
A LIFE IN THE MIDST OF RUINS: ROSALINA HONÓRIO COTA AND THE DEPICTION OF MELANCHOLY IN AUTRAN DOURADO'S NOVEL ÓPERA DOS MORTOS

UMA VIDA EM MEIO A RUÍNAS: ROSALINA HONÓRIO COTA E A
REPRESENTAÇÃO DA MELANCOLIA EM *ÓPERA DOS MORTOS*, DE AUTRAN
DOURADO

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ABSTRACT: The theme of melancholy has been a recurrent topic in literary productions and has also been the focus of a fairly large number of studies. Even though researchers in the field have shown their concern regarding the negative impact of melancholic feelings in fictional characters, considerations from the role of offspring and family ties to set off such feeling have been minimally explored. The present paper examines the portrayal of melancholy in Autran Dourado's novel *Ópera dos mortos* (1967), considering the effect of transgenerational transmission and the burden of the past on the main character Rosalina Honório Cota. To do so, the study draws on the insights provided by Freud (1977), Penso, Costa and Ribeiro (2008), Candau (2011) and Ginzburg (2012). The findings indicate that due to Rosalina's incapacity of dealing with the burden of the past and her family memories result in her escape from reality and psychological entrapment.

KEYWORDS: Melancholy; Literature; Autran Dourado; *Ópera dos mortos*.

RESUMO: A tema da melancolia converteu-se em uma temática recorrente na literatura e passou a ser objeto de investigação de variados estudos. Embora os pesquisadores da área demonstrem abordagens relacionadas ao impacto negativo do sentimento melancólico sobre as personagens, abordagens acerca do papel da descendência e dos laços familiares para o desencadeamento do sentimento melancólico não têm sido comuns. O presente artigo examina a representação da melancolia no romance *Ópera dos mortos* (1967), de Autran Dourado, levando em consideração o efeito da transmissão transgeracional e o peso do passado sobre a protagonista Rosalina Honório Cota. Para tanto, o estudo ampara-se nas contribuições prestadas por Freud (1977), Penso, Costa e Ribeiro (2008), Candau (2011) e Ginzburg

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(2012). Conclui-se que a incapacidade de Rosalina lidar com o peso do passado e as suas memórias familiares acabam ocasionando a sua fuga da realidade o seu aprisionamento psicológico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Melancolia; Literatura; Autran Dourado; *Ópera dos mortos*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of melancholy has been researched under the aegis of many different disciplines. Most existing work on the topic has been undertaken in the areas of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and health studies (SCLIAR, 2003; KRISTEVA, 1989). Additionally, one area that has drawn considerable attention to melancholy and which provides a fruitful ground for the study of its representation is the Art in general, and, more specifically, literature (CORRÊA, 2015; VASCONCELLOS, 2009; LOPES, 1999; GINZBURG, 1997). The portrayal of melancholy and its aftermaths in the literary field have been a strategy frequently employed by many writers, providing, thus, a useful framing in fiction for an exploration of characters which convey a reflexive and, also, gloomy view of the world.

By analyzing the Brazilian literary production, one might observe that melancholy has permeated the literary works of many writers from the state of Minas Gerais. As Reinaldo Marques (2002) points out, the theme is arguably in the core of a varied of works from those artists, as one can see, for instance, in Lúcio Cardoso's novel *Chronicle of the murdered house* (1959), as well as in some poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Abgar Renault, Henrique Lisboa, Octávio Dias Leite, among several others. Apart from the distinguishing traits that can be found in those productions, all of them have brought about relevant concern over the existence of a melancholic Minas Gerais doomed to its past and marked by an anguishing disappointment regarding its future. As the author states:

Essa atmosfera melancólica, marcada tanto por imagens da morte de um passado em ruínas, quanto por um vívido sentimento de tristeza, de ensimesmamento do eu, de angústia existencial frente ao fluir inexorável do tempo [...] assinala a existência de uma Minas Gerais melancólica, ruminando ensimesmada seu passado e interrogando angustiada seu futuro (MARQUES, 2002, p.14).

As noted above, given the important role of this subject-matter in the fictional universe of those writers, it is important to develop further approaches to the investigations of the topic in order to gain a finer understanding of the attitudes that some characters have towards melancholic feeling. In fact, by focusing on new perspectives on the issue, the imposition of family bonds upon

the individual along with its devastating consequences lie at the core of many books and have become central in understanding characters driven by melancholic states.

In light of these considerations, one writer whose work clearly presents a special attention to the theme is Autran Dourado (1926-2012). Widely known for his careful and detailed use of linguistic tools, some of Dourado's narratives are set mainly in Minas Gerais and present a thorough attention not only to the depiction of problematic bonds that come into light within family relations, but also to the portrayal of melancholic characters which struggle against time changes and dramatize a somber view of life.

His novel *Ópera dos mortos*, published in 1967, presents the rise and fall of the Honório Cota's, an old order of land-holding aristocracy. Set within the fictional city of Duas Pontes, a recurrent small town in the author's literary project, the narrative focuses on the story of Rosalina Honório Cota, Lucas Procópio's granddaughter and João Capistrano and Dona Genu's daughter. She is the last member of a social class which enjoyed the richness and glorious moments in the past but, in the current time, has no prestige at all and finds itself in clear decadency. Besides living incarcerated in her ancestor's house together with her old dumb maid servant Quiquina, the protagonist desperately seeks to stop time as a reaction to her inability to cope with political, social, and cultural changes. In doing so, Rosalina sheds light on the influences on the doomed blood that runs in her family, as well as on the power the ruins or fragments from the past have over her.

Even though it is possible to notice that the presence of family relations within the narrative provide evidence to suggest that it represents a strategic approach toward development and comprehension of the novel, there has been little rigorous investigation into the issue. To date, albeit previous studies, such as the ones of Silva (2017) and Vianna (2007; 2001), have begun to address this question, relatively few research on Autran Dourado's family portrayal have been carried out.

In order to more fully explore this potential in *Ópera dos mortos*, the present study seeks to examine the depiction of melancholy in the narrative, considering the effect of transgenerational transmission and the burden of the past on the main character. To that end, the current work draws on the insights provided by Sigmund Freud (1978), Maria Penso, Liana Costa and Maria Ribeiro (2008), Joël Candau (2011) and Jaime Ginzburg (2012).

2. BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: ROSALINA HONÓRIO COTA AND THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

To begin with, we should start analyzing the way in which the protagonist deals with the cultural *continuum* inherited by her family. Since the beginning of the novel, one can observe that Rosalina not only follows his deceased father's way of thinking and acting, but also the hate and bitterness he used to have for the residents of Duas Pontes. As expressed in the protagonist's monologue, Rosalina blames the citizens for the tragedy which tore her family apart after an outright fraud in the town's political election, which caused her father's defeat and, consequently, his death. In addition to that, it is also possible to perceive the character's strong feeling of hostility due to her bright future had been completely destroyed by such misfortune that involved her family:

Papai fazia planos pra mim. Depois me esqueceu, se entregou àquela maluqueira. Pra que precisava, se tinha tanto? Não, eles não podiam ter feito aquilo com ele. Com ela. Ele não merecia. Tão bom, tão calado, tristonho. Para sempre tinha de odiar. Não esqueço, ninguém deve esquecer (DOURADO, 1999, p. 43-44).

By assuming the sadness and loneliness of her father and getting used to living in a constant mourning, as a result of her father's tragic death, Rosalina decides to live incarcerated in her ancestor's house. Within the place, she lives not only with her old dumb maid servant Quiquina, but with the memory of her ancestors, especially João Capistrano's reminiscences, which reminded her to ignore the town citizens as well as never forget to highlight the Honório Cota's sense of superiority. Such attitudes cover Rosalina with a negative aura, whose main function is to boost her suffering. In doing so, if, on the one hand, according to the character Quincas Ciriaco, Rosalina's birth was expected to: "abrandar em beleza e graça o destino bruto e selvagem de Lucas Procópio Honório Cota" (DOURADO, 1999, p. 30), on the other hand, one can verify Quincas Ciriaco's opposite thought. In other words, Rosalina's attitudes toward her father's memories only intensify the heiress' resentment and pride. What is immediately noteworthy is that Rosalina becomes increasingly controlled by her ancestor's voices and constantly haunted by them as the narrative unfolds.

By analyzing Rosalina's actions expressed so far in *Ópera dos mortos*, it should come as no surprise that family memories have a significant control upon her. As noted by Maria Aparecida Penso, Liana Fortunato Costa and Maria Alexina Ribeiro (2008), such mnemonic modality has a selective feature due to its administration of contents that must be forgotten and the ones that must be valued. Accordingly, one may see that this memory typology can be a potential target for manipulation. As the researchers point out:

É a memória familiar que garante a reprodução simbólica da família ao longo das gerações, lembrando o mito fundador da célula familiar [...] Isso significa que as famílias selecionam aquilo que consideram importante de ser compartilhado por todos os seus membros, e essas informações são transmitidas ao longo do ciclo de vida familiar e também ao longo das gerações (PENSO, COSTA, RIBEIRO, 2008, p. 13).

A similar understanding of the family memory concept can be found in Joël Candau's (2011) reflections on the issue. By focusing his attention on this sort of memory, the author stresses the strong identity affirmation linked to family memory. By classifying two kinds of memories, that is, the modern, which does not have the intention to pass on, and the old one, which has the purpose of carrying on, Candau argues that the old form of family memory conveys a sense of belonging and, more importantly, the conservation of the family legacy. As Candau postulates:

A forma antiga é uma memória genealógica que se estende para além da família. Ela é a consciência de pertencer a uma cadeia de gerações sucessivas das quais o grupo ou o indivíduo se sente mais ou menos herdeiro. É a consciência de sermos os continuadores de nossos predecessores. Essa consciência do peso de gerações anteriores é manifesta em expressões de forte carga identitária (CANDAUI, 2011, p. 142).

In accordance with the insights above, both authors agree that it is necessary to “dose” the cultural legacy conveyed by us through family memories. Thus, by considering that the passing of time cannot be wiped out completely and that memories from the past have a considerably power over one's attitude in the present, the researchers state that living and dead people should be in different places. Therefore, the burden of family memories, when not managed, may contribute to the identity solidification of members which share the legacies from a family past.

In Rosalina's case, it is clear that she is incapable of dosing the cultural legacy conveyed by her. Memories from her father only make her suffer. Such fact drives her detachment, almost absolute, from the social sphere. Although it is possible to verify that in the protagonist's anguishing or harsh moments she resorts to her ancestors' reminiscences as a means to protection and to overcome her flaws and limitations, her commitment to the family code and elite ideology, which characterize the Honório Cota's identity, reassure the protagonist momentarily. Her ancestors' heritage, which force her to live by herself, as well as detach from the life out of the walls of her house, gradually turn Rosalina into one more ghost that inhabit and haunt the residence.

As stated previously, her ancestor's house plays an important role in the narrative. It is the only place in which the protagonist circulates. By choosing to spend the rest of her life within the

residence, Rosalina not only prohibits the entry of the citizens of Duas Pontes but minimizes her social relationship. In fact, one can verify that the huge and imposing structure, which finds itself in an advanced decaying condition in the current time, serves as a shield to Rosalina. The house protects her from the social, political and cultural transformations which guide the citizens of the city. To put it in other words, the Honório Cota's heiress lives in a parallel universe, an anachronic time governed only by the reckonings and by the social codes of an outdated era.

According to the narrator's voice, expressed in the beginning of the novel, the Honório Cota's, albeit its clear physical decay, still emanates a superior aura that comes from the rich and powerful times of the old rural aristocracy of Minas Gerais.

Casa de gente de casta, segundo eles antigamente. Ainda conserva a imponência e o porte senhorial, o ar solarengo que o tempo de todo não comeu. As cores das janelas e da porta estão lavadas de velhas, o reboco caído em alguns trechos como grandes placas de ferida mostra mesmo as pedras e os tijolos e as taipas de sua carne e ossos, feitos para durar toda a vida (DOURADO, 1999, p. 11).

In the passage, besides establishing a connection between the past and the present, the house is anthropomorphized by being depicted with bones, flesh, and wounds. It is interesting to see that its physical portrayal presents a mirroring relationship with Rosalina. In other words, by describing the protagonist metonymically, the house along with its wounds, process of deterioration and, consequently, decomposition are instances that may be evidence for Rosalina's emotional degradation. Another important issue worth mentioning is that in the moment in which Quiquina leaves the residence and Rosalina stays totally alone, she shows a kaleidoscope of emotions. While she expresses her fear for being without Quiquina's company, Rosalina is fully aware that, because of her rigid and outdated social code, she could never live among the other citizens.

With regard to Rosalina's uncertainty or doubt about either staying in silence or directing herself to life, the protagonist reveals her melancholic state. As one can be seen the description below, Rosalina's monologue points out her obligation to remember her ancestors' voices in addition to the description of a present time doomed to the ruins of the past. Furthermore, the passage stresses not only her inability to cope with the strong sense of pride of being a member of the Honório Cota's, but also the power which Rosalina's father memories have over her. Such nostalgic reminiscences function as a catalyst for her decision to lock herself into her ancestor's house and seek revenge on the residents of Duas Pontes.

O pai. Você não deve olhar para nenhum rapaz, não deve dar confiança para essa gatinha. Depois do que aconteceu. Esta gente não presta. A gente também deve ter um pouco de orgulho. Quem se rebaixa demais, arrasta a bunda no chão [...] Ninguém vai pisar no orgulho da gente. Eles vão ver (DOURADO. 1999, p. 50).

Equally important to mention that the cultural *continuum* inherited by the character gains increasing strength as the narrative progresses. So, Rosalina is literally imprisoned by her family ties out of which she is unable to scape. In this sense, the contributions of Sigmund Freud (1977) and Jaime Ginzburg (2012) set the tone for the understanding of Rosalina's psychological complexities and moral issues.

In his essay on "Mourning and melancholia", Sigmund Freud establishes a distinction between two emotions in which a person may express toward a traumatic experience of loss: mourning and melancholy. Even though both feelings seem to be associated with the same behavior, Freud thoroughly accounts on mourning's and melancholy's features stress the differences between them. In the psychoanalyst's words:

A correlation of melancholia and mourning seems to justified by the general picture of two conditions. Moreover, wherever it is possible to discern the external influences in life which gave brought each of them about, this exciting cause proves to be the same in both. Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on [...] It is also well worth notice that, although grief involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a morbid condition and hand to mourner over to medical treatment. We rest assure that after a lapse of time will be overcome, and we look upon any interference with it as inadvisable or even harmful (FREUD, 1978, p. 152-153).

As Freud states in the fragment above, the mourning is a reaction to an irreversible loss. As the time goes by, the suffering is overcome, once one transfers its feelings to another object, substituting, thus, the loss of an object or loved person. Based on such reflection, Freud draws attention to melancholy, pointing out the main aspects that distinguishes it from mourning, as well as defending a thesis that melancholy has a pathological trait. According to the author:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profound painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment (FREUD, 1978, p. 153).

So, the melancholic feeling, according to Freud, are not necessarily triggered by the loss of someone, but also by the loss of something as a loving object. In melancholy, even loosing something or someone, the person is unable to identify or believe in his loss. Consequently, one starts preserving, for a long time, degrading feelings, such as the ones highlighted by Freud. Therefore, the melancholic person finds himself incapable of detaching from his loved object, losing himself in a hazy horizon along with his lost loved object.

A similar understanding of the portrayal of melancholy can be found in Jaime Ginzburg (2012)'s studies. From the standpoint of the researcher, the melancholic behavior is characterized by an intense discontent related to reality, once it is observed as a place of growing disenchantment and distrust. Moreover, Ginzburg notes that one of the most important traits expressed by a melancholic person is his susceptibility to self-destruction.

O melancólico confronta-se com os limites da existência constantemente, pois associa sua perda à incerteza quanto à possibilidade de que qualquer coisa possa de fato fazer sentido. E um ponto central da condição melancólica consiste na atitude autodestrutiva. Impregnado de um amor que não pode ser correspondido e jogado em um campo de dor e perda, o sujeito agrade a si mesmo (GINZBURG, 2012, p. 12).

Through the representation of Rosalina in *Ópera dos mortos*, it is clear that she expresses a melancholic view about her existence. However, the root of this reflexive and self-destructive feeling lies in her family ties. In addition to the preservation of Rosalina's ancestors long deceased within her consciousness, the place which she lives in and, most importantly, the protagonist denial of leaving her outdated family codes aside are some instances that have a negative influence on her. By remembering and stumbling in a present time filled with the fragments of a dead past, Rosalina stuck herself in a time-lapse she cannot get out of. Thereby, the heavy burden of the family memory, the suffocating house she never leaves, and her social isolation are some examples which strengthen her melancholy and drag her to a tragic ending.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist develops drinking problems and devotes herself entirely to the reading of narratives as a means to scape from her decaying reality. By focusing her attention on books, such as Júlio Diniz's *As pupilas do senhor reitor* (1867) and Xavier de Montepin's *As mulheres de bronze* (1823), both resources of strong romantic and dramatic portrayals, these fictions get Rosalina to the literary world. As the narrative suggests, only within a fantasy reality she would be able to feel the passions and happiness that she got used to reading.

Her motionless life shifts when Juca Passarinho, with whom she gets emotionally involved and wakes her up to the life outside her ancestor's house, brings life and hope to Rosalina's destiny. As it is possible to analyze in the passage below, in free indirect speech, the flourishing of the protagonist's sensibility makes her face the emptiness and darkness around her. By doing so, Rosalina is finally able to review her attitudes toward her archaic and petrified moral codes inherited by her family.

Os olhos de novo frios olhavam os móveis da sala, o relógio parado, o lustre de cristal, as mãos abertas sobre a mesa, as suas mãos abertas sobre a mesa, as suas mãos vazias. Tinha vontade de chorar, de uns tempos para cá tinha vontade de chorar. Ela, que antes não chorava. Como viver ali, naquela sala, naquela casa, naquela cidade hostil, quando havia uma vida tão diferente lá fora, no grande mundo de Deus? (DOURADO, 1999, p. 134).

Despite Rosalina demonstrates moments of comprehension and knowledge about her melancholic existence inside her house, she cannot free herself from the family memory of hers. However, by becoming emotionally involved with a common man from a social class quite distant from hers, Rosalina destroy all the paradigms and social hierarchies of the Honório Cota's lineage. Since then, one may verify that the main character starts assuming two split identities: a daily Rosalina, close to her father João Capistrano, who carries his arrogance; and the nighty one, akin to her grandfather Lucas Procópio, consumed by the temptations of pleasure.

Although the heiress attempts to find an acceptable way to deal with both antagonistic identities, she is severely punished for breaking the family traditions. Her anguish, emotional instability and sense of guilt increase when she wakes up in the nights with Juca Passarinho and starts suffering and worrying not only about her family reminiscences, but also about Quiquina's disapproval eye contact. Notwithstanding Rosalina presents herself psychologically destroyed as a result of her attempting to get together her individuality and her rigid aristocratic ideology, she hides herself behind a fragile mask which covers her genuine inner torment. As Juca Passarinho underlines in the fragment below:

Como pode, como pode? Pensava quando de dia ela o olhava mansamente como se nada de noite se passasse entre eles. Não é fingimento [...] Ela não está fingindo, uma pessoa que finge não tem os olhos assim. Porque em nenhum momento ela vacilava, em nenhum momento tremia, em nenhum momento parecia reconhecer nele o homem que de noite a visitava com outras roupagens. Como ela desligava os olhos e a alma do corpo, assim vivia de noite uma vida, de dia outra (DOURADO, 1999, p. 201).

Rosalina's sense of guilt owing to her relationship with Juca Passarinho maximizes when she got pregnant. Even though the novel does not present details on Rosalina's pregnancy and, through an ellipse, the narrative places the reader during the protagonist's labor, Quiquina's long monologue play an important role in the destiny of Rosalina's baby. During the labor, the old dumb maid exposes her hatred for Juca Passarinho and points out her self-deception with regard to Rosalina's relation with a "poor guy". In the following passage, one can observe Quiquina's worries about helping gave birth to a child who would change the routine of the residents of the Honório Cota's:

Não, meu Deus, não podia fazer aquilo, é pecado. Um pecado feio, sem perdão. Não era pecado também deixar ele viver? Como é que ela ia fazer com aquele menino dentro da casa? Até quando podia esconder da cidade, o menino crescendo? [...] O pior é que ele [Juca Passarinho] ia querer bancar o pai, mandar na casa, tinha direito. O pior não era isso, era a cidade ficar sabendo. Não, aquele menino não podia viver (DOURADO, 1999, p. 224).

Despite the importance of Rosalina baby's birth be considered one of the most striking moments in the entire novel, an ellipse between the baby's birth and Quiquina offering the dead child to Juca Passarinho leaves the question open as to whether the old maid had the courage to murder the baby or he was born without signs of life. Even if the causes of Rosalina baby's death remain open in the narrative, its aftermath is devastating.

Juca Passarinho, plunged into despair, leaves the house soon after burying his son. As for Rosalina, which is wounded by the presence of a somber atmosphere within the residence, it is possible to affirm that she goes through a process of psychological breakdown. The citizens of Duas Pontes repeatedly encounter her walking along the streets singing in the night, in addition to being reportedly seen dressed all in white in the city cemetery – here, the novel establishes an intertextual connection with the woman in white legend.

Consequently, the heiress ended up leaving her ancestor's residence and is taken to "longes terras", suggesting that Rosalina is going to a sanatorium. In Quiquina's case, her last action before mysteriously leaving the residence and the city was to stop the pendulum clock in the kitchen area of the house. This attitude might be read as the achievement of Rosalina's tragedy, that is, the ending of the Honório Cota's dynasty and the symbolic murder of the house, which had its heart stopped beating.

During Rosalina's exit of the house, two important facts are worth analyzing. The first one takes into account the presence of a large number of citizens into the residence. The opening of its

doors and, consequently, the invasion of different people in its inner place highlight the death and the symbolic contamination not only of the house but also of the patriarchy values and the Honório Cota's lineage. The second fact is that, yet psychologic damaged, by going downstairs – and here one may interpret the stairs as a metaphorical representation of a bridge between Rosalina's dream world and the harsh reality – she puts an end to her craziness by leaving the ancestor's ghosts behind.

In the following passage, it is described the moment in which Rosalina along with her old friend Emanuel went downstairs and left the house. Within the fragment, the narrator's qualifications used to describe Rosalina highlight her ghostly features by depicting her dressed up in a long white dress, as well as with a fragile expression. In spite of such traits, the narrator's voice also stresses her superior and arrogant attitude toward the public which thoroughly follows her until departing. In fact, such a description clearly echoes the tragedy of the character Blanche DuBois in the play *A streetcar named desire* (1947) written by the north-American writer Tennessee Williams. In this work, one can also find its main character gradually sliding into madness owing to its incapability of keeping control of the legacies from the past and its problems dealing with reality.

De branco, o vestido comprido e rendado, uma rosa branca refohuda no cabelo, lá vinha ela. Lá vinha Rosalina descendo a escada de braço dado com Seu Emanuel [...] A cabeça erguida, o porte empinado, hierático, ela mais parecia uma rainha descendo a escadaria dum palácio, uma noiva boiando no ar a caminho do céu [...] Ela sorria feito se fosse para a gente. Mas sabíamos, não era para nós que ela sorria: era um sorriso meio abobalhado, para ninguém (DOURADO, 1999, p. 247).

Leaving behind a trace of dust, suffering, and the decaying Honório Cota's, Rosalina left as legacy to the residents of Duas Pontes the memories of a wiped-out dynasty destroyed by its own members and by the complexities and contradictions of modern times. Therefore, Autran Dourado's novel leads us directly to the problematization of family memories great influence on one's identity and the consequences of developing a melancholic feeling of life.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the portrayal of melancholy in Autran Dourado's novel *Ópera dos mortos* (1967), considering the effect of transgeracional transmission and the burden of the past on the protagonist Rosalina Honório Cota. Deeping the findings of this study, Luiz André

Nepomuceno's insights on the narrative offer important observations account of Rosalina's outcome. According to the researcher, one of the most important reasons for the character downfall lies in her incapacity of adapting to the new social order and in her endless persistence in keeping not only a memory but also an aristocratic identity and outdated social values. In the author's point of view:

[...] a ilusão parece ser mesmo a única realidade que predomina o cenário arcaico dos personagens [...] Esses indivíduos melancólicos, presos a uma herança trágica, obcecados pela memória agonizante mantêm, na verdade [...] uma espécie de teatro das virtudes, uma farsa grotesca de identidade, que existe apenas num mundo de ilusões (NEPOMUCENO, 2006, p. 121).

The results presented in the current research are in accordance with the findings of Nepomuceno. Our study indicates that Rosalina suffers for her incapacity to resist or dose the cultural *continuum* inherited. As the findings of this work show, the character turns into an object of manipulation controlled by her ancestor's voices. As a result, she finds herself incapable of changing her reality. So much so that the death of the baby's protagonist symbolically conveys her impossibility of updating her way of acting and thinking.

Therefore, by depicting all the Honório Cota's offspring by metonymy, the death and psychological breakdown described within the novel may indicate the fall of traditions toward a world in constant transformation. In this sense, memory rescue in *Ópera dos mortos* is not only a nostalgic attitude, but clearly an ideological and critic one. By holding and hiding herself in her family's distant memories, Rosalina unveils all faults and failures of the old aristocratic society, highlighting, thus, the dangers involved in denying social, political and cultural shifts. So, through this analysis, it is possible to assert that *Ópera dos mortos* critically sheds light on the impasse between the conservation of the past and the desire for modernity and progress.

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