

# "George" - a tale by Maria Judite de Carvalho:

## The self I believe to be is the dwelling place of the others I think I have been

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### **ABSTRACT**

We intend to conduct a critical analysis of the short story "George" by the Portuguese writer Maria Judite de Carvalho. As a prominent figure in 20th-century Portuguese literature, the author portrays the solitude of the contemporary woman. This perspective is highlighted in the short story "George", from the collection *Seta Despedida*, published in 1995. Here, we encounter a narrator witnessing George's return to their homeland, where they manage to reconnect with themselves and bid farewell to a part of their life, in a blend of memory, imagination, and reality. With a gaze that extends across time, George can piece together some elements of a puzzle. Throughout the plot, the story exposes the familial and societal expectations that suppress George's freedom of choice, demonstrating the influence of the social milieu on their journey and the attempt to limit their autonomy. It is through the sale of the inherited house that the character liberates themselves and makes room for new possibilities. In this sense, George's need to return and depart, to encounter Gi, the eighteen-year-old, and Giorgina, the seventy-year-old woman, is crucial for them to return and ultimately depart with resignation.

**Keywords:** Maria Judite de Carvalho, Contemporary Portuguese short story, Female emancipation.

### **"George" - um conto de Maria Judite de Carvalho: o Eu que julgo ser é a morada dos Outros que penso ter sido**

### **RESUMO**

Temos por intenção realizar uma leitura crítica do conto George, da escritora portuguesa Maria Judite de Carvalho. Exponente da literatura portuguesa do século XX, a autora

representa a solidão da mulher contemporânea. Essa perspectiva é evidenciada no conto "George", da coletânea *Seta Despedida*, de 1995. Aqui encontramos um narrador a testemunhar o retorno de George a sua terra natal, onde consegue se reencontrar e também se despedir de uma parte da sua vida, em uma mistura de memória, imaginação e realidade. Com um olhar que se estende através do tempo, George pode juntar algumas peças de um quebra-cabeça. Ao longo da trama, o conto expõe as expectativas familiares e sociais que reprimem a liberdade de escolha de George, demonstrando a influência do meio social em sua trajetória e a tentativa de limitação de sua autonomia. É pela venda da casa herdada que a personagem se liberta e abre espaço para novas possibilidades. Nesse sentido, a necessidade de George de retornar e partir, de encontrar Gi, a jovem de dezoito anos, e Giorgina, a mulher de cerca de 70 anos, é fundamental para que ela possa voltar e, por fim, partir resignada.

**Palavras-chave:** Maria Judite de Carvalho, Conto português contemporâneo, Emancipação feminina.

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In general, our society has relegated women to a position of inferiority and subordination. However, the blow dealt by Portuguese society was one of the most serious. In the context of a dictatorship with numerous cultural limitations and, above all, religious constraints, women were expected to have a virginal, immaculate posture that never transgressed. It was a provincial and religious society that imposed increasing obstacles to women's liberation. Women were required to fulfill their roles, considered by fundamental common sense to be mother and wife.

On the other hand, starting from the 1950s, a movement emerged against the idealized image of women as the cornerstone of Christian family and society. Writing begins to problematize the female condition in the world. Writers coming to the scene post 1945, with existentialist influences, bring as centrally problematic human loneliness and conflicts generated by male/female relationships. Authors such as Agustina Bessa-Luís, Natália Nunes, Graça Pina de Morais and Maria Judite de Carvalho write seeking to change imposed paradigms and promote an opening to new possibilities for women.

For Agustina Bessa-Luís (in her Preface to Filomena Cabral's *Tarde Demais Mariana*), it was still a writing "confusa e embaraçada como elas, quando é uma escrita de mulheres. [...]. No mais das vezes, as mulheres escrevem segundo o modelo que obtiveram dos homens," but "agora começa a haver uma literatura feminina, uma forma de a mulher se interrogar; mas ainda só balbucia [...]" (Bessa-Luís, 1985, p. 12)<sup>1</sup>. A women's emancipation movement began to emerge, standing up for the struggle of the writers who were committed to combating not only structural limitations imposed on the female, but also faced a hostile environment that restricted the full development of their potential.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "confused and embarrassed like them, when it is written by women. [...]. More often than not, women write according to the model they obtained from men", but "now there is a female literature, a way for women to question themselves; but still only babble (...)"

According to Nelly Novaes Coelho (1999), the authors of this period have the desire for liberation, but still do not know how to do it. There is a crisis of identity, since they have no one to mirror, and then need to develop a new identity. For Coelho, what characterizes the female literature of the second half of the century is a “problemática transgressora que se manifesta através de uma linguagem também transgressora das normas consagradas” (p. 122)<sup>2</sup>. It is the breaking of silence maintained for centuries.

After the 1960s, the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, especially the placements made by the philosopher in *O Segundo Sexo* (1949), began to influence Portuguese writers, especially those who question the female role in society. Questions arise about what it is to be a woman because, for Beauvoir (2019), men establish the place of women in society. According to her, the search for freedom stems from the rupture of the role played by women as men's shadows.

Therefore, inserted in this context, Maria Judite de Carvalho employs brief forms, a lean language, and spared words, representative of the loneliness and discomfort of the twentieth century woman. In a subtle and silent way, it brings to the surface this emptying of living female characters in a society ruled by male hegemony. It shows the dissatisfaction of women in the most varied areas of life.

Baptista-Bastos (1989)<sup>3</sup>, on the writing of Maria Judite de Carvalho, says that she writes about “os cativos resignados, os heroísmos complacentes, as solidões povoadas, os desamores” (p. 29). Most are women tormented by the need to meet the expectations of their husbands, emotionally torn, or doomed to live in solitude. They cannot find a solution, only a lack of hope.

This perspective is evidenced in the short story “George,” published in the 1995 collection *Seta Despedida*. The narrator reports the protagonist's return to her homeland, where she can find herself again in a mixture of memory, imagination, and

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<sup>2</sup>Translated by the author of the article: “transgressive problem that manifests itself through a language also transgressing the consecrated norms”.

<sup>3</sup>Translated by the author of the article: “the resigned captives, the complacent heroisms, the populated solitudes, the desamores”.

reality. Through a look that extends through non-linear time, George tries to somehow put together the pieces of a puzzle that make up her life. The sale of the inherited house is the trigger for the character to make room for new possibilities. In this sense, George's need to return and leave, to find Gi, the eighteen-year-old, and Giorgina, the old woman in her 70s, is fundamental so that she can see herself in another and finally leave.

## **CARTOGRAPHY OF SUBJECTIVITY IN HETEROGENEOUS TIMES**

### **Village: Life as destiny**

George, a woman in her mid-40s, returns to her hometown after the passing of her parents. Her intention is to sell the inherited house where she spent her childhood and youth. The narrative is structured in blocks. In the first part, it is possible to observe that George's life was deeply marked by family impositions that restricted her choices and limited her personal development. During the time she stayed in the village, she lived an existence conditioned by family expectations that would determine her destiny.

Sigmund Freud, in publishing *Além do Princípio do Prazer* in 1920, will deal with "the neurosis of destiny". This theory refers to a psychological state in which a person seems to be destined to repeat traumatic events or difficult situations in his life, even if he consciously wants to avoid them. It's as though events are repeating themselves, "encadeamentos a que o sujeito parece estar submetido como uma fatalidade exterior" (Leplanche, 2001, p. 307)<sup>4</sup>. It seems impossible to escape the expectations placed on George since her birth. The idea of a cycle and the repetition of a previously established destiny are evident. She is expected to follow in the footsteps of the matriarchs inserted in a patriarchal tradition, that is, to marry, have children, and take care of the house.

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<sup>4</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "threads to which the subject seems to be subjected as an external fatality".

At the beginning of the narrative, after her arrival in the village, George sees Gi approaching in her direction from a distance:

O rosto da jovem que se aproxima é vago e sem contornos. . . . As suas feições ainda são incertas, salpicando a mancha pálida, como acontece com o rosto das pessoas mortas. Mas, tal como essas pessoas, tem, vai ter uma voz muito real e viva, uma voz que a cal e as pás de terra e a pedra e o tempo, e ainda a distância e a confusão da vida de George não prejudicaram. (p. 219)<sup>5</sup>.

The encounter with the other, the young Gi, leads George to recognize himself. Judith Butler, in retaking Jean-Luc Nancy, states that we can only recognize ourselves when we are recognized by others, since the recognition of others transforms us (2021, p. 39). As Gi approaches, her image becomes less distinct. The young woman's face doesn't matter; the encounter is what leads her to turn inward.

Gi finds herself in a period when George's destiny is still being shaped, following the norms imposed on her. Gi shows no rebellion or opposition to family expectations. Upon seeing her, George recalls her parents' conservative stance towards art:

Mas nesse tempo, dantes, não sabia quem era Modigliani, não eram artistas lá casa, os pais tinham sido condenados pelas instâncias supremas à quase ignorância, gente de trabalho, dizia como se os outros não trabalhassem, e sorriam um pouco com a superioridade dessa mesma ignorância se a ouviam falar de um livro, de um filme, de um quadro nem pensar, o único que tinham visto talvez fosse a estampa do Angelus que estava na casa de jantar. (p. 220)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "The face of the young woman approaching is vague and without outlines .... Her features are still uncertain, splattering the pale blur, much like the faces of the deceased. But, just like those people, she will have a very real and lively voice, a voice that the lime and the shovels of earth and the stone and time, as well as the distance and the confusion of George's life, have not harmed".

<sup>6</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "But back then, in the past, she didn't know who Modigliani was; there were no artists in her house. Her parents had been sentenced by the highest authorities to near

This period is characterized by the full experience of the Salazarist dictatorship, with its ruralist structure and narrow-minded vision, with the decrease of diversified world interpretations. The vast majority of Portuguese villages were conservative, traditionalist, closely tied to the land, family, and restricted nationalism. This produced a narrow conception of femininity, resulting in rigid cultural expectations regarding the roles of women in the family and society. The political power of the time also had no interest in providing the population with a refined education or encouraging critical thinking. Therefore, for George's parents, the possibility of their daughter becoming an artist was something to be laughed at, deemed unworthy of a respectable woman.

The encounter with Gi, in a seemingly imaginary dialogue, leads us to believe that Gi is the younger version of George. Described much like a Modigliani painting, the young woman has a blurred, undefined face, and this "encounter" brings back memories of the past.

E eles acham que eu tenho muito jeitinho, que hei-de um dia ser uma boa senhora da vila, uma esposa exemplar, uma mãe perfeita, tudo isso com muito jeito para o desenho. Até posso fazer retratos das crianças quando tiver tempo, não é verdade? (G, p. 219)<sup>7</sup>.

The young woman is still subject to the determinism of a life that offers her few options. She has a boyfriend who shows no interest in leaving, her mother is in charge of preparing her trousseau for her wedding, and the idea of leaving the village is seen as impractical and absurd.

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ignorance, hard working people, they said, as if others didn't work, and they would smile a little with the superiority of that very ignorance if they heard her talk about a book, a movie, a painting – not even a thought. The only one they had maybe seen was the print of 'The Angelus' that hung in the dining room".  
<sup>7</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "And they think I have a knack for it, that one day I'll be a good lady of the village, an exemplary wife, a perfect mother, all that while having a talent for drawing. I might even make portraits of the children when I have the time, right?"

Judith Butler (2021), when discussing the central theme of Foucault's work in the 1980s on the constitution of the subject, states that self-recognition is only possible through a regime of truth. The primary influencing factor in her formation is partially external to her:

mas também são apresentados como as normas disponíveis, pelas quais o reconhecimento de si acontece, de modo que o que "posso ser", de maneira bem literal, é limitado de antemão por um regime de verdade que decide quais formas de ser serão reconhecíveis e não reconhecíveis. (p. 35)<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, according to the philosopher, the regime of norms in which the subject is situated influences the construction of the subject:

não existe nenhum "eu" que possa se separar totalmente das condições sociais de seu surgimento, nenhum "eu" que não esteja implicado em um conjunto de normas morais condicionadoras, que, por serem normas, têm um caráter social que excede um significado puramente pessoal ou idiossincrático. (p. 18)<sup>9</sup>.

When a person seeks to tell their own story, they may start with themselves, but they will realize that this narrative is already embedded in a social temporality that goes beyond their own storytelling abilities. (Butler, 2021, p. 18). The subject's history always involves a set of relationships. Thus, narrating oneself is also narrating what comes before.

However, Butler argues that despite norms serving as a reference point for the decisions we will make, what we do is not solely determined by these norms. Therefore,

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<sup>8</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "(...), but they are also presented as the available norms through which self-recognition occurs, so what 'I can be,' quite literally, is limited in advance by a regime of truth that decides which forms of being will be recognizable and non-recognizable".

<sup>9</sup>Translated by the author of the article: "There is no 'I' that can be fully separated from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning".



for the author, identity or the actions taken by someone are produced and reinforced by social and discursive practices, not something innate. In this way, although not completely opposed to determinism, the author believes that we construct our own identity. And this is what George does.

### **Exodus: The rupture and desire**

George breaks the cycle and leaves. She questions the regime of social norms and sets out to find herself as an individual and autonomous being. According to Butler, “o questionamento de si envolve colocar-se em risco, colocar em perigo a própria possibilidade de reconhecimento por parte dos outros” (2021, p. 36)<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, questioning the imposed norms causes George to run the risk of not being known as a recognizable subject.

For the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1998), the subject is composed of lines. Such composition is varied, and the first line, hard segmenting line, is related to the environment in which we live – our home, family, work, and so on. The second line, of malleable segmenting, “não que sejam mais íntimas e pessoais, pois elas atravessam tanto as sociedades, os grupos quanto os indivíduos. Elas traçam pequenas modificações, fazem desvios, delineiam quedas ou impulsos: não são, entretanto, menos precisas; elas dirigem até mesmo processos irreversíveis” (p. 101)<sup>11</sup>. And the third line, the line of escape:

Ao mesmo tempo ainda, há como que uma terceira espécie de linha, esta ainda mais estranha: como se alguma coisa nos levasse, através dos segmentos, mas também através de nossos limiares, em direção de uma destinação desconhecida, não

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<sup>10</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “self-questioning involves putting oneself at risk, endangering one’s own possibility of recognition by others”.

<sup>11</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “not that they are more intimate and personal, for they cut through societies, groups, and individuals alike. They trace small modifications, make detours, outline falls or impulses: they are not, however, any less precise; they even direct irreversible processes”.

previsível, não preexistente. Essa linha é simples, abstrata, e, entretanto, é a mais complicada de todas, a mais tortuosa: é a linha de gravidade ou de celeridade, é a linha de fuga e de maior declive. (p. 101)<sup>12</sup>.

To depart is to trace a line, and the line of flight is a deterritorialization. It signals the desire to be something other than what one is. It is to escape the fate of the Self and encounter the Others residing within oneself. For the philosopher, “fugir não é renunciar às ações, nada mais ativo que uma fuga. É o oposto do imaginado. É também fazer fugir, não necessariamente os outros, mas fazer alguma coisa fugir, fazer um sistema vazar como se fura um cano” (p. 101)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, fleeing is not an act of cowardice, but rather seeing the world from the outside, with other possibilities. It is breaking what was previously determined and established. It is the line of ruptures; the clandestine line. When all situations are exhausted, it is what remains.

Exodus is a line of flight. Breaking free to live the essence of desire, an encounter with oneself.

Uma verdadeira ruptura pode se estender no tempo, ela é diferente de um corte significante demais, ela deve ser continuamente protegida não apenas contra suas falsas aparências, mas também contra si mesma, e contra as reterritorializações que a espreitam. Por isso, de um escritor a outro, ela salta como o que deve ser recomeçado. (Deleuze, 1998, p. 32)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “At the same time, there is a third kind of line, even stranger: as if something were leading us, through segments, but also through our thresholds, toward an unknown, unpredictable, non-preexistent destination. This line is simple, abstract, and yet it is the most complicated of all, the most tortuous: it is the line of gravity or velocity, it is the line of escape and steepest descent”.

<sup>13</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “to flee is not to renounce actions; nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of what is imagined. It is also to make something flee, not necessarily others, but to make something escape, to make a system leak like puncturing a pipe”.

<sup>14</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “A true rupture can extend over time; it is different from a cut that is too significant. It must be continually protected not only against its false appearances but also against itself and against the reterritorializations that lie in wait. Therefore, from one writer to another, it leaps like what must be started anew”.

George leaves for more than twenty years: “quando saiu da vila e partiu à descoberta da cidade grande onde, dizia-se lá em casa, as mulheres se perdem” (p. 220)<sup>15</sup>. She goes in search of the desire to be exactly the opposite of what she should become. She changes her hair several times, an attitude of lost women, but never the color of the past: “Fez loiros os cabelos, de todos os loiros, um dia ruivos por cansaço de si, mais tarde castanhos, loiros de novo, esverdeados, nunca escuros, quase pretos, como dantes era” (p. 220)<sup>16</sup>. She had loves, married and divorced, left and arrived repeatedly. Always in motion. A constant movement of searching.

### **Amsterdam: Where is it?**

The question asked by Gi seems to be one of the main questions of George's life. Where is the place she has always been searching for? Does she find what she's looking for? “Depois de ter deixado a vila viveu sempre em quartos alugados mais ou menos modestos, depois em casas mobiliadas mais ou menos agradáveis. As últimas foram mesmo francamente confortáveis” (p. 220)<sup>17</sup>. Always moving, never establishing roots. Living in houses without anything of her own, a fact that would horrify her mother. Now she's in Amsterdam. How long? Settling down in a house, for George, would be like being trapped.

Uma casa mobiliada, sempre pensou, é a certeza de uma porta aberta de par em par, de mãos livres, de rua nova à espera dos seus pés. As pessoas ficam tão estupidamente presas a um móvel, a um tapete já gasto de tantos passos, aos bibelots acumulados ao longo das vidas e cheios de recordações, de vozes, de olhares, de mãos, de gente, enfim. Pega-se numa jarra e ali está algo de quem um dia apareceu com rosas. Tem

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “when she left the village and set out to discover the big city where, as they said at home, women get lost”.

<sup>16</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “She made blond hair, of all blondes, one day redheads for fatigue of herself, later brown, blonde again, greenish, never dark, almost black, as it was before...”.

<sup>17</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “After having left the village, she always lived in rented rooms, more or less modest, then in furnished houses, more or less pleasant. The last ones were quite comfortable”.

alguns livros, mas poucos, como os amigos que julga sinceros, sê-lo-ão? Aos outros livros dá-os, vende-os a peso, que leve se sente depois. (p. 221)<sup>18</sup>.

She wants to be free, ready to leave at any moment. A lover once told her that the desertification process she went through was deliberate but painful. But she wanted to be free, without ties. Even if leaving meant simply staying where she was. Deleuze says, “a história, porém, nunca compreendeu nada dos nômades, que não têm nem passado, nem futuro” (1998, p. 31)<sup>19</sup>. She feels this way, as her parents never understood why she had this craving for freedom. And that's why she left.

But George's departure means loneliness. It entails accepting the fact that the intended fulfillment did not occur. On her way back to Amsterdam, sitting on the train, she cries as a figure begins to materialize in front of her:

A figura vai-se formando aos poucos como um puzzle gasoso, inquieto, informe. Vê-se um pedacinho bem nítido e colorido mas que logo se esvai para aparecer daí a pouco, mais nítido ainda, mas esfumado. George fecha os olhos com a força possível, tem sono, volta a abri-los com dificuldade, olhos de pupilas escuras, semicirculares, boiando num material qualquer, esbranquiçado e oleoso. (p. 223)<sup>20</sup>.

The image of an old woman forms. In her seventies, Giorgina appears, showing George her future. Rich, but with loneliness laid bare:

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<sup>18</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “A furnished house, she always thought, is the certainty of an open-door pair by pair, hands free, new street waiting for your feet. People are so stupidly attached to a piece of furniture, a carpet already worn from so many steps, the bibelots accumulated throughout their lives and full of memories, voices, looks, hands, people, anyway. You take a jar and there's something that one day appeared with roses. You have some books, but few, like the friends you think are sincere, will they be? She gives the other books, sells them by weight, which she feels lightly afterwards”.

<sup>19</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “history, however, never understood anything about nomads, who have neither a past nor a future”.

<sup>20</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “The figure gradually takes shape like a gaseous, restless, formless puzzle. You see a tiny, very clear and colorful piece, but it soon fades to reappear a little while later, even clearer but blurred. George closes her eyes with all the strength she can muster, feels tired, opens them again with difficulty, eyes with dark, semicircular pupils, floating in some kind of whitish, oily substance”.

vivo tão só. Cheguei à ignomínia de pedir, a pessoas conhecidas, retratos da minha família. Não tinha nenhum, só um retrato meu, em rapariguinha. E retratos de amigos também. De amigos desaparecidos, levados pelas tempestades, os mais queridos, naturalmente. (p. 224)<sup>21</sup>.

The old woman shows George her future, in which she will be alone in a furnished house. Faced with George's denial, who believes that art will be her companion, Georgina warns her that the day will come when her hands will begin to tremble, her vision will diminish, and she will realize that this ephemeral world does not belong to her. Perhaps it happens because she is a woman or because she is alone. Anyway, time is relentless. Amsterdam: could it be the place where dreams are found?

## **PORTRAITS OF HERSELF: THE ENCOUNTER OF THE SELF WITH POSSIBLE OTHERS**

### **The portrait at the bottom of the suitcase: Youth and fetish**

Throughout the narrative, portrait images appear. They represent George's various "selves" metaphorically projected outward. As a fragmented and divided being, the ability to look at herself will only be possible by looking at others. She is adrift, "perdeu a bússola não sabe onde nem quando, perdeu tanta coisa sem ser a bússola. Perdeu ou abandonou" (p. 219)<sup>22</sup>. Thus, by deepening her gaze towards her "Others", in the materialization of a past and a future, the character tries to make sense of her existence. So, the first look is for Gi, the fetish of youth:

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "I live so alone. I reached the ignominy of asking, from people I knew, for portraits of my family. I didn't have any, only a picture of myself as a little girl. And portraits of friends as well. Friends who disappeared, carried away by storms, the dearest ones, of course".

<sup>22</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "lost the compass, doesn't know where or when, lost so many things besides the compass. Lost or abandoned".

uma pincelada clara, e quando os tiver ele será o rosto de uma fotografia que tem corrido mundo no fundo de uma mala qualquer, que tem morado no fundo de muitas gavetas, o único fetiche de George. (p. 219)<sup>23</sup>.

Gi is a photo stored at the bottom of a suitcase, a portrayal made of light as if youth, through the experience of life, was gradually buried. The cult of youth is indeed a phenomenon present in various societies, considered a kind of "holy grail" in Western cultures. The relentless pursuit of appearing young has proven to be a persistent trend.

Over the years, George paints Gi's portrait incessantly. Doing so connects her with a previous version of herself, when discomfort was not as great and intense, "*quando falar não criará espanto, um simples mal-estar*" (p. 220)<sup>24</sup>. An attempt to become youthful or to repeatedly experience what she once was.

Tão jovem, Gi. A rapariguinha frágil, um vime, que ela tem levado a vida inteira a pintar, primeiro à maneira de Modigliani, depois à sua própria maneira, à de George, pintora já com nome nos marchands das grandes cidades da Europa. Gi com um pregador de ouro que um dia ficou, por tuta e meia, num penhorista qualquer de Lisboa. Em tempos tão difíceis. (p. 220)<sup>25</sup>.

Fixating her gaze on Gi is to become aware that, despite the discomfort of stagnation, the "little girl" is a fragile and vulnerable young woman. The duality of feelings that afflict George is illustrated by the fact that, when reconnecting with Gi, she must confront her own fears, which she tried to leave behind when moving far away, overseas. The

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<sup>23</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "a clear brushstroke, and when he has them, he will be the face of a photograph that has traveled the world at the bottom of some suitcase, that has lived in the depths of many drawers, George's only fetish

<sup>24</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "when speaking will not create astonishment, just a simple discomfort."

<sup>25</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "So young, Gi. The fragile little girl, like a wicker, whom she has spent her whole life painting, first in the style of Modigliani, then in her own way, George's way, a painter already with a name in the art markets of the great cities of Europe. Gi with a golden brooch that one day ended up, for next to nothing, at some pawnshop in Lisbon. In such difficult times".

imagery of the great voyages, so present in Portuguese culture, is used to describe George's search for new horizons and challenges. However, what remains for her is melancholy and decadence, feelings she denies but which manifest themselves with “uma lágrima no olho direito, enquanto o outro, que esquisito, sempre se recusa a chorar” (p. 223)<sup>26</sup>.

### **A puzzle and the portrait of the future: The old woman and the crime**

The portrait of the old woman is akin to a puzzle, assembled with all these shards of life, from the past to the future. Old age has no future, only the past. It is assembled and reassembled in the village, in the things of the village, in what she could have been, in what she thinks she is. The metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle. The assembly of parts that try to fit but take time to form an image. Old age is always a blurred image. Youth is always a sought-after yet idealized image. Thus, Giorgina comes to show that the only crime one can commit is to grow old:

Sem voz e sem perder o riso diz:

- Verá que há-de passar, tudo passa. Amanhã é sempre outro dia. Só há uma coisa, um crime, que ninguém nos perdoa, nada a fazer. Mas isso ainda está longe, muito longe, para quê pensar nisso? Ainda ninguém a acusa, ainda ninguém a condena. Que idade tem?

- Quarenta e cinco anos. Porquê?

- É muito nova – afirma. - Muito nova. (p. 224).

Porque... o tal crime de que lhe falei, o único sem perdão, a velhice... Um dia vai acordar na sua casa mobiliada...

Como sabe que...

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<sup>26</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “[...] a tear in the right eye, while the other, how strange, always refuses to cry”.

... e verá que está só e olhará para o espelho com mais atenção e verá que está velha. Irremediavelmente velha. (p. 225)<sup>27</sup>.

The description of the old woman, a term used by George, highlights the discomfort she feels when facing the possibility of losing her youth. Despite the apparent opulence of her Italian handbags, wrinkled hands hold them. Hands that tremble and can no longer hold a paintbrush. Georgina is an archetype of loneliness, of the forgotten, of those who no longer belong to social circles. An attempt to break George's alienation, as she still believes that with money, one is never completely abandoned.

### **LAST WRITINGS: A TALE AND THE EDGES OF SOLIPSISM**

Despite having her destiny already traced and being led to repeat a tradition imposed on her, George breaks this continuous patriarchal line and decides to build her own identity. The self-exile chosen by her ends up not constituting a complete life, as idealized by the character. She lives on the edges of solipsism that, however, cannot be sustained. The dreamed-of destiny is not realized. It is almost a disappointment. Helena Buescu (2008) says:

George vive então em permanente estado de exceção, que o próprio estatuto de refugiada pressupõe: sem nome próprio, apenas um nome profissional; sem casa nem coisas nem amigos, nada que seja verdadeiramente seu, que a prenda a um lugar e a

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<sup>27</sup> Translated by the author of the article: "Voiceless and without losing her laughter, she says:

You'll see, everything will pass. Tomorrow is always another day. There's only one thing, one crime, that nobody forgives us, nothing to be done. But that's still far away, very far away, why think about it? No one accuses her yet, no one condemns her yet. How old are you?

- I'm forty-five years old. Why?

- You're very young - she asserts. - Very young. (p. 224)

Because... the crime I mentioned, the only one without forgiveness, is aging... One day you'll wake up in your furnished house...

How do you know that...

... and you'll see that you're alone and you'll look in the mirror more closely and you'll see that you're old. Irredeemably old." (p. 225)



uma gente; sem um verdadeiro passado – que é aquele que se sabe ter sido vivido, mas justamente como passado. Ora, George não “enterrou” o passado: a sua fuga é, no fundo, a mesma que teve início no momento em que saiu da sua vila natal, apenas em círculos mais largos. (p. 232)<sup>28</sup>.

She does not belong to a physical space, as she cannot settle in any place. Thus, when returning to the village, she must unfold into many selves, meet her other identities in order to look at herself. In a movement of going and coming, of past and present. The other Selves that reside in her make time merge into these images. However, it is always heterogeneous. It goes to the past, returns to the present, then travels to the future and comes back to the present. Heterogeneous times, like life. It is an illusion to think that time is linear, pointing towards the future. It goes back and forth, so it can eventually depart. Only through this merging of parts will it be possible to breathe freely:

O calor de há pouco foi desaparecendo e agora já não há vestígios daquela aragem de forno aberto. O ar está muito levemente morno e quase agradável. George suspira, tranquilizada. Amanhã estará em Amsterdão na bela casa mobiliada onde, durante quanto tempo?, vai morar com o último dos seus amores. (p. 226)<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “George thus lives in a permanent state of exception, which the very status of a refugee presupposes: without a proper name, only a professional name; without a home or belongings or friends, nothing that is truly hers, that ties her to a place and people; without a true past – which is the one known to have been lived, but precisely as the past. Now, George did not “bury” the past: her escape is, in essence, the same as when she left her hometown, only in wider circles”.

<sup>29</sup> Translated by the author of the article: “The heat from earlier has disappeared, and now there are no traces of that open oven breeze. The air is very lightly warm and almost pleasant. George sighs, reassured. Tomorrow she will be in Amsterdam in the beautiful furnished house where, for how long? she will live with her last loves”.

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