

Revisiting female sexual honor and femininity during the Brazilian dictatorship (1964-85) in Leilah Assunção's Fala baixo senão eu grito and Nelson Rodrigues' Toda nudez será castigada

Rutgers University has made this article freely available. Please share how this access benefits you.
Your story matters. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/59594/story/>

This work is an **ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT (AM)**

This is the author's manuscript for a work that has been accepted for publication. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as copyediting, final layout, and pagination, may not be reflected in this document. The publisher takes permanent responsibility for the work. Content and layout follow publisher's submission requirements.

Citation for this version and the definitive version are shown below.

Citation to Publisher Grevan De Carvalho, Isadora. Revisiting female sexual honor and femininity during the Brazilian dictatorship (1964-85) in Leilah Assunção's Fala baixo senão eu grito and Nelson Rodrigues' Toda nudez será castigada. *Latin American Research Review*.
Version:

Citation to this Version: Grevan De Carvalho, Isadora. Revisiting female sexual honor and femininity during the Brazilian dictatorship (1964-85) in Leilah Assunção's Fala baixo senão eu grito and Nelson Rodrigues' Toda nudez será castigada. *Latin American Research Review*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.7282/t3-6tgp-d277>.

Terms of Use: Copyright for scholarly resources published in RUcore is retained by the copyright holder. By virtue of its appearance in this open access medium, you are free to use this resource, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings. Other uses, such as reproduction or republication, may require the permission of the copyright holder.

Article begins on next page

Revisiting Female Sexual Honor and Femininity during the Brazilian Dictatorship (1964-85) in Leilah Assunção's *Fala Baixo Senão Eu Grito* and Nelson Rodrigues' *Toda Nudez Será Castigada*

Abstract: This article presents an analysis of two female characters on Rodrigues' and Assunção's plays, Geni (Toda Nudez Será Castigada) and Mariazinha (Fala Baixo Senão Eu Grito). It will look at the ways the characters' expose their literal silences (half sentences, unspoken gestures, desire to speak) into obsessions with body parts and objects. Their sexuality and being is often seen as a type of "monstrous feminine" (to quote Barbara Creed's term), not just by others, but even to themselves, which is often subtly revealed or disguised. I aim to forge a dialogue between Nelson Rodrigues's character and the new dramaturgy writer to explore how both brought to the fore questions surrounding the position of women in this society and their particular "feminine" response to the dictatorship as a performative inquiry.

Yan Michalski, renowned theater critic, has written a number of books on theater during the dictatorship in Brazil. When we compare his point of view on the impact of the dictatorship in the theater production, we see a change from pessimistic (1979) to more optimistic (1985), clearly reflecting the years when the two books were written. In 1979, he writes: "Para além, e muito além, das proibições propriamente ditas, o mal causado pela censura ao recente teatro brasileiro prende-se também ao generalizado processo de autocensura que se implantou na sua esteira" (48). Revealing the change in how censorship affected expression from 1979 to 1985 (gradual liberalization of the dictatorship), Michalski has a change of point of view, when reflecting back on his first assumptions: "A 20 anos de distância, parece-me que o equívoco que cometi na época ao atribuir uma 'mediocridade generalizada', a uma temporada tão repleta de bom teatro devia-se, em parte, a uma insatisfação, ainda que não conscientizada, diante da falta de um rumo mais definido por parte do nosso teatro" (23). Though seemingly paradoxical, the period of the dictatorship (1964-1989), coupled with a history of repressive regimes (and especially censorship, despite different types of political regimes), saw an effervescence of original plays and theatrical production. There was, in fact, an urgency for playwrights to express a particular type of social unease, while inventing creative ways to disguise any seemingly political message, as Mostaçõ describes:

Chegou um momento em que a classe teatral, percebendo os métodos dos censores, começou a burlá-los: escreviam o que sabiam que seria aprovado, e encenavam a proposta que pretendia mostrar suas opiniões, visões políticas, ou abrir espaços ao debate e a estimular a consciência, usando táticas como as metáforas. (6)

This paper will present an analysis of two female characters on Nelson Rodrigues' and Leilah Assunção's plays; Geni from *Toda Nudez Será Castigada* (1965) and Mariazinha, from *Fala Baixo Senão Eu Grito* (1969). It will look at the ways the characters' expose their literal silences (half sentences, unspoken gestures, desire to speak) into obsessions with body parts and objects that appear as "madness" or mental disturbances at first view. Their sexuality and being is often seen as a type of "monstrous feminine" (to quote Barbara Creed's term) or a sexuality that every character is afraid to confront, which is often subtly revealed or disguised. I aim to forge a dialogue between Nelson Rodrigues's character and the *new dramaturgy* writer to explore how both brought to the fore questions surrounding the position of women in this society and their particular "feminine" response to the dictatorship as a performative inquiry.

During the height of the dictatorship in Brazil, a series of plays were being written and performed that dealt with different types of family units (or lack thereof) that differed from the patriarchal family¹, while exploring issues of gender boundaries as well as sexuality. In fact, a series of

female characters were developed that reflected a new ideology, influenced by feminist movements in the US and Europe (despite the highly moralistic stance on family set forth by the dictatorship): single women that never wanted to get married; strong independent women who work as prostitutes, who do not put strong value in marriage; sexually free women; women that do not get married for not ever having experienced sexual pleasure, and so on. In the context of Brazilian literature, the depiction of these types of female characters is not new, a fluid depiction of the patriarchal family and gender boundaries reflected in texts from the 19th century onward. However, in the context of the dictatorship and theater, specifically, the visceral reality of these female characters gain new vitality. In Rodrigues and Assunção, female half naked bodies are exposed on stage together with their indiscretions and bodily fluids, though in many cases, only alluded to in a highly descriptive manner.

The split and at the same time, concomitant presence of the public morality, espoused by the nation state, and private morality of the individual, is evidenced in the two plays by the juxtaposition of contradictory moral codes. The first espouses a conservative patriarchalism, influenced by the Catholic moral code, while the other espoused a skeptic morality, inspired by individual desire, influenced by existential meanders. Godoy describes this split in Rodrigues as a “failure of the Brazilian project of modernity” (47), whereas DaMatta sees it as an intrinsic part of the Brazilian social structure². This new group of dramaturges, of which Assunção is part of, would later be denominated part of a movement called *Nova Dramaturgia*. At the same time, Nelson Rodrigues, an already renowned author spearheads a new cycle of plays, which would later be called *Tragédias Cariocas*³. *Toda Nudez Será Castigada* is one of the last plays Rodrigues writes before an 11-year hiatus.

Traditionally, because of Rodrigues’ unique style, he has not been analyzed in contrast or comparison with authors of the same period. *Nova Dramaturgia* plays from the first phase were often plays with very few characters, portraying chance encounters by two very different characters in intimate conversations. Rodrigues’ character development, which included the exposition on stage of the characters’ different plane of consciousness as well as the characters’ extreme self-consciousness through the process of awareness of performance in life, helped pave the way for this new group of writers. In this supposedly chance encounter in *Fala Baixo*, Mariazinha performs different fantasies and explores her intimate desires. She comes to terms with the theatricality of her life, how she had been controlling everything, even her class position. She also realizes that her prejudices were given to her by the society in which she is inscribed. Through this encounter with a “marginal” unnamed character or “criminal”, they both play out different scenarios of dreams, reality and frustration as well as question the female and male roles they play. This encounter, though a revision of the gender performative prerogative is also dependent on their positions in the social scale. Mariazinha talks to herself and she has a special relationship with the objects around her. Similarly to Rodrigues’ character Geni, she has a number of fetishized objects with which she converses on a regular basis. Towards the end of the play, both her, and the unnamed man, destroy her very clean and organized room.

Geni speaks and narrates in a recorded tape after her death. Her story is told through the recorded message played by her husband after their marriage. She works as a prostitute until she meets Herculano, a widower, who eventually becomes a very jealous husband. She is obsessed with dying of breast cancer, she often talks about this “lyric” aspect of her death. Death is a type of fetish for Geni and while her gender is well defined in the beginning, it slowly is metamorphosed. Female and male roles are reversed, played out, put on display as farce. As with many of Rodrigues’ plays, the typical patriarchal family is dissolved and the repressive aspect of societal appearances is explored through Herculano’s sisters and his son Serginho, especially after his mother’s death. Many of Serginho’s anger and anxiety is somewhat resolved when he escapes with a Bolivian robber, exposing his homosexuality. Geni, however, is the only character in the play who does not repress her sexuality and desires, in opposition to the character of Mariazinha, who pretends, until she meets the Man, that she has no sexual desire.

Contrary to the openly political theater of the time, these two authors do not openly discuss the political repressive regime, nor political ideas, although those are expressed in the form of relationships and the play of appearances, especially in revealing the constant split between the world of the outside/appearances and the world of the individual. This “new” theater, considered in parallel with Rodrigues’ oeuvre, call into question the existential condition of individuals that make-up the society, putting on stage the minutiae of class and the effects that political and social conditions have on the individual. Even though it is created during the repressive regime, this “new writing” abandons the use of large scenic metaphors and explores the conflict through direct speech, the direct confrontation of words, by using a type of Brechtian estrangement effect.

Toda Nudez sera Castigada features one more example of the labyrinthic qualities of Nelson Rodrigues’ playwrighting style. A feature of most of his plays, which is metafiction, is heightened here, but explored in a different way from *The Wedding Dress* and *Boca de Ouro*, for example. As with his other works, the content of the play is just as important as the structural element of the narrative, working together to develop the narrative. We know, from the start, that the scenes are functions of the narrative Geni tells in her cassette tape recordings. However, because of the play of light to resemble flashbacks, and the fact that the first scene is engendered by Herculano’s arrival at home and actively playing the tape, it is hard to clearly see what point of view is being engendered in all of the scenes. There is a separation between the story that Geni tells as a type of performance or fragments of an unreliable narrators’ memory, and the facts seen on stage through Herculano’s memory (mixed in with the other characters’). This double destabilizing technique complicates even further any type of univocal interpretation.

In the first act, the characters follow the voice-over of the prostitute that tells a story in flashback. Scenes appear either by Geni’s recorded voice or by the speech of other characters. As it is the case with other Rodrigues’ plays, truth is in the process of story telling, not in the facts themselves, that literally, cannot be recovered. This causes the first type of estrangement effect on the audience⁴. Serginho, for example, is referenced by Herculano throughout the first two acts, but he only appears in the second act. Thus, it is impossible to feel that we are actually seeing Serginho devoid of different points of view that describe and might enclose him. Patricio, Herculano’s brother, is the orchestrator of the narrative by inserting Geni into the family and having a decisive role in all the dramatic changes during the play. He promotes the meeting between Herculano and Geni, and tells Serginho on the involvement of his father with the prostitute, which supposedly leads to the boys’ emotional imbalance, prison and the meeting with the Bolivian thief. Patricio is also responsible for convincing the nephew to accept the marriage of his father with the prostitute and to seduce her as a way for revenge. He is Machiavellian and at the same time a seer, someone who truly knows the Achilles heel of each character. “Eu sou o cínico da família. E os cínicos enxergam” (165). As it is common with Rodrigues’ plays, the play of appearances and the narrative style, confuse our perception of all the characters. Patricio, though clearly an orchestrator, and perverse in his desire to punish his brother for not having saved him a business transaction, appears more like a device to expose the theatricality of everyday (Brazilian) moral life.

As it is a facet of all of Rodrigues’ plays, here he adopts the melodramatic tone mixed with the technique of estrangement. This is caused by the contradiction of the characters’ speech throughout as well as their strange behavior. In the first act, Geni says “caridade eu não faço!” (166) but, in the end, she asks Herculano: “Vamos fazer um amorzinho bem gostoso? [...] Só essa vez e nunca mais!” (185). And, at the same time, melodramatically announcing her death from cancer by an imaginary wound, which, coincidentally, also killed the late wife of Herculano. Geni seems volatile, unsure of her feelings and certainly not the archetype of the prostitute. She is not portrayed as a victim of her circumstances, but someone who creates her own reality. She also does not feel any shame for working as a prostitute. She is poetic and self-conscious: “Herculano, você interessou de cara. Te confesso. Talvez porque havia uma morta.[...] E a ferida no seio. Eu não sou como as outras. Eu mesma não me entendo” (167).

When watching the death of her aunt from cancer and hearing from his own mother that she would die of the same disease, Geni, connecting one fact to another, does not have that much doubt that it will also be her fate. The obsession with death is also recurrent theme in the work of Nelson Rodrigues, exposing the aspect of mysticism and a fetishism of death as a type of redemptive process in Brazilian culture⁵. In a phone conversation with Geni, Herculano trying to summarize their relationship by a contradictory mystical triad, says: “Escuta, você tem uma alma, meu filho outra e há uma ferida. Eu sou um bêbado que passou pela sua vida e sumiu”(176). Characters, lacking the conviction of the Catholic morality to define their lives, construct their own moral codes.

In the second act, Herculano puts Geni up at an apartment so he can meet with her in secret. Aunts # 1, # 2 and # 3 with no name, appear as a type of chorus. They appear to represent the opposite side of Geni, a dichotomy that is slowly erased as the play unfolds. Adverse to sex, older, but virgins, they support Serginho on his obsession to keep his dead mother alive in daily trips to the graveyard, giving him baths and smelling his underwear in order to identify any trace of sex, which is never found. They demonstrate a perverse sexual pleasure in the act of preventing Serginho from having sexual pleasure. At the end of the second act, Aunt #1 reveals to Geni and Herculano that Serginho was violated by a Bolivian thief. Apart from the Psychological aspects of the whore-madonna complex, explored by Freud⁶, Rodrigues brings to the fore the changing political and contradictory gender dynamics in Brazilian society, which is also explored in *Fala Baixo Senão eu Grito*. Herculano claims that his son “não aceita o ato sexual” (174) and when commenting on his act while with Geni, he degrades himself: “estou babando como um cão” (173). Though some characters repress their sexuality, they always sublimate or express it in some way. Geni is the only character who is not afraid of expressing herself sexually as well as feeling pleasure in sex.

It is in this instance that the idea of the monstrous feminine is also exposed; Serginho’s strange fear of sex, as it relates to his mother, Herculano’s nausea of his wife’s dying body, Herculano’s feeling of debasement when feeling sexual pleasure, Geni’s obsession with the cancer in one breast, her obsession with death itself (corpse), her incestuous relationship with Serginho and the monstrous feminine of homosexuality. The monstrous feminine is related to the female body, since femininity is unnamable, but it does not depend on the biological aspect of sexual identification, which is symbolic on the level of the play. In *Fala Baixo*, it is revealed in Mariaz’ frigidity and the Man’s description of her as “ugly”, bloody or as a corpse full of flies. Creed describes it in relation to the feminine in horror movies, connecting the idea with the concept of *abject* in Kristeva. All the abominations of a religious nature described below are present as a facet of the monstrous feminine in the two plays:

At crucial points, I shall also refer to her writing on the abject in relation to religious discourses. This area cannot be ignored, for what becomes apparent in reading her work is that definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection – particularly in relation to the following religious ‘abominations’: **sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest.** (my emphasis, 69)

To complement the idea of the monstrous feminine, the authors explore the dichotomic dimensions of sexual honor imposed by the sexual honor codes. The idea of sexual honor explored by the two playwrights go hand in hand with the contradictions put on display in relation to the private and public morality (or lack thereof) described in the beginning of this essay. It is important to emphasize this aspect, since the playwrights are putting on display the masking and confusion of a system with these number of contradictory viewpoints on sexuality, while exploring the effect they have on the individual, especially the female characters. This contradiction is also part of the “anarchic” quality of the dictatorship itself, as Gaspari notes in *A Ditadura Escancarada*, when describing one of the generals:

Expressão do voluntarismo militarista, quase sempre falava em nome de um ente vago denominado “nosso grupo”. Era exacerbado e, muitas vezes, desconexo. Propagava aquele palavrório pomposo que, na **anarquia militar, confunde-se com enunciado de propósitos** (emphasis added). (111)

Because of the involvement of segments of the church against the dictatorship, he even goes on to criticize the church for trying to end “the family”:

Dias antes da edição do AI-5, atacara “padres e bispos da esquerda festiva que incutem determinados problemas sexuais nos jovens para acabar com a família” e os estudantes “que fazem o jogo dos grandes grupos econômicos”. Enaltecia o AI-5 como instrumento “para promover a reforma das estruturas superadas que resistiam aos esforços de atualização pelos caminhos normais”. (111)

Caulfield in investigating the history of women’s sexual honor codes in Brazil during the beginning of the 20th century, reveals that, even after the Promulgation of the Republic (1889) and for decades to come, jurists attempted to rewrite the laws concerning “deflowering”, “the honest woman”, and “seduction” (10), but found it difficult to conciliate the new liberal mentality of gender equality before the law with the old protectionism of women’s sexual honor:

Moreover, even without knowing it, jurists who interpreted Brazil’s legal code continued to imbue honor with its older racial and class components. Honor thus frequently obscured contradictions between official principles of universal citizenship, equal rights, and democracy, and the realities of gender, class, and racially-based discrimination. (9)

A sexualized woman’s body before marriage or (even within marriage, when looking at sexual morality through the prism of church teachings) could compromise family honor and be a disruptor of the patriarchal norm. Therefore, being (or at least appearing to be) a virgin before marriage is extremely important in order to preserve the patriarchal code of honor. Besides, the mere threat of sexuality or sensuality could present a problem since it was not always easy to prove whether a woman had had sexual relations with someone or not. Nevertheless, the new liberal ideas emanating from Europe and the United States reflecting changes in the world’s perspective on the traditional patriarchal family could not help but exert a strong influence on cosmopolitan cities like Rio de Janeiro, the then capital of Brazil and São Paulo, for example. With the development of the city and its cultural manifestations and soirees together with a rapidly-emerging bourgeoisie, married women could more easily leave the confinement of their homes and participate in urban life. This new reality made protecting a woman from any sexual contact with men other than their husbands or other male relatives much more difficult to control along with the accompanying rumors and speculations that arose in this matter, thus creating an anxiety ridden reality for women.

Caulfield, when describing the position of jurists and reformers of laws regulating laws related to sexual crimes, honor and morality in 1920s Brazil, affirmed that they believed “a postwar crisis of morality threatened women’s honesty and, hence, the family. The danger, they insisted, did not arise from modernity itself, but rather from the Brazilian masses’ unpreparedness for the new liberties of modern society” (82). In this scenario, we can clearly see how the anxiety of being or not being a virgin is something that circumvents most of Rodrigues’ female characters as well as the new dramaturgy authors; values that the dictatorship brought back to the fore in its practice of censorship, control of the media and discourses⁷. We could also conjecture, that due to the different codes ascribed (and available) for different classes, middle-class women might be plagued with the impossibility of having an orgasm. They are raised to fear sex and wait for a husband to be able to have sexual intercourse.

To complicate matters even further, according to the *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* in the Chapter “Brazil”, Brazilians have a different type of attitude towards sexuality and eroticism from that of other societies that follow predominantly patriarchal and Roman Catholic values:

In this respect, Brazilians tend to allow expressions of sexuality and eroticism that are

quite unacceptable in other areas of the Latino world, especially in public. This disparity can be traced to a unique blend of Roman Catholic and native Indian values with a strong African influence. Like other Latinos, Brazilians have taboos and restrictions on public sexual behavior. However, Brazilians draw an important distinction between public and private behaviors that preserves traditional Indian and African values. "Within four walls, beneath the sheets, and behind the mask of *carnaval*, everything can happen!" "Everything," or *tudo*, refers to the world of erotic experiences and pleasure. The phrase *fazendo tudo*, "doing everything," means Brazilian men and women have an obligation to experience and enjoy every form of sexual pleasure and excitement, or more precisely those practices that the public world most strictly prohibits. This, however, must all be done in private, behind the mask, between four walls, or under the sheets.

This division between the four walls of the home and the street complicates the sexuality of women since it creates contradictory expectations. On the one hand, women are encouraged to experience and expect sexual pleasure. On the other, they are encouraged to ascribe to an appearance of purity in the outside world. Furthermore, living under the authority and protection of a husband or father, she is also encouraged to maintain a chaste demeanor at home. In turn, we could always conjecture whether this permission to "do everything" in the bedroom applied more specifically to men to guarantee that women dispose of their bodies to, first and foremost, serve the sexual pleasure of men as opposed to their own.

Therefore, despite the rapid changes taking place in relation to the patriarchal family structure when Nelson Rodrigues begins writing his first plays (1940s), many of the traditional honor codes ascribed to women are still in place. Petra Ramalho Souto, for example, describes dichotomic dimensions ascribed to women in Brazilian society and how the female characters in Rodrigues' plays follow their own ethics of conduct, at times contradicting the moral expectations of society and family.

...retoma a discussão sobre a visão dicotômica da mulher na sociedade brasileira (puta/santa) e conclui ... que a mulher rodriguiana ao ser classificada como santa ou puta, não é necessariamente boa ou má, segundo julgamentos morais, mas um ser que segue, a fim de satisfazer seus desejos, uma ética própria que por vezes contraria a moral sexual vigente na sociedade que se reflete no texto rodriguiano. (29)

In the third and last act, Geni, imbued with a sense of Christian guilt, though following her own ethics of conduct, as we see above, says: "Eu tenho pena do teu filho, e quando tenho pena sou uma santa!" (216) She decides to supposedly "save" Serginho, hospitalized after being violated by the Bolivian thief. At the same time, Geni and Herculando get married under the blessings of the aunts, who now consider Geni part of the family and profess that she has married as a virgin. Fulfilling Patricio's macabre plans, Serginho betrays his father by getting romantically and sexually involved with Geni and at the end, runs away with the Bolivian thief. The aunts are prone to follow a certain ethics of conduct that will change so they can keep receiving money from Herculano, proving that their strict moral code is easily modified according to the circumstances. Geni, on the contrary, acts according to her own belief systems, even her belief in God fits with her conduct.

A voice-over ends the piece revealing the tragic outcome: Geni is dying. Lacan says "poetic creations engender rather than reflect psychological creations" (Session 13, p. 214) and that is perhaps the difficulty in tackling this play. Though Rodrigues plays with the impossible conciliation between individual psychological desires and the morality of the church/family/state, his plays also go beyond these dichotomic characterizations⁸. Characters such as Geni contribute to destabilizing apparent notions we might first have. There are some obvious, apparent features of the characters that are just further destabilized when we take into consideration the act of telling, or manipulating stories. Even if we take the story as true in terms of factual evidence, it is still hard to pin point the real motivations of the characters. Characters speak in half sentences, scenes are cut off, and characters show signs that

they enjoy leading double lives, lying in certain situations when it is convenient for them. The extremity of chastity or morality is easily dismantled when characters are easily swayed to give up their belief systems in exchange for a different type of gain, creating an economy of desire.

We can assume that the whole play is told from Geni's point of view and her fantasies of death as a redemptive process, of going back to what she believes she truly is, "different from most prostitutes"; Someone who has the soul of a puritan, spiritualist in the body of a prostitute and desiring woman. The most obvious elements the play tackles are the madonna-whore complex, the dichotomy between sexual desire and repression of these desires as well as the idea of the monstrous feminine. Those are supposedly unleashed by lack of inhibition after moments of crisis, near death experiences, nausea from sexual images with the chaste wife and pleasure during sex with a prostitute.

Rodrigues plays with a lot of dichotomies and many of them belonging to the cultural, social imaginary of Brazilian social structure; the dichotomy of life and death, sexual desire and purity, the qualities associated with the church morality versus the qualities associated with a more libertine mind, such as symbolized by the doctor in the play, an atheist and communist, versus the priest. In fact, Magaldi stresses that: "Em pólos antagônicos, o médico e o padre completam o círculo familiar, fundado um na autoridade da ciência e outro, na da religião. [...] A análise fria dos diálogos no contexto em que se travam, permite arriscar que Nelson não isentou de ironia as convicções que ambos ostentam" (37). Herculano actually migrates between the two extreme moral codes in his almost analytic sections with the two figures of the doctor and priest, in the process of figuring out what to do with his son Serginho. There is one insight that goes in tandem with the idea of the monstrous feminine, or the abject, which is related to Serginho's sexuality. The doctor, when alluding to his supposed rape by the Bolivian robber, says: " Pois essa monstruosidade foi o ponto de partida para um processo de vida" (205). It is hard at this point to know whether and how Geni might know this when she is telling the story of what happened, or if the imagination and memory of Herculano plays a part in this. The conscious mind is certainly put on display as theatrical scenes and devices, mirroring the fictional narrative. Again, the poetic imagery engenders the psychological structures, making it hard to maintain the dualities put forward on stage.

The patriarchal stance is completely demolished in the process of uncovering the monstrous feminine as not so monstrous as well as embracing it. Geni is a highly sexualized woman, who also does not take orders from men easily. Although she is still inscribed in the male fantasies and their manipulations, she attempts to have the last laugh by suicide (corpse and death as abject). To what degree her love interests and even falling for Serginho is just a stepping stone for her suffering, an excuse of martyrdom to be able to die the noble death, is never clear. There is a nobility in incest, since she is the mother figure for Serginho. The fetishism of a woman's body is focused on the breast (as breast cancer), on the naked body, and on the contradictory shame of seeing the naked body, which the aunts and Geni both obsessively have to cover up. As we will see in more detail later, the abject of the female body as the unknown both attracts and repulses. Geni, for example, constantly makes reference to her breasts: "O melhor você não sabe. Tenho uma cisma que vou morrer de cancer no seio" (1054). Or: "A coisa mais difícil é um seio bonito". Geni also feels that her body is that of a martyr: "meu amor é pena" (1091) and even though she works as a prostitute, and has not qualms about it, she feels nauseated when looking at a picture of herself naked. As seen in all of Rodrigues' plays, Geni embodies the two opposite extremes of stereotypical female fetishism (saint vs. prostitute). She attempts to redeem herself by marrying Herculano and seeing Serginho as a lover in order to save him (again, accepting a double code of ethics of both saint and prostitute). Most of all, through the self-conscious performance by Geni as both martyr and savior, she justifies her past behavior as a prostitute as well as her adultery, making it possible to act out both in a continual performance of these two roles as an obsession.

Moreover, all the characters are looking for some sort of salvation or sexual pleasure through the adoration of one another, which seems to create a split and a continuous consciousness of

doubleness or consciousness of performance. The contradiction within the structural relationship highlights DaMatta's configuration of Brazilian society that accepts contradictions as long as each is relegated to different spaces in the social structure (house, street and the world of the beyond). Even though morally "wrong" for the church and in the house, for example, Geni feels she is doing something good so that Serginho can live, on the street code of ethics. By the same token, she assures herself she is doing something good for herself by being with someone she considers to be very pure (atoning in the world of the beyond, saved by love and grace). She performs the role of prostitute, wife and lover as if they were mutually inclusive. However, the presence of these different structural and contradictory expectations of the body of women is mostly oppressive to the female characters that are dependent on men for their survival. Geni, even though she makes her own money, ends up being financially dependent on Herculano after she meets him.

Though at first view, Patricio is the catalyst for the characters' decisions throughout the play, at second view, Geni can be seen as the catalyst. Her complete sense of individual freedom, reflected in her suicide, is a type of agency she is trying to impart, which she cannot neither as a wife nor as a prostitute. There is the *in betweenness* explored in her obsession with the abject of death. Her affair with Serginho is redeemable in her view, since it is "pure motherly love", away from the shackles of two institutions. Thus, for the history of Brazilian theater during the 20th century on, Geni is certainly one of the strongest female characters developed. By creating her own ethics of conduct amidst the confusion of sexual honor codes ascribed to women in different ways depending on their class, race and structural position, she reverses typical gender roles. Her sexual expression, foremost, is similar to a man, considering the type of male characters in the theater of the time. She says, for example: "Há homens que gostam de apanhar!" (205), in response to Herculano accusing her of not being a lady, for swearing. She also says, she is young, she needs a man, she cannot be without sex for too long (205). She blame her breasts, at the end, the symbol of her femininity, degradation and salvation, at the same time: "Lembranças à tia machona! Malditos também os seios!" (238) Due to her bending gender norms, Geni becomes the muse for a cross dressing/transgender character in *Opera do Malandro* (1978), a play by Chico Buarque, also written during the dictatorship.

When analyzing the character of Mariaz, we could say, at first view, that she represents the extreme opposite of Geni. She is a virgin, orderly, live among other women in a hotel (*pensionato*), possibly with a religious affiliation, and does not have a lot of dreams besides the immediate mundane ones. But when we look closely, she mentions wanting to have studied Philosophy and being a mystic, of some sort. She also obsesses with images of the feminine, especially ones associated with childhood. Her fixations echo Geni's fixation with lack of childhood and her motherly instinct turned into sexual ones. Assunção's style differs from Rodrigues since it lacks the melodramatic, mostly espousing a tragic comic tone bordering on the absurd. Thus the alienation effect employed here happens through the absurdity of the situation.

Mariazinha makes an effort to always look impeccable in her uniform, a discreet suit. She believes to be always "well-behaved". She fulfills all her obligations by following rules to a t. She is punctual at work, always pays her loans on time and regularly saves money every month so she can finish playing for this small studio. Awaiting for the day she she can move to her apartment, she spends her days in a pension for girls, watching TV during her free time. Hebe Camargo is one of her favorite shows. She claims she could have studied Philosophy, since she feels she is a mystic. This is all heard from her own mouth, though the tone is almost ridiculous. She is seen talking to the objects around her, especially the wall clock given to her by her father, the nightstand, the bed and a closet. They are all ridiculously decorated with balloons and bows that are used for the hair of young girls.

When she was a child, she fit within the furniture. As an adult, she would ask them: "Não é esquisito não caber mais dentro das coisas? Foram elas que cresceram, ou fui quem diminuiu?" (27). Because of the absurdity of the scene, her thoughts, though seemingly profound, gain a strange quality, become empty of meaning. She seems to be repeating words from books, such as *Lispector* (27), Lewis

Carroll (27), and José de Alencar (“olhos negros como as asas da graúna”[27]), for example. Her words are also mixed with jingles and children’s folk songs. However, despite the emptiness of her words, she slowly reveals aspects about the world and herself after meeting the “Homem” (literally meaning, “Man”).

Orgasm is an unknown experience for Mariazinha. She claims to have tried, but was never successful at it. Virgin, already resigned with the idea of being single for the rest of her life, she was surprised one night with the entry of an armed Man. The Man asks her: “Não sabe o que é gozar? Não? Responda!”, to which she replies: “Não sei! Não sei!” (112). The encounter precipitates an imaginary tour of the city of São Paulo, through hallucinatory leaps, literally breaking with convention and the world of objects around her. Fearful and demure at first, furious and impulsive at the end, she made use of swear words as well as revealed a desire to be loved and get married. When finally asking him, the Man replies: “E você acha que o bonitão aqui vai perder tempo com um bagulho como você?”(100). Feeling desperate, she responds: “inteligentíssima, independente, intelectual bonita” and, screaming, she asks: “Minta! Minta! Minta! Que é um solitário que talvez se case comigo. Eu sou boa de cama! Mente que quer casar comigo”(101). At this point, though also in the pretend performative mode, she gives us her dream from finding a prince, from the fables she would read as a child. The Man, in front of her, is real, is flawed, might be a criminal.

The prayer of Mariazinha for the Man to marry her was formulated in the course of the imaginary trip that both did while running around the room. As she let her construction of herself change, perceiving the performance to which she was ascribed, all the objects in the room lost their importance. Reality, as a possibility that would destroy imagination, gave rise to anguish. The Man, though depreciative towards her throughout their encounter, finally decided he would like to her to go with him. When a woman announced in the hallway that it was 7 AM, Mariaz wakes up from her “dream” and decides to scream for help, rather than running away with the Man.

The prejudices between social classes, the monstrous feminine as a religious prerogative to maintain sexual honor and the performance of different gender roles are all on display in this play through Mariazinha as they are in Rodrigues’ play through Geni as a catalyst. In fact, because the Man is unnamed, he can also be seen as a figment of Mariaz’ imagination or the chorus (as the aunts are in the other play). From this point on, I will analyse different passages in chronological order. Due to the absurdist quality of the text, it will give us a more organized overview of the path the play takes. In the beginning of their encounter, the Man incites Mariaz to act and to change, he is a catalyst. Towards the middle, Mariaz takes the lead, and finally, towards the end, they blend in until the destruction of their encounter. The idea of truth in story telling is put into question when the Man says: “Dona... Não tem nada que mexa mais com meu nervo que desacreditar da minha palavra...Quando é mentira, eu acabo com o imbecil, mas mesmo quando é verdade, eu já fico puto da vida!” (36) He then calls the balloon in her room “vermelho hemorragia”, revealing the first instances of the monstrous feminine. Her apparently childish love for gas balloons is seen as blood (from menstruation or cut), the border with the abject, as described by Creed as “a taboo object within religion” (71):

there is, of course, a sense in which the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross

the ‘border’ is abject. Although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous remains the same – to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability. (71)

in the case of the play, the abject of the monstrous feminine are represented as: the threatening of stability in the encounter between the social classes, the encounter of different gender roles, the instability of her organized life during the encounter, and her repressed sexuality. The construction of the discourse of the organized life is also seen as a type of control for fear of the abject. The Man philosophizes that “a cor que eu vejo nela é aquela que resolvemos chamar de vermelho. Hemorragia.

Se bem, que daí, de onde você está, poderia ver ela com um reflex, da luz, e daí muda...”(38). He sees this abject in her and through force, makes her agree with him, enforcing his patriarchal control of the woman. Immediately afterwards, he shows another side to him, when he says he just wants company, not to rob or rape (41). In terms of class, he expresses himself to have all the doors closed to him because of his lower social economic status. And Mariaz replies by offering to find someone to help him in a religious path. He crosses the path of the abject (her monstrous sexuality) when he says: “Eu só respiro quando vejo olho olhando, carne, risada, suor, pele.....” (47). Later the Man calls her a rock, to which she replies: “Eu não sou pedra, nada!” (49). Her response is strange, since in the beginning she is bothered and fearful of the intrusion. Here, to the contrary, she reveals a sense of pride and desire to be seen as sexually attractive for the first time in the play. After the confrontation with the unknown of him and herself, she slowly demystifies the monstrous feminine. However, she reveals that the furniture and objects around her are her family and friends, the fetishism of objects. As Lacan points out when describing the imaginary object petit a:

The object of the fantasy, image and pathos, is that other element that takes the place of what the subject is symbolically deprived of. Thus the imaginary object is in a position to condense in itself the virtues or the dimension of being and to become that veritable delusion of being [leurre de le'tre] that Simone Weil treats when she focuses on the very densest and most opaque relationship of a man to the object of his desire: the relationship of Moliere's Miser to his strongbox. This is the culmination of the fetish character of the object of human desire. Indeed all objects of the human world have this character, from one angle at least. (15)

The Man's perception of the value of these objects prompts him to perform a scene where the objects are all put up for auction, destroying her possible means for sexual pleasure through sublimation. Elza Cunha de Vincenzo refers to the objects as “fantasmas dos valores da família burquesa” (p.90, quoted in Vieira de Andrade, p. 34) Again, bringing back the monstrous feminine, he tells Mariaz that her hair is full of flies around, as if her body had become a corpse (to mirror the death of the objects in her room). Thus, though the monstrous feminine causes disgust, in the play, it is deliberately prompted so that aspects of gender and social structure are put on display in this nauseating dynamic. To the point as he says “Aqui jaz, Mariazinha Mendonça de Morais...” (63). She replies by threatening to kill everything around her, including him. The fear and hate of the monstrous feminine that could be unleashed by the destruction of the world as she knew it, prompt her to enter into the game of make-believe. They imagine themselves naked, together, walking on the street. As expected they stroll around a cemetery, jumping from one tomb to another. At one point the Man says “eu te pego e viro do avesso” (82), a definite allusion to the sexual act as it relates to death. His words are mixed with words such as “eu sou uma caveira” and that he will kill her (80). Later, they both admit to not representing the typical expected gender norms. She says she hates to cook and he says he cannot have sex five times straight, he is not a “macho”(83). At one point they start repeating words such as “sewage”, “water drop”, “everything broken”, calling out the abject from behind the clean façade of her room. She pretends to be a rich woman, then a femme fatale Heddy Lamar (95). At which points her moral code related to sexual intercourse comes back when she says: “Será que ela está pensando que sou uma prostituta? Nossa! Olha lá a madame Rosalva! Se me vê, na certa conta pra dona Celestina que nunca mais me deixa entra na casa dela!”, and he replies: “(ele mesmo) Burra! Mulher independente não pensa isso! Faz o que quer!” (99). Later she repeats to need a lie that she can believe in. She falls into the belief of marriage and begs him to pretend he will actually marry her. Slowly she begins to get tired, and remembers her obligations. He convinces her of swearing, and she does, after a period of convincing. Towards the end, after he confesses to wanting to have sex with her, she trembles, she confesses she is a virgin. The fear of the monstrous feminine of orgasm proves bigger than her desire. Finally, she hears the lady from the pension waking everyone up. She is not the ridiculous woman of the perfect curls anymore (113)(in the words of the author), she is conflicted, but in the end, she calls

for the police, screaming: “Socooooooooooooorrrroo!!!!!! Tem um ladrão dentro do meu quarto! Polícia!!” (113) Creed, in the third definition of the monstrous feminine in the horror film, says: “In the child’s attempts to break away, the mother becomes an abject; thus, in this context, where the child struggles to become a separate subject, abjection becomes ‘a precondition of narcissism’ (p. 13)” (72) In the case of Mariaz, she cannot break away from the mother (as it is clear in her references to her childhood). In a metaphorical level, Mariaz is tied to the womb of the nation, the image of the nation-state, that develops into the image of the abject related to women’s bodies. She at least tries to break away from the idea of the monstrous feminine by being in direct contact with the abject, where the feminine is not so clearly relegated to a space of oppression. Assunção might not be giving us an answer to the problematics of gender in Brazil, but through this process, she is showing the mechanisms that are used to keep it in place as well as the possibility, however contradictory, for Maria to find a type of agency. Mariaz, though committed to a life of cleanliness and order, has already found a way to have agency as an independent woman, at least financially speaking. The encounter with the other of gender and class changes her while bringing to the fore the absurdity of a system of values based on a patriarchal authoritarian system. Furthermore, as Vieira de Andrade points out,

No Brasil de 1969, o repúdio à submissão da mulher soava como um eco de repúdio à falta de liberdade política imposta pela ditadura. A questão feminina, pela primeira vez, deixava de ser unicamente feminina para transformar-se em algo mais universal: o desmascaramento do poder autoritário. [...] Quem poderia imaginar que uma solteirona infantilizada pudesse tornar-se tão perigosa? Para a censura, o perigo vinha justamente do fato de que a figura e Mariazinha era a prova da estupidez de todo um sistema de valores defendido pelo autoritarismo da ditadura militar. (33)

The performative aspect of the dictatorship, controlling the radio and TV to propagate the values of the patriarchal family as well as that of the patriarchal father, failed to completely repress the production of dissident text in the theater realm. Though it eventually silenced and was responsible for the exile of a number of playwrights and directors, the combination of contrary viewpoints, which were springing up during that time, led to plays that pushed the generic boundaries of gender and questioned the patriarchal family as the model of the perfect Brazilian family. Rodrigues, and then Assunção, developed nuanced characters that required a critical perception of the audience, due their clever estrangement effects. Though Assunção is considered a feminist playwright, Rodrigues is not usually associated with the feminist agenda. In fact, both have pronounced not to want to fit into any type of strict ideological agendas. I hope in this article, to have shown, how Rodrigues is echoed in the new dramaturgy of the time, while providing even more critical perspectives on gender than expected of the new generation of 1969. It is also important to emphasize that these writers transformed the problematics of gender in a political contestation, beyond feminism. As Vieira de Andrade suggests:

No caso de Leilah Assunção e *Fala Baixo Senão Eu Grito*, o enfoque dos problemas específicos do tipo de mulher que temia enfrentar seu próprio desejo sexual talvez não tivesse alcançado a mesma receptividade por parte da crítica se o ambiente cultural não estivesse tão dominado pela necessidade de luta contra a repressão política e a opressão em geral, o que permitiu que a problemática do personagem Mariazinha também pudesse ser compreendida de maneira mais ampla, para além dos limites da questão feminina. (9)

It is in this scenario that a new view of Brazilian social structures is put on display. The writers are responsible for creating theatrical devices of a complex nature while effectively producing other types of allegories to question the idea of *Brazilianess*, so much explored by the modernist writers of the previous generations, especially innovating in new concepts of marginal, within the framework of the female characters.

End Notes

¹ The authors not only contest the patriarchal family as a revision of the authoritarian regime, but also revisit the model of the Brazilian patriarchal family as a historical prerogative to understand Brazilian culture. This, in turn, provides criticism of the work of important Brazilian social theorists such as of Gilberto Freyre and Caio Prado Junior. This discussion, though pertinent, is beyond the purview of this essay.

² DaMatta in *A Casa & a Rua* describes the idea of complementarity of social planes and ethics of dual codes:

Pela mesma lógica, uma pessoa numa igreja, num funeral, num terreiro de umbanda ou num centro espírita poderia marcar suas atitudes com um discurso diferente daqueles requeridos pelos espaços da rua e da casa. Não é agora podemos saber - ao acaso que temos um ditado que diz: “Faça como eu digo, mas não como eu faço”. Entre dizer e fazer há um abismo que parece caracterizar todo sistema dotado daquilo que Weber chamou de “éticas dúplices”, ou seja, códigos de interpretação e norteamto da conduta que são opostos e valem apenas para certas pessoas, ações e situações. (33)

³ The plays, after being written, were classified by Magaldi, Rodrigues most renowned critic, following Rodrigues’ approval. The classification remains controversial, since Rodrigues creates his own classification in the beginning of each play, which at times, contradict Magaldi’s overarching denominations.

⁴ According to Brecht, estrangement or alienation effects, especially the ones used in modern theater, “are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today” (8).

⁵ For DaMatta, death is seen as a metaphor for going up or down a type of hierarchical plane:

Ou seja, a morte no Brasil é concebida como uma passagem de um mundo a outro, numa metáfora de subida ou descida – algo verticalizado, como a própria sociedade – e jamais como um movimento horizontal, como ocorre na sociedade americana, onde a morte é quase sempre encapsulada na figura de uma viagem aos confins, limites ou fronteiras do universo (Cf., para o caso brasileiro, Freyre, 1977: 84). (103)

⁶ See, Freud. *A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)*.

⁷ Michalski (1979) lists some of the guidelines officially received by the censors, which are very vague, but assumes a certain understanding of the expectations of what is considered proper (espousing family values) or not:

a) contiver qualquer ofensa ao decoro público;

- b) contiver cenas de ferocidade ou for capaz de sugerir a prática de crimes.
- c) divulgar ou induzir aos maus costumes.
- d) for capaz de provocar incitamento contra o regime vigente, a ordem pública, as autoridades constituídas e seus agentes;
- e) puder prejudicar a cordialidade das relações com outros povos;
- f) for ofensivo às coletividades ou às religiões.
- g) ferir, por qualquer forma, a dignidade ou os interesses nacionais.
- h) induzir aos desprestígios das forças armadas. (25)

⁸ Guidarini in *Nelson Rodrigues: flor de obsessão* (and other critics of Nelson Rodrigues) has emphasized the dualities and play of opposites in Rodrigues' plays. I, on the contrary, believe that the play of opposites is used to destabilized prescribed dichotomies, a theatrical device.