gonçalves takes thus a double cue from *Convite.* She decides to go to Salvador, where she intends to "[walk] through the streets where the Malês had walked, [enter] the churches they had once entered, [swim] in the sea where they had once swum because I knew that if I weren't *in loco*, I wouldn't finish the book" (11, my translation).[10] The aspiring writer is convinced that "although I did not belong to the category of 'young historians from Bahia', it was clear that it was directed to me the provocation about writing a novel" (ibid., my translation).[11] Building on the appellative tone

[9] "'E quando a viola gemer nas mãos do seresteiro na rua trepidante da cidade mais agitada, não tenhas, moça, um minuto de indecisão. Atende ao chamado e vem. A Bahia te espera para sua festa cotidiana. […]vem e serei seu cicerone.' [...]/ Eu só não tinha ainda a mínima idéia do que fazer na Bahia, mas quando o momento é de serendipidade, as coisas simplesmente acontecem. Foi por isso que, algumas páginas adiante, encontrei o seguinte texto: 'Do Alufá Licutã, quem conhece o nome, os feitios, o saber, o gesto, a face do homem? / Comandou a revolta dos negros escravos durante quatro dias e a cidade da Bahia o teve como seu governante quando a nação malê acendeu a aurora da liberdade, rompendo as grilhetas, e empunhou as armas, proclamando a igualdade dos homens. Não sei de história de luta mais bela do que esta do povo Malê, nem de revolta reprimida com tamanha violência. [...] / Da revolta e de seu chefe pouco se sabe. No mais, o silêncio. É o caso de se perguntar onde estão os jovens historiadores baianos, alguns de tanta qualidade e coragem intelectual, que não pesquisam a revolta dos malês, não levantam a figura magnífica do chefe? […] Tema para um grande romance..."

[10] "[...] andando pelas ruas por onde os Malês tinham andado, entrando nas igrejas por onde tinham entrado, nadando no mar no qual eles tinham nadado, pois tinha certeza de que, se não *estivesse in loco*, o livro não sairia ".

[11] "[...]apesar de não pertencer à categoria de 'jovens historiadores baianos', estava claro que era para mim a provocação sobre escrever um romance".

of Amado's text, the writer not only claims to accept its invitation but also reclaims the position of its intended addressee, rendering *UDdC* the product of an accepted call set out directly to her. The belief that *Convite* was addressed to her induces a suspension of contingency in the event of discovery that does not quite befit the original idea of chance in serendipity. However, this apparent suspension does not necessarily renounce the surprise effect of serendipity but prompts at this moment rather a less orthodox reading of Walpole's concept – setting aside the inherent tension between casualty and causality to foreground another of its determinant traits: diversion.

Analogous to the Serendip princes' wandering focus, in *UDdC*, serendipity is affected by the ability to divert attention to one's surrounding spaces and peripheral texts. The unexpected encounter with Amado's prologue deviates Gonçalves from the original purpose of her search, after which her travel destination is replaced and discarded – "I think I left the travel guides about Cuba on the floor, mesmerized by what I had just discovered" (ibid., my translation).[12] Once in Bahia, it is again her propensity to divert from the intended path that emerges as a propitious device for inquiring Salvador's Malê history. Following her arrival in Bahia's capital, Gonçalves visits the village of Itaparica, a small province located in a neighbouring island about 10 kilometres away from the city of Salvador. And, after falling in love with one of the village stories told by a local resident, she decides to move to Itaparica. This spontaneous decision to reside outside the site of her inquiries reveals another movement of deviation in the prologue's narrative – a movement, which proves itself fruitful once, soon after starting her research, Gonçalves comes across an investigative dead end. She finds in Bahia a large amount of material already written on the Malês and realizes that "[a] lot more people beside me and ahead of me have accepted Jorge Amado's invitation […]. I gave up the idea of writing the book about the Malês […]" (13, my translation).[13]

At this moment, the prologue reveals the writer's illusory and biased reading of Amado's *Convite*, where Gonçalves's own wish to accept the challenge of historical discovery took the lead of interpretation. Such a desiring reading illustrates a mode of

[12] "Acho que esqueci pelo chão os guias sobre Cuba, encantada com o que tinha acabado de descobrir".
[13] "[...] muito mais gente, além de mim e antes de mim, tinha aceitado o convite de Jorge Amado […] Abandonei a idéia de escrever o livro sobre os malês […]".

BRASILIANA: *Journal for Brazilian Studies*. ISSN 2245-4373.
Double Issue Vol. 8 Nos. 1-2 (2019).

perception Slavoj Zizek has termed "looking awry" or "looking from aside". Leaning on Lacan's desire theory, Zizek posits that:

> […] if we look at a thing straight on, i.e., from a matter-of-fact, disinterested, 'objective' perspective, we see nothing but a formless spot. The object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it 'from aside', i.e., with an 'interested' look, with a look supported, permeated, and 'distorted' by a desire (Zizek 34).

Similarly, in *UDdC*, the aspiring writer's desire for discovering a dismissed narrative distorts Amado's invitation. Before Gonçalves' desiring eye, *Convite* comes to assume its full meaning and purpose only at the fateful moment its proposition is accepted by its original "addressee" – herself. The writer's understanding of *Convite* derives from her own desire to break the silence around the Brazilian counter-narrative – the barely known "beautiful story" of the Malês' oppressed struggle. Nonetheless, after acknowledging previous engagements with the history of the Malê Revolt, Gonçalves resigns the self-claimed position of *Convite*'s exclusive recipient, but not her own wish to summon missing histories. She then sets her mind on a new book project about a historical event in São Luis do Maranhão, about which she assured herself that not much had yet been written.

This re-orientation foregrounds the writer's desire to engage overturned historical narratives in literature and, moreover, opens the way for a second serendipity. While *Convite* endorsed an approximation of literature and history central to the validation of *UDdC*'s counter-narrative discourse, the revelation of the researcher's deceptive look awry reveals that such an approximation demands a particular kind of endeavour, which I will call intertextual errantry.

Intertextual Errantry

In *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant explains the visionary and unbiased workings of *errance* – or errantry – as follows:

> Errantry […] does not proceed from renunciation nor from frustration regarding a supposedly deteriorated (deterritorialized) situation of origin; it is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment. […T]he thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related (Glissant 18).

In accordance with Glissant's notion of errantry, in *UDdC*, the discovered texts about the Malês do not prompt an abrupt renunciation of Gonçalves' engagement with Brazil's invisible narratives but rather restate the need, in serendipity, to allow for "things [to] just happen". Accepting Amado's call and later the existence of other texts on the Malê history thus become important steps in the writer's process of exloration, where Gonçalves acknowledges the things relayed as much as the things related. This discloses the discovery of '*Convite*' to be only the first movement of diversion towards the blind spots of Brazilian history.

Before leaving for Maranhão, Gonçalves pays one last visit to Itaparica to hand the portraits she promised to Vanessa, a little girl she had met in the village church months ago. Carrying only the little girl's portrait as a reference, Gonçalves asks around for directions to Vanessa's residence and finally arrives at "a very simple house, without pavement, without number, and at a dead-end street" (Gonçalves 14, my translation). There:

> Dona Clara, [Vanessa's] mother, invited me to have a cup of coffee and, when I entered her living room, I noticed an unusual coffee table, with the glass top sustained by piles and piles of paper and magazines. I complimented them, saying that it was good to know that someone there enjoyed reading. Dona Clara said that this was not really the case, that she used the magazines to support the tabletop, but that they also came in handy when the children had to cut out images for some school homework. Regarding the papers, the youngest son, who was six years old, used them to draw on the side that had not been used yet (ibid., my translation).[14]

The six-year-old boy, Gérson, used the backside of paper sheets his mother had found in the old church basement, when she had been asked by the local priest to clean the facilities and throw away any old piece of paper. Instead of fulfilling the priest's request, Clara decided to keep the old papers and magazines for the children's entertainment.

While Gonçalves still waits for Vanessa, Clara asks her son to come show his work to the special guest:

[14] "Dona Clara, a mãe, me convidou para tomar um café e, quando entrei na sala, percebi uma inusitada mesa de centro, com o tampo de vidro sustentado por pilhas e pilhas de papéis e revistas. Elogiei, dizendo que era bom saber que alguém ali gostava muito de ler. Dona Clara disse que não era bem assim, que usava as revistas para apoiar o vidro da mesa, mas que também serviam para que as crianças recortassem figuras para algum trabalho de escola. Quanto aos papéis, o filho mais novo, de seis anos, usava-os para desenhar do lado em que ainda não tinham sido usados ".

> […] Gérson, enthusiastic with his new audience, ran into the house and returned with sheets and more sheets of drawings. Nothing special, but I looked at them attentively and even complimented him because, with some incentive, the boy could maybe improve. You never know where great talents hide.
> Turning one of the sheets around, which looked yellowed with age and had let the fountain pen handwriting soak through to the sides of the drawings, I realized what looked like a document written in old Portuguese - with tiny and very well drawn letters, [and] a continuous writing, almost out of breath or punctuation. The reading of that sheet was already very compromised, not only through the interference of the boy's drawing on its opposite side, but also because it looked like it had been made on a porous surface, which might have well been the naked concrete floor of the living room, which left deeply carved traces and caused it to tear on some spots. I took another sheet, this time with a smaller drawing on it and as I turned it around, the first word I could read was 'Licutan' (15, my translation and emphasis).[15]

Spotting the name of the Malês' former leader, Licutã, written in old Portuguese, concretizes Gonçalves' second moment of revelation. Here, although the prologue does not conclude this to be the aspiring writer's second and "most happy serendipity" (14) – which is previously announced but not explicitly indicated like the first –, its certainty is implied, first, due to this passage's clear mention of Licutã and reference to the novel's main text and, second, in Gonçalves' recognition of the relevance of the manuscript. The handwritten letter fragments surpass her initial expectation of finding artefactual evidence that could underpin her writing and convey "much more than I had dared to look for" (16, my translation).

Culminating in the discovery of this first-hand account of the Malê Revolt, *UDdC's* prologue reveals the writer's errant and diverting path as a mode for engaging with the blind spots of Brazilian history. Gonçalves's serendipitous discovery of Kehinde's letters derives from a series of deviations from the centre stage of Bahia's historical setting and discourse to its periphery – a circular movement that enables the writer to wander off to spaces a researcher would not likely enter. Through her wanderings into uncharted territories and unceasing relations of Bahia's literary and urban landscape, the renounced

[15] "Ele, Gérson, todo feliz com a plateia, correu para dentro da casa e voltou com folhas e mais folhas de desenhos. Nada de especial, mas olhei com atenção, pois, incentivado, o menino podia até melhorar. Nunca se sabe onde estão escondidos os grandes talentos. / Virando um dos papéis, amarelado pelo tempo e que deixava vazar a escrita em caneta-tinteiro para o lado dos desenhos, percebi que parecia um documento escrito em português antigo, as letras miúdas e muito bem desenhadas, uma escrita contínua, quase sem fôlego ou pontuação. A leitura daquela folha já estava bastante prejudicada, não só pela interferência do desenho do menino no lado oposto, mas também porque este parecia ter sido feito sobre uma superfície porosa, que bem podia ser o chão de cimento cru da sala, com traços bastante calcados, fazendo com que a folha se rasgasse em alguns pontos. Peguei outro papel que tinha um desenho menor e, assim que o virei, a primeira palavra que consegui ler foi 'Licutan''.

researcher gradually distances herself from more obvious sites of historiographical inquiry into occluded spaces, wherein Afro-Brazilian narratives lies unaccounted for the researcher's desiring eye.

The first of various sideways glances takes place when, instead of wandering through the streets of the capital, as Amado had suggested, Gonçalves trades the centred stance of the canonical writer for a secluded satellite location – an island and therein a small village, which stand in clear antithetical relation to the populous and prominent capital of Bahia. Further, engaging with this space liberated from a conditioned inquisitive glance renders Gonçalves more receptive to Bahia's uncovered narratives and invisible spaces. Emphasizing the invisibility of this space to the hegemonic narrative, Vanessa's house is an unnumbered and irregular building on a nameless dead-end street – a doubly invisible locus, not only socially marginalized but also officially inexistent and only accessible through the local indication. At last, Vanessa's house conceals an unrecognized artefact of Bahia's slave past whose representative value remains unrealized to its poorly literate guardians. Because of the pages' poor conditions as much as the family's inability to decode their writings (cf. 15), Kehinde's letters are made once again invisible, reduced to stained paper and her testimonial words, deprived of its discursive power. In this scene, Gonçalves's last errant movement takes place on the flat surface of paper sheets. Given one of Gérson's drawings and "look[ing] at them attentively" so as to identify their possible hidden value, Gonçalves allows her sight to divert "to the sides of the drawings" and the dark stains framing it. Parting from the perimeter of the boy's drawings to their peripheral space discloses a deeper and shadowy layer soaking through from the backside of the sheets – the ghostly traces of Kehinde's story insistently infiltrating the visible layer. Not erased, nor overwritten, and yet, overturned and hidden from view, the child's sheets of drawing carry palimpsestic traces, which interfere on the present surface to denounce a historical narrative overturned.

In *UDdC*'s revelatory errantry from the centre to margins, Glissant's thought of errantry is evoked as a propitious mode for the exploration of marginalized spaces and texts. The discovery of historical blind spots calls for an interaction that eschews an "absolute forward projection" (Glissant 12), and rejects the possibility to "know the totality of the world" (20):

> Errant, he challenges and discards the universal - this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it (ibid.).

Along the lines of Glissant's call for a renunciation of universal truth and totalitarian knowledge, the prologue of *UDdC* dismisses teleological approach and "arrow-like" projection (221) as proper modes to access erased counter-narratives. In place thereof, Gonçalves must renounce the desire to conquest and possess history and, moreover, evade the limited visual range of the centre – whose claims of "transparency", objectivity, and historical truth are the real dismissing force behind narrative gaps.

This scene concludes a series of diverting movements – errant and decentralizing – performed by the writer, where she turns her attention from the centre to the margins of historical sites, public spaces, and paper sheets. Like the princes in the *Serendip* tale, who discovered the trail of a one-eyed mule by attending to the sideways of their path, the errant explorer too must decentralize her glance to the side spaces. Moving to the peripheral space of city and texts to attain more awareness of Bahia's history blind spots, *UDdC*'s narrative seems to build on the visual effect of "anamorphosis", where a projected image can only be recognized from one specific vantage point. Yet, as shown by the prologue's extensive citation of Amado's text, the errant's focus is never static and requires movement to delineate the unseen object. Only in movement – i.e., departing from canonical texts and historical sites to peripheral archives and spaces – can the writer arrive at contrasting marginal voices.

Decentralization and Marginalized Voices

As exemplified by Gonçalves's evocation of Amado, decentralization and errantry take place not only on geographical terms but in a "revelatory wandering" through intertexts (Glissant 16). In fact, *UDdC*'s intertextual errantry is disclosed as the author first adopts and then relativizes the workings of Walpole's serendipity and, in the following, accepts and disavows Amado's invitation to autonomously engage with her surroundings. This departure educates the reader into a navigation of peripheral texts that is primordial

for the appreciation of *UDdC*'s main text and the array of narratives interweaved within it. Additionally, the main narrative, told in Kehinde's voice, invests in intertextual errantry and decentralization as a device to depart from the literary canon and engage with Afro-Brazilian female counter-narratives.

Following this decentralizing strategy outlined in the prologue, Kehinde's autobiographical narrative attends not only to her memories but very often lingers on underlying narratives laid open alongside her story. *UDdC* builds on the semantical disparity between "looking for" and "seeing" to project many other stories inside and to the side of the protagonist's memoir which, literally, populate its 947 pages. In this respect, it renders no exaggeration to affirm that the novel's narrative is seldom focused on Kehinde's personal struggle and development from an enslaved child to a successful businesswoman in Africa, but rather loses sight of her quest to disperse in the painstaking description of late colonial and early republican settings and Brazil's early socio-cultural relations.

As soon as Kehinde learns that her son Luis has been sold into slavery, the protagonist starts a desperate search, travelling to different localities of Brazil – such as Rio de Janeiro, Santos, and São Paulo. In her account of each stop, the former slave weaves in numerous encounters with other characters whose stories provide an intricate and heterogeneous illustration of the urban Brazilian life and socio-spatial relations in the late nineteenth-century. Her interminable search through historical centres in Brazil sheds light on reminiscences of African daily culture as well as elements and circumstances that marked Afro-Brazilian syncretism – such as the adaptation of Yoruba and Jêjê-Nagô cultural practices, or the communal structures of associations formed by slaves and former slaves. The protagonist's memoiristic narrative recovers thus other fates in the agitated life of Brazilian urban centres, whose stories she wants integrated to her personal – and their family – story (cf. Gonçalves 662).

Following its narrative structure with diverting focus hinders a clear genre classification, as critic Cristina Stevens explains:

> [*UDdC*] cannot be characterized as a fictional narrative only: it can be read as a kind of diary, […further,] it is an epic narrative of a heroine. […] She records in great detail these several journeys, not only from the geographical, cultural point of view; her narrative also analyses her complex, inward, psychological journeys, her incessant search for roots and identity. / […] At the same time, the novel can be read as a historical, anthropological, sociological narrative. [… At last,] it can be read as an epistolary novel (Stevens 200,1).

Kehinde's autobiographical account goes beyond the imaginable extent of a personal or family memoir. Along with this detailed and in-depth reconstruction of nineteenth - century society from the perspective of the African protagonist, prominent historical figures are also brought to life through their personal relationship to Kehinde. The product is a black-authored account of Brazilian history and culture whose textual richness and complexity conveys a multitude of narratives. This aggregating effect is at some point directly addressed by the protagonist-narrator, who, self-aware of her overly detailed descriptions, admits that: "I don´t even know that I remembered so many names….[But as I know how bad it feels to have many unanswered questions,] I try to remember every important detail of my life, to answer all the questions you may not even know you have" (Gonçalves 662, my translation).[16] Or, after giving a long explanation about Yoruba religious beliefs: "I have no idea of what you know about the cults of my homeland, and I apologize if nothing that I tell here is of your interest. But these are things which I would have told you if we had been together, things which I enjoy knowing and I think it is important that you know them too" (577, my translation).[17] Among the secondary characters stand out the Imam mala Abubakar, characterized as financial and spiritual guide to most of the Malês living during that time in Bahia, the Malê Revolt leader Alufá Licutã, depicted as Kehinde's acquaintance and helper, and curious figures such as the "flying" priest Bartolomeu Gusmão, whose adventurous flight invention with balloons has also become the inspiration for José Saramago's 1982 *Memorial do Convento* – briefly referred to in one of *UDdC's* footnotes.

Evoking figures and stories from historical discourse and literary texts makes out part of *UDdC's* narrative strategy. As literary critic Eduardo de Assis Duarte contends:

> Linked to the post-modern disbelief that interprets History's discourse as narrative […], Ana Maria Gonçalves's text makes itself historiographic metafiction to shelter other accounts, including those dismissed as scientific sources, origin of a possible truth of facts. In this dialogism, voices of an Afro-Brazilian memory emerge, placed at the *antipodes of*

[16] "[T]ento me lembrar de cada detalhe da minha vida, para responder a todas as dúvidas que você pode nem saber que tem".

[17] "Não tenho idéia do que você sabe sobre os cultos da minha terra, e peço desculpas se nada do que eu contar aqui for do seu interesse. Mas são coisas que eu contaria se estivéssemos juntos, coisas das quais gostei de saber e acho importante que você saiba também".

> *official history* which pushes the novel discourse into the coupling and co-habitation of disparate versions (Duarte 22-3, my translation and emphasis).[18]

As seen in the prologue's summoning of Amado's *Convite*, *UDdC's* intricate dialogism convey antipodal spaces not only of official history but also the literary discourse. A similar venture can be seen in Kehinde's claim to the early Brazilian Romantic tradition, whereas the novels *A Moreninha*, published in 1844, and *O Moço Loiro*, published in 1845, both written by Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, are evoked as parts of Kehinde's story.

While looking for traces that might lead her to Luis in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Kehinde makes acquaintance with the aspiring writer Joaquim Manuel de Macedo – soon to be one of the leading authors of the Brazilian early Romanticist movement. On the occasion of their first encounter, Kehinde and her friend Tomásia are talking about Tomásia's new job at the city theater and the famous Italian singer, Candiani, who had recently become the theatre's main attraction. Noticing the women's talk about Candiani, by whom he had become fascinated, Macedo stops at their side to eavesdrop:

> We were so entertained with the stories Tomásia told us that we didn't even notice [Macedo], standing still between our trays, attentively listening to our conversation [about Candiani]. It was Benta who asked him if he wished something – to which he answered that what he most wanted in life was to know Candiani and then started posing Tomásia many questions, who could barely hide her satisfaction for being given so much attention. The young mister wanted to know where [Candiani] lived and, when Tomásia answered it was on the Ouvidor Street, he replied that this really had to be a work of the Divine Providence, that the saints were collaborating for him to come even closer to his muse [.B]ecause at that very moment he was on his way to the Ouvidor Street, more precisely to the *Jornal do Commercio* Newspaper, where he was about to leave a copy of the novel he was finishing. He looked very friendly, and I decided to ask him if he wanted to publish the novel at the newspaper, to which he answered yes, because the newspaper needed to start publishing Brazilian authors. I mentioned that I accompanied every *feuilleton* publication, and, after his initial astonishment, he wanted to know my opinion about them. […] Doutor Joaquim became very impressed by what I said [. He] set out to walk alongside us since we were going in the same direction, and divided his attention between the

[18] "Vinculado à descrença pós-moderna que interpreta o discurso da História como narrativa [...], o texto de Ana Maria Gonçalves se faz metaficção historiográfica para abrigar outros relatos, inclusive aqueles não-reconhecidos como fontes científicas, origem de uma possível verdade dos fatos. Nesse dialogismo, emergem as vozes de uma memória afro-brasileira colocada nos antípodas da história oficial, que tensiona o discurso do romance rumo ao acoplamento e co-habitação de versões díspares".

> curiosity regarding the *cantarina* and his desire to tell me about his book (Gonçalves 698,9, my translation).[19]

In this scene, once again serendipity sets off a fortuitous encounter that weaves an intertextual thread into *UDdC*. With his interest set on learning more about Candiani, the writer turns his attention away from his path to the *Jornal do Commercio* to the ongoing talk of the two *quituteiras*. This attention to the women standing on the street side engenders a movement of diversion, which allows him a closer contact and exchange with a peripheral layer of Rio de Janeiro's (social) landscape – side figures and stories which will deeply influence his prose.

At the time they meet, Macedo is working on the manuscripts of his later most influential novels *A Moreninha* and *O Moço Loiro*. Impressed by what Kehinde had to say in their first conversation, Macedo started to look for her every Saturday, when the two of them would talk about his newest project – *A Moreninha.* As Macedo asks for Kehinde's opinion on the developing plot, she contributes, among other ways, by providing the missing protagonist's name:

> Do you know something I am very proud of? Of giving a name to the young lady in the novel, whom [Macedo] had called so far only "*moreninha*" for not being able to find a fitting name yet. I don't know why but while he read to me the passages which described the young woman, I imagined her as Carolina, the oldest daughter of *sinhazinha*, since at that time both were the same age. It is a romantic and beautiful story, which both Carolina and *sinhazinha* could have lived, more so because it was set almost entirely on an island, which I soon *imagined* to be the Itaparica Island. […] I wanted you to know of my role [in the novel], which, besides having one story, is also part of another, mine. Or ours, because it was because of you that I ended up in Sao Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro and met Doutor Joaquim (699, my translation).[20]

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[19] Original: "Estávamos tão entretidas com as histórias da Tomásia que nem demos por [doutor Joaquim], parado em meio aos tabuleiros, todo ouvidos na nossa conversa [sobre Candiani]. Foi a Benta quem perguntou se o sinhozinho queria alguma coisa, e ele respondeu que o que mais queria na vida era conhecer a *cantarina*, a Candiani, e começou a fazer muitas perguntas à Tomásia, que não cabia em si de tanta importância. O jovem doutor quis saber onde ela morava, e quando a Tomásia respondeu que era na Rua do Ouvidor, ele comentou que só podia ser mesmo obra da Divina Providência, que os santos estavam colaborando para que ele chegasse mais perto da sua musa, pois naquele exato momento estava de passagem para a Rua do Ouvidor, mais precisamente para o *Jornal do Commercio*, onde ia deixar a amostra de um romance que estava acabando de escrever. Ele parecia simpático, e resolvi perguntar se queria publicar o livro no jornal e ele respondeu que sim, que o jornal precisava começar a publicar autores brasileiros. Eu comentei que acompanhava todos os folhetins, e depois do espanto inicial ele quis saber a minha opinião sobre eles. [...] O doutor Joaquim ficou muito impressionado com o que eu disse e resolveu nos acompanhar, já que faríamos o mesmo trajeto, e foi dividindo a atenção entre a curiosidade a respeito da *cantarina* e a vontade de me falar do seu livro".

[20] "Sabe de uma coisa da qual muito me orgulho? De ter dado o nome à mocinha do livro, que ele chamava apenas de

Kehinde's und Macedo's meetings make out an unusual literary collaboration, wherein a former slave is not only able to voice her personal interpretation of the narrative but even to leave her own mark imprinted on the novel's final version. Inspired by the protagonist's similarities to an old-time friend's daughter, Kehinde gives name to Macedo's central character and, decades later, still holds on "proudly" to her creative contribution. Rendering Macedo's literary work as indebted to her imaginative investment, *A Moreninha* is summoned not only as a contextualizing asset to her story but, further, to reclaim it as part of her own narrative – "part of [my story, or] ours".

Similarly, Kehinde presents a revision of Macedo's second novel, *O Moço Loiro,* whose fictional narrative is disclosed as partly inspired by her close friend and former slave – Tomásia – and her insights from a peripheral stance. For this reason, so Kehinde, Macedo's creation of a homonymous character in his novel should be seen as a:

> homage, because [Macedo] used some stories told by her about the [Independence] war and the performance of the *cantarinas,* and because he was also inspired by the evening gatherings that Tomásia had witnessed in the accommodations of Candiani and other ladies whom she helped getting dressed (704, my translation).[21]

Besides inspiring one of its secondary characters, Tomásia had a central influence on the plot of *O Moço Loiro* – providing the author with information about the Brazilian war of independence and the intimate meetings of high society women. Moreover, hers is a unique perspective from the margins, which not only grants Macedo an insight into these intimate feminine spaces but whose contrasting glance from a lower social class also offers an incisive critique of the superficialities and decadence of the bourgeoisie that marks the tone of *O Moço Loiro*.

"moreninha", por não ter conseguido ainda encontrar um nome que combinasse com ela. Não sei o motivo, mas enquanto ele lia para mim os trechos que descreviam a moça, eu a imaginava como sendo a Carolina, filha da sinhazinha, já que naquela época tinham a mesma idade. É uma história romântica e bonita, que tanto a Carolina como a sinhazinha poderiam ter vivido, ainda mais por se passar quase toda em uma ilha que eu logo imaginei como sendo a Ilha de Itaparica. [...] Eu gostaria que soubesse da minha parte [no romance], que, além de ter uma história, também faz parte de uma outra, a minha. Ou a nossa, porque foi por sua causa que eu tinha ido parar em São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro e conhecido o doutor Joaquim".

[21] "Uma homenagem, porque ele usou algumas histórias contadas por ela sobre a guerra e as apresentações das *cantarinas,* e também se inspirou nos saraus que a Tomásia presenciou nos salões da Candiani e de outras damas que ajudava a vestir".

Redefining Tomásia as more than Macedo's secondary character and one of the main sources of information for his novel, *UDdC* decentralizes its narrative focus and reclaims black female authorial voice. Although the narrator conceives Macedo's fictionalized representation of her friend as a homage, *UDdC* emphasizes the importance of Tomásia's creative contribution for Macedo's final narrative, who was not only "inspired" by her but also by her stories and observations. And yet, the extent to which Kehinde's narrative is intended to trouble the writer's prestige and authority over Tomásia's stories remains unclear – a fine line left uncrossed or, one could even say, dismissed.

Nevertheless, in its intertextual claims over both *O Moço Loiro* and *A Moreninha*, *UDdC* complicates the novels' presupposed narrative focus and authorial voice by tending to the influence of Afro-Brazilian women – made visible in the canon. With its depiction of the author's otherwise unaccounted black female muses – or better said, collaborators – Kehinde's narrative disrupts the stable claim of hegemonic narrative and abolishes delineated notions of centre and periphery in the Brazilian literary production. In its "revelatory wanderings" through centred discourses and marginalized voices, the novel's sequential diversions can be seen to recall thus a further asset of Glissant's decentralizing teachings. Shifting attention to marginal spaces – spaces "made invisible" in the city landscape and texts, the errant must learn to lead "from periphery to periphery, and […reproducing] the track of circular nomadism, […it] makes every periphery into a centre; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of centre and periphery" (Glissant 29).

Underscoring the connections between Brazil and the Caribbean within the context of the Black Diaspora in the Americas, the metonymic relation between spatial and discursive decentralization drawn in *UDdC* can be read in relation to what Glissant has identified in the Caribbean relationship to "soil". In the Caribbean, observes Glissant, "the consequences of European expansion ([including the] importation of new populations) is precisely what forms the basis for a new relationship with the land: not the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation" (147). Dwelling on the discursive realm of the Black Diaspora in the Americas, *UDdC* unfolds a "complicity of relation" within Brazilian literature beyond claims of possession but rather attending to the hidden intersections and interrelations in the Brazilian textual landscape.

Finally, *UDdC*'s envisioned encounters with Black female authorial voices opens up a discursive space for its own counter-narrative within this landscape, employing intertextuality as a mode for retrieving – in Glissant's terms – diversity within the totality

and unfolding Black women's accounts laying unrealized at the margins of canonical texts and historical discourse. This dialogic strategy further decentralizes the Brazilian literary corpus, recuperating within its male-dominated discourse the excluded memories – sometimes echoed, sometimes overturned but still struggling for the recognition of its narrative and voice. The divergent paths embarked upon in *UDdC* deem literary decentralization and intertextual errantry as modes for reclaiming these Black female voices within and beyond the margins of the Brazilian canonical tradition.

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