

Ciranda de pedra: Manifestations of the Living Statue in Portuguese-language Literatures

Valeria Tocco - Sofia Morabito

Abstract

Among the studies of Portuguese-language literature dealing with the simulacrum, there is still a lack of a diachronic perspective on the issues associated with its many possible representations. Our incipient study started from the need to verify how literature outlines figures of the simulacrum in peripheral, contaminated and hybridized cultural areas such as those of the Portuguese-speaking world, and what role it attributes to them in relation to the sphere of the human. In order to answer these questions, however partially, we have focused our research on one of the possible conceptions of the simulacrum – the statue – and we have tried to identify texts that reformulate this theme across various historical phases (classical, Romanticism, Modernism, and Post-modernism) of Portuguese-language literature (in particular, from Portugal, Brazil, Angola). Camões, Melo, Carvalhal, Sá-Carneiro, Clarice Lispector, Pepetela, and Jaime Salazar Sampaio are some of the authors examined in this initial journey through living stones. What emerges is that, beyond the peculiar hybridizations bearing on the conventional love theme, the axis on which the use of the living statue in the Lusophone sphere most insistently pivots is that of social criticism.

Keywords

Lusophone literature; Living statue; Simulacrum

Ciranda de pedra: Manifestations of the Living Statue in Portuguese-language Literatures¹

Valeria Tocco, Sofia Morabito

The Marble Dance

When addressing the theme of the simulacrum in the Portuguese-speaking world, we noticed two apparently constant phenomena. On the one hand, Portuguese-speaking critique seems to understand, identify, and analyze the concept of the simulacrum almost exclusively within the fantasy genre and mode, or in connection with the sphere of the ghost, the monster, and the double². On the other hand, a diachronic overview of Portuguese-language literatures shows that one motif connected to the theme of the simulacrum – recurring in time, genre, and space – is that of the living statue. In our incipient research we have so far identified about ten texts belonging to different literary genres in which the statue – or another anthropomorphic artefact – is precisely the object (an object actually

¹ This article is the result of shared research and a constant dialogue between the two authors. However, the chapters *The Marble Dance*, *Among puppets and automata* and *A first conclusion?* were specifically written by Valeria Tocco, while *Characteristics, functions and orders of the simulacrum* and *Rethinking Pygmalion* are by Sofia Morabito.

² Brazilian critics, in particular, have focused on these aspects of the simulacrum. A very active research group is *Vertentes do insólito ficcional*, connected to the Universidade Estadual de Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and linked to the Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Letras e Linguística (ANPOLL). In collaboration with Portuguese scholars, this group has also launched a digital dictionary which, if does not include as yet an entry for ‘statue’ or ‘living statue’, does contain entries under preparation on the subject (for instance, one is dedicated to Mérimés’s *La Vénus d’Ille*). The dictionary is available at <http://www.insolitoficcional.uerj.br/> (last accessed 21 March 2022).

simulating, implying, or openly declaring to be a subject) that is reformulated from a literary point of view across Portuguese-language literatures.

Kenneth Gross starts his reflection on the motif of the living statue by looking into selected texts for answers to the following questions:

What, for instance, do such stories reveal about how we imagine the stillness of sculpture? What does that stillness become a figure of? What crisis does the animation of the unmoving statue thereby entail, what is lost or gained, transgressed or restored in that abandonment of stillness or silence? What does it mean after all for a statue to step down from a pedestal (assuming we are sure what a pedestal is), to enter a sphere of exchange and intention? What parable about our relation to other people, objects, words, or institutions might such a fantasy offer? (Gross 2019: 7).

We too have therefore sought to interrogate a selection of texts by attempting to answer these same questions. Our choice of an intertextual reference for our title, i.e. *Ciranda de pedra* (1954), the famous novel by Brazilian writer Lygia Fagundes Telles, is certainly no coincidence. The 'marble dance' of the title is a fountain at the manor house where part of the action takes place, adorned with stone dwarfs holding hands in a grotesque, motionless closed circle. A silent presence throughout the novel, but with which the protagonist Virgínia tries to communicate because she wants to be part of the ring dance at all costs, that *ciranda* of eternally motionless and imperturbable human beings is nothing but a metaphor and simulacrum of the family, seen as a magic circle that strangers are not allowed to enter. This was a concept which post-war Brazilian society was starting to question. The *stillness* that does not envisage any possibility of coming to life is, in fact, a figure of a world heading for extinction.

The aim of our work, which is still at an incipient stage, is precisely to verify in what way the theme of the living statue is used in various historical periods and by authors of different genres, in order to possibly identify its constant and specific features, beyond the characteristics already underlined by scholars such as Kenneth Gross (2109), Victor Stoichita (2008), Gilles Deleuze (1994) or Jean Baudrillard (1981), among others. The idea that prompted us was to «put the emphasis on 'what the texts tell us'»³ (Fusillo 2014: 18) and to understand why and how such

³ The translation of texts that are not quoted in the original language, unless otherwise indicated, is by the translator.

texts specifically introduce the statue (or a substitute for it). In short, we wanted to check whether, to quote Gross, «minor cases have presented major questions» (2019: XII) («minor», in our case, stands for literatures that are certainly not minor as such, but in terms of the critics' attention: literatures that are peripheral and, as a rule, somewhat contaminated). Our intention is consequently to ascertain whether, from that uncentred perspective, «things whose meaning might have seemed obvious began to seem not so obvious» (*ibid.*), and thus contribute to enriching the debate on the 'living statue'.

For those who intend to focus on a constant theme or motif in the Portuguese-speaking macrotext from a diachronic perspective, it is quite natural to deal with the archetypal work of Lusophone literariness, namely the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (1572) by Luís de Camões. As for the theme of the animated statue, there is actually an opposite and complementary motif in the *Lusíadas*, i.e. that of flesh turned to stone – a stone that is in fact still alive. When Vasco da Gama is about to round the Cape of Good Hope (Capo Tormentoso), a horrifying rock monster appears to him: Adamastor (V, 37-60). The giant was in love with the beautiful nymph Tethis, but she did not return his love, and at the moment of the highest erotic climax, represented by the kiss they were about to exchange, he is turned into a rocky mountain. Out of shame, he hides from prying eyes by taking refuge in the remotest corner of Africa. He appears as a menacing cloud and, after telling his dramatic story, the cloud dissolves into tears of rain. The elements that Tabucchi (1973) had already identified in the construction of the dramatic love affairs of literary giants turned to stone, such as Polyphemus besides Adamastor, often play on the motif of the living statue seen through the lens of the water/stone antinomy, resurfacing with different purposes and in various ways depending on the texts. The same applies to the theme of the kiss, which also recurs in many of the examples mentioned here.

We have thus started from Camões, from flesh turned to stone in a sentimental context, to follow a chronological path that also involves one of the many figurations of the living statue, namely the fountain that comes alive. An example of this, in classical Baroque literature, is offered by Francisco Manuel de Melo, who, in one of his *Apólogos dialogais* (written around 1657 and published posthumously in 1721) dedicated to the *Visita das fontes*, gives voice to the Old Fountain and the New Fountain in a conversation that sounds highly critical of the Portuguese society of the time. Portuguese-language literature is also rich in humanized fountains and statues whose connotations are linked more to social criticism than to themes of an erotic or sentimental nature. Relevant examples of this are

Jaime Salazar Sampaio's play *Nos jardins do Alto Maior* (1962), the children's tale by the well-known poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen *O rapaz de bronze* (1966), and the novel *Yaka* (1984) by the Angolan writer Pepetela. We could not possibly overlook another classic of fantasy literature, namely Álvaro de Carvalho's short story *Os canibais* (1868), in which the theme of the simulacrum enters into a dialogue with the motifs of the living statue, the automaton and the homunculus, undermining the very principle of humanity. On the other hand, the play by modernist artist José de Almada Negreiros, *Antes de começar* (1919), is dedicated to a world of marionettes that come to life. But it is the dialogue with the myth of Pygmalion that obviously also pervades Lusophone literatures: the short story *Loucura* (1912) by Fernando Pessoa's *amigo de alma*, Mário de Sá Carneiro, the lyric poem *Estátua* (1920) by Camilo Pessanha and the short story *O primeiro beijo* (1971) by Clarice Lispector, the Brazilian writer belonging to the so-called third modernist generation, contribute to a peculiar reappraisal of the Pygmalion effect dealt with by Stoichita (2008)⁴.

Characteristics, functions and orders of the simulacrum

Starting therefore from a few considerations by Stoichita (2008) and Gross (2019), it is possible to define a set of common aspects that distinguish the simulacra dealt with in our research⁵. The characteristics that have been identified mainly refer to the statue, but can also be applied to other simulacra, such as Almada Negreiros' marionettes or Álvaro de Carvalho's automaton/monster.

As a rule, simulacra belong to the category of the man-made artefact, or the «*made object*», as Stoichita defines it (2008: 2). In our case – with the exception of Adamastor (*Lusiadas*) and the Viscount of Aveleda (*Os canibais*) –, they are true works of art simulating the appearance, behaviour and

⁴ Of course, other examples could be mentioned, such as, just to cite one among many, the homoerotic variations on the living statue theme present in Judith Teixeira's poetic production of the 1920s (*A estátua, Ilusão*). Cf. Teixeira 2015.

⁵ Although the studies by Asimov 1950, Baudrillard 1981, Deleuze 1994, and Micali 2019 refer to other types of simulacra (automata, monsters, robots, artificial intelligence, etc.), they can nonetheless provide excellent food for thought on the peculiarities of the living statue as well. As a matter of fact, they attempt to throw light on the specific features of man-made artefacts that weave with humans relations of similarity and dissimilarity, of identity and otherness, of overpower and subordination, or of power and solidarity.

functions of man. The simulacra examined here have human characteristics even when they are not strictly anthropomorphic, such as the fountains in the 17th-century text *Visita das fontes* by Francisco Manuel de Melo, which in fact emulate the human being in other aspects, such as voice, thought, language, character and personality.

The essential trait characterizing the statue is corporeity. As Gross points out, unlike other types of simulacra, statues

occupy the space of bodies, compete with bodies for that space, share the same light and atmosphere; but they neither take things in (food, bullets, air, sounds, or signs) nor do they throw things out (words, blood, excrement, children). Hence, they are freed from whatever danger or power we might speculate on about such things. (Gross 2019: 17)

The human being is fascinated by these stone bodies because they are everlasting, unreachable, indefectible, immune to the passage of time, to pain and earthly needs. As «surfaces whose secretiveness is satisfyingly absolute» (*ibid.*), statues are a real challenge for man. And it is precisely their being impenetrable that prompts human beings to project their innermost fantasies and dreams onto them, thus developing a libidinal attraction towards the inanimate object.

In the history of literary simulacra, the relationship between the simulacrum and man often takes on the tones of the 'oppressor-oppressed', 'master-servant' dialectic. For this reason, there are many cases in which living simulacra rebel against their creator or master at the moment they come alive (Micali 2019: 136-148). However, this scenario is rather unusual when it comes to the statue-simulacrum. There are very few literary examples of rebellious or violent statues, the most famous being arguably Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* (1837). This is because, in literary tradition, the statue has always distinguished itself precisely by its inoffensive character. Even the simulacra that populate the works selected here are harmless and naïve, and appear subordinate to the will of man. Only the statues of *Nos jardins do Alto Maior* represent an exception. These, however, do not oppose their creator, as is usually the case in the tradition of rebellious simulacra, but rather the situation in which they find themselves, i.e. an allegory of Salazar's dictatorship.

Besides showing an autonomous and independent identity, simulacra are also endowed with specific functions and purposes that manifest themselves throughout the narrative. From the texts we have selected, one

can gather that the figure of the statue in Lusophone literature especially works as a form of social criticism.

In Melo's work *Visita das fontes* we come across two fountains – the Old Fountain in Rossio Square and the New Fountain, near the Royal Palace (*Terreiro do Paço*). A debate thus starts in which the statue of Apollo that adorns the New Fountain and the soldier on guard (the only human being in the story) are also involved. The Old Fountain informs the inexperienced New Fountain about the state of affairs: in particular, about the economic, political and social corruption vexing 17th-century Portugal.

Mutatis mutandis, in Jaime Salazar Sampaio's play *Nos jardins do Alto Maior* (1962), the intent of social criticism is also explicit, so much so that it was immediately banned by the censors and the script withdrawn from circulation. The fountain statues in the Alto Maior garden – a 'he' (*Ele*) and a 'she' (*Ela*) – might be cast as simulacra of the Portuguese citizens under Salazar's dictatorship, during which censorship silenced any attempt to speak out. It is no coincidence that, when the two statues attempt to rebel against their condition of subalternity and segregation by addressing their criticism directly to the public (in metatheatrical tones reminiscent of Pirandello's characters), they are subjected to brainwashing, a «lavagem completa» (Sampaio 1968: 77) by the so-called *Lavadores* (washers) and immediately reduced to silence.

If *Os canibais* expresses parodic criticism of all the main genres and *topoi* of late-Romantic literature, in *Yaka*, on the other hand, the political value of the statue, which bears witness to the injustices and atrocities of Portuguese colonization in Africa, is markedly evident.

Finally, albeit veiled, criticism of contemporary society can also be noticed in Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen's children's story, *O rapaz de bronze*. The story is set in the garden of a Portuguese *quinta*. At night, when no human being is able see, all the creatures in the garden come to life. The statue of the bronze boy dominates the flowers in the garden, allegorically representing mid-20th-century Portuguese society, with all its virtues and faults, its vanities and fancies. As the story unfolds, only the gardener's daughter, a five-year-old girl, can interact with these objects coming alive. If, at the beginning, a beautiful friendship develops between the little girl and the bronze boy, at the end, after a decade has passed, a relationship blossoms between the two that suggests something more.

This other genre, featuring the love affair between man and statue – the so-called 'agalmatophilia', which has a centuries-old tradition in literary history – includes stories that revive the myth of Pygmalion.

Within our corpus it is possible to identify two different orders of

simulacral statues. The first is related to animated statues, whose main character does not consist in 'resemblance', but in 'existence' (Deleuze 1994). These stone (or bronze) simulacra are transformed from inanimate objects into subjects that speak, think, move, and interact with the other characters in the story. Almada Negreiros' already mentioned marionettes should also be included in this group, along with Álvaro de Carvalho's automaton/monster.

The second order consists of inanimate statues. In this case, the inanimate object is perceived as a simulacrum by the human being who interacts with it. On the one hand, the inanimate simulacrum can become the object of desire, while on the other it might prove a constant presence, a travelling companion, a silent witness.

Rethinking Pygmalion

According to Stoichita, the simulacrum has a «veritable founding myth - the myth of Pygmalion - and its history has been long and complex» (Stoichita 2008: 3). The story of the Cypriot sculptor who falls in love with his work of art, moulded according to his own canon of beauty and femininity, represents the archetype of the simulacrum in Western culture. The work of art – in this case the ivory statue, the simulacrum of the idealized love object – is not only free from all the imperfections of phenomenal reality: it is also so credible and perfect that it goes beyond reality and ultimately overshadows it.

In the history of Portuguese-language literature, we find several echoes of Ovid's myth. Mário de Sá-Carneiro, for instance, offers a rather faithful reformulation of it in *Loucura* (at least in the first half of the story). Like Pygmalion, the protagonist of *Loucura*, Raul Vilar, rejects women, love and marriage, and dedicates his life to sculpture. Unlike the Cypriot artist, however, Raul does not fall in love with a single statue, but with all his creations, which appear to satisfy him emotionally and sexually. The allusion to myth is particularly evident in a passage where the protagonist speaks to his best friend (the narrator of the story):

You fool... Women?... What for? Don't I have my statues, don't I have marble? You stupid literati, when you describe the body of an ideal woman, you say: 'her shapely, sinewy legs were two columns of hard marble; her bosom, pure alabaster'. Yes, despite your great imbecility, you understand that the supreme beauty of the flesh is to look like stone... Now I have stone; why would I want flesh, you

fool? And as he said this, he caressed the breasts of a beautiful Greek dancer. (Sá-Carneiro 2013: 17)

Raul escapes from reality by taking refuge in an idealized world of his own creation. The beauty of the stone simulacra (instead of an ivory simulacrum, as was the case with Pygmalion) surpasses that of any real woman in the flesh. Pervaded by a sense of all-powerfulness, the protagonist convinces himself that he has given life to his creations: «my statues are not like other statues, [...] they have life... [...] Instead of making flesh with my flesh, I make life with my hands; that is, with my brain, which guides them. I make life; time passes over my statues, it does not pass over me...» (*ibid.*: 16). The statues fulfil, for the sculptor, a function that is not very distant from that of the portrait in relation to Dorian Gray: they are a sort of concrete and tangible double through which Raul is able to exorcise the passage of time recorded in his own body.

The humanization of the object, i.e. the protagonist's tendency to regard his simulacra as real living beings, entails, as if by compensation, a simultaneous objectification of the human. During the story, Raul meets and marries a real woman, Marcela. However, as he is unable to establish any kind of loving relationship, he immediately treats his wife as if she were one of his simulacra: «the statue Raul was currently chiselling was Marcela. He was perfecting her out of love and – without thinking of the stone – was now thinking only of her flesh; burning, throbbing marble» (*ibid.*: 40). Slowly, the woman's body is stripped of its uniqueness and transformed into a work of art to be exhibited, so that everyone can admire what he calls his «masterpiece» (*ibid.*: 41). Raul, now convinced that his wife is a living statue to be chiselled and shaped to his liking, even goes so far as to hurt her physically, causing bruises all over her body⁶. The story ends with the protagonist who, terrified by the inevitable passing of time and in the grip of a megalomaniac delirium, attacks Marcela with acid in order to turn her into a repulsive, deformed monster to be loved by him only. That is to say, a sort of simulacrum immune to time and death, or, as Silva (2003: 136) defines it, an «immortal double». Luckily, Marcela manages to save herself, while Raul, by now insane, persuades himself that the only solution to face the threat of time is death. This leads him to commit suicide.

Clarice Lispector's short story *O primeiro beijo* also revives the myth

⁶ The protagonist himself will cry out to his narrator friend: «it is I who formed, who gave fire... life to this body» (Sá-Carneiro 2013: 42).

of Pygmalion. In this case, however, the protagonist seems more like an 'unaware Pygmalion'. *O primeiro beijo*, in fact, tells the story of a teenager who, in an entirely involuntary and innocent manner, develops a libidinal attraction towards a statue in the likeness of a woman.

The story begins with the protagonist telling his girlfriend about the experience of his first kiss – or, rather, what he experienced as a first kiss. During a school trip, the boy begins to feel unbearably thirsty. When the coach finally stops, he senses that «in an unexpected curve of the road, between bushes, there was... a fountain from which a trickle of the dreamed-of water was gushing» (Lispector 2015). The boy hurries up and immediately rushes to the fountain, anticipating his classmates. Once he has quenched his thirst, he opens his eyes and, right next to his face, he sees the «two eyes of the statue staring at him». He then realizes that the orifice from which he had been drinking was actually the mouth of a statue of a naked woman:

And then he knew that he had pressed his mouth to the mouth of the stone statue of the woman. Life had sprung forth from that mouth, from one mouth to another. Instinctively, and confused because of his innocence, he felt intrigued: but it isn't from a woman that the life-giving liquid comes, the liquid germinator of life... He looked at the naked statue. He had kissed her. (*Ibid.*)

After realizing that he had (albeit unintentionally) given his first kiss, the boy's body felt a tremor that «started deep inside him» (*ibid.*) and took hold of his body «bursting through his face like a burning ember» (*ibid.*). After all, never before had he touched a woman's lips⁷.

Following in the footsteps of Heinrich Heine's *Florentine Nights* (1836), also in this story «the moving water lends a kind of animation to the stone, provides a sense of something moving through it, something it can pass on to others, giving the stone breath, spirit, even speech» (Gross 2019: XII). In *O primeiro beijo*, the water animates the statue and the latter, in turn, animates the boy. Life flows from one mouth to the other through a first kiss that marks the passage into adulthood. The inexperienced adolescent, after 'kissing' the statue, unconsciously develops a strong sexual urge

⁷ In Ovid's myth, on the other hand, it is the statue that blushes when Pygmalion kisses it (vv. 290-295): «Then indeed the Paphian hero thanked Venus again and again and pressed his lips to lips that were real at last. The girl felt the kisses and blushed, and when she shyly raised her eyes, the first thing she saw was her lover» (Ovid 2001: 171).

towards the inanimate object which, at the end of the story, culminates into an orgasm: «until, springing from the depths of his being, the truth gushed from a hidden source within him. This at once filled him with fear and then also with a pride he had never felt before: he... He had become a man» (Lispector 2015).

A different case is that of the poem *Estátua*, composed at the end of the 19th century (but not published until 1920, in the collection *Clepsidra*) by the symbolist poet Camilo Pessanha, where the Pygmalion myth is totally overcome. In this composition, the lyric self sings of the disillusionment regarding his love for the statue of a woman that has always been, and will always remain, inanimate and cold. The speaking I declares himself tired of trying to understand the secret behind those colourless eyes («sem cor», v. 2). He is tired of living what has now become an obsession, with fear gripping him («cheio de medo», v. 8.) during sleepless nights. He now knows that his ardent kiss («ardente», v. 9) will never warm that half-open, icy lip («Desse entreaberto lábio gelado», v. 11). Indeed, even his own kiss has now cooled due to that lifeless marble.

The scene described by Camilo Pessanha seems to be telling another version of Pygmalion's story, as if it were a kind of answer to the momentous 'what if' question. What would have happened to Pygmalion if the goddess Venus had not heard his prayers and had not given life to the statue? Would the sculptor have continued to love his creation, or would he eventually have grown weary of this one-sided love affair? In Pessanha's version, the lyric self – which might conceal the identity of Pygmalion – woke up from that illusion and gave up his dream of love. The simulacrum no longer represents the idealized object of love, but is seen for what it is: a lifeless, impenetrable statue, as placid as a quiet high sea («como um pé-lago quieto», v. 14) and, at the same time, as stern as a closed tomb («como um túmulo fechado», v. 13).

As we mentioned above, inanimate statues can also have a testimonial or documentary function. This is the case of Yaka, a sacred statuette with half-human, half-animal features, who silently attends all the events that involve a family of Portuguese settlers in Angola. In Pepetela's novel, the story of the Semedo family is intertwined with Angolan political, economic and social history, from the end of the 19th century until independence from Portugal (1875-1975). Right from the start – as the author himself reveals in the epigraph – it is clear that the real protagonist of the story is the statue:

But this book is not about them, only about a statue. And the statue is pure fiction. Yaka statuary being so rich, it could have existed. But

it did not. By chance. Hence the need to create it, as myth recreated. Because only myths have reality. And as in myths, myths create themselves, by speaking. (Pepetela 1984: 6)

The novel is divided into five chapters that correspond to the various parts of the simulacrum's body, associated with key historical moments in Angolan existence and resistance on its way to independence: *The Mouth* (1890/1904); *The Eyes* (1917); *The Heart* (1940/41); *The Sex* (1961); and *The Legs* (1975)⁸. Therefore, Yaka allegorically represents Angola, its voice, history, and culture. It embodies the spirit of Angolan identity becoming stronger day by day and resisting the imperialistic sway of the Portuguese.

The story begins in 1890 with the birth of the protagonist, Alexandre Semedo, the son of Portuguese Óscar Semedo, and ends with his death in 1975, a few days before independence. From the very first pages of the novel, the protagonist describes his strong bond with the statue:

My father won that yaka statue by means of gambling. He already had it in Capangombe when he got married. My mother always thought it was hideous, with these transparent marble eyes and three parallel stripes, white, black and red. Look, it's almost a metre tall and has a man's body, but its face is strange, sometimes human looking, sometimes animal. [...] I ended up learning that it is yaka, from a people living near the northern border. How such a northern statue ended up in Moçâmedes or Capangombe, far to the South, is a mystery that only he can explain. I hope he might tell me, but he does not. All my life I have been trying to talk with him; when I was a boy, he was my confidant, then I gave up, convinced that he would not yield, and later on I insisted again. He changes, he always changes, he speaks with his marble eyes. I feel more and more as if he is speaking to me. But I don't understand. (Pepetela 1984: 21-22)

Alexandre Semedo establishes a love-hate relationship with Yaka. On the one hand, he feels attracted to the simulacrum, sees him as a confidant,

⁸ As Mariana Sousa Dias explains, the parts of Yaka's body metaphorically represent the body of the nascent nation: the mouth stands for speech, which in Angolan culture gives rise to everything; the eyes bear witness to the sufferings of the Angolan people; the heart symbolizes the feeling of consciousness and affirmation of nationality; the sex alludes to the fertilization that began with the armed struggles for liberation and, finally, the feet represent the possibility for Angola to walk free and independent (Dias 2012: 60-61).

a member of the family; on the other, he is annoyed and tormented by his constant, silent presence. He knows that the statue wants to communicate a message to him, but he cannot understand what.

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist keeps on trying to question the statue (sometimes in friendly, sometimes in accusatory tones), establishing with the inanimate object what might be called a 'one-voice dialogue'. Yaka, in fact, will never speak explicitly except through the words of Alexandre Semedo, who, throughout his life, will try to interpret what is concealed behind those 'transparent glass eyes': «Yaka looks at me. No, his gaze pierces me only to contemplate something far away, maybe in the past or the future. I feel he is sending me a message. [...] Did the message come from the depths of his history?» (*ibid.*: 128).

By attempting to question the statue and his silence, Alexandre Semedo interrogates himself and the reality around him, slowly discovering his 'being Angolan'. Indeed, as Gross states, «the attempt to grant a statue an apprehending ear, a voice, even a motivated silence of its own, can become an occasion to redream the possibilities of speech» (Gross 2019: 148). The possibility of the unspoken or denied word is linked to a sense of hope: Yaka will one day be able to recount all that must not be forgotten, the hidden truth of a country that has lived through and endured reality and colonial war, but is now ready for a new future. Yaka's silence is the silence of the Angolan national identity, now eager to make its voice heard.

Only a member of the fourth generation of the Semedo family can immediately grasp the meaning of the simulacrum. This member is Alexandre's grandson, Ulysses Semedo, who will show him that Yaka actually personifies a ridiculed colonist. The statuette, however, as Ulysses explains, symbolizes not only a «satire of colonialism» (Pepetela 1984: 294-296), but also the «understanding between men» (*ibid.*), no matter how different from one another they might be. The protagonist, therefore, realizes why he has never been able to interpret the statue's gaze and silence: Yaka does not address everyone, but only those whom Alexandre himself calls the «chosen ones» (*ibid.*). Only the new generations of Angolans, like the one to which Ulysses belongs, can fully understand the message carried by the statue: that of a new Angola formed by the union of many different peoples fighting together against the Portuguese enemy.

Moments before his death, now freed from colonialist codes and aware of the need to transform Angolan social reality, Alexandre Semedo finally hears, for the first and last time, Yaka's voice: «the statue speaks through his eyes and the smile is no longer mocking and now speaks tenderly also through his lips. [...] 'Your generation will be the last,' says the yaka statue

again. 'I have told you all your life to prepare yourself. And only now do you understand'» (*ibid.*: 301).

The simulacrum then takes the floor in the epilogue, addressing the reader directly in order to express the concern that afflicts him:

I can now close these transparent eyes that have seen so much. My creation is there in torrents of hope, the one announced has arrived. Can I then lose my balance and fall off the pedestal scattered in a thousand pieces, my mouth to one side, my eyes to the sea, my heart in the bowels of the earth, sex to the North and my legs to the South? Or is it perhaps better to wait a little longer? (*Ibid.*: 302)

Yaka fears that the national situation after independence might not correspond to the hoped-for future. He does not know whether he will be able to close his eyes, come down from his pedestal and scatter his body parts (the same ones referred to in the chapter's titles) all over the nation – thus becoming one with him –, or whether it will be better to wait and see what will happen to his country. After 1975, in fact, the feeling of a terrible civil war was already in the air: it would break out shortly thereafter, devastating Angola up to 2002.

Among puppets and automata

As for other animated simulacra – not exactly statues, but anthropomorphic figures in any case – we might refer to automata as well as marionettes.

When Álvaro de Carvalho died at a very early age (he was only 24), he already had to his credit several short stories that would go down in literary history as the most accomplished examples of 'fantasy' narrative. His best-known work (which also inspired renowned filmmaker Manoel de Oliveira) is *Os canibais*. Classified as a fantastic short story – even though it does not show any of the distinguishing traits of the fantastic, at least as far as Todorov's perspective is concerned –, it offers a series of elements that constitute a sort of repertoire of interesting motifs. There, the automaton, the statue, the deformed being, the semi-human or the simulation of the human are all present. In short, Carvalho uses a plethora of motifs that can be traced back to the theme under consideration in this paper, in a way that critically revises tradition by means of a parodic approach. Indeed, this short story could be read as a refined parody of Romanticism's stylistic and thematic ingredients. The protagonist is a Viscount who is gradually intro-

duced through alienating elements: he is described as elegant, charming, and mysterious, but at the same time we are told that his gait is mechanical, that at the touch of his hand one feels the hardness of granite, and that his body is hieratic and statuesque. Throughout the story, this character is seemingly portrayed with all the characteristics of the human: he possesses a body, limbs, a voice; he shows empathy and sensitivity; he exudes a Don-Juanesque charm⁹; he is in love with a woman, Margarida, whom he eventually marries despite the resistance of his previous fiancé, João, but also against the wishes of her father and brothers. At the same time, one easily gathers clues about his not being human, but rather a figure close to a statue, so much so that at one point the narrator likens the Viscount to the *Convidado de pedra*. At the moment of the final revelation, prompted by Margarida's question «Who are you? Who will you ever be?», he replies «I am not a man», and then dramatically admits to being «A statue!» (Carvalho 2004: 251). In the end, therefore, it turns out that the protagonist is not human. Or, rather, he might be said to be and *not* to be such, a muddled situation which undermines the very concepts of humanity, authenticity and the ontological status of the protagonist. The Viscount's figuration belongs, at least in part, to that order of simulacra based on 'counterfeit', which Micali, reinterpreting Baudrillard's categories, mainly compares to «the 18th century automata, which were a spectacular counterfeit of Man, and whose ideal consisted in the utmost similarity, in being mistaken for true people» (Micali 2019: 123). When the Viscount takes off his gloves, he displays ivory hands, and the spring mechanism that has been eliciting his movements falls apart:

Upon the armchair fell a mutilated, deformed, monstrous body. Legs, arms, the Viscount's own teeth, white as beautiful strings of pearls, fell onto the fuzzy Turkish rugs and were lost in the folds of his *robe de chambre*, which had naturally slipped off his shoulders. (Carvalho 2004: 251-252)

The prostheses within which the «stupendous abortion» is hidden (*ibid.*: 252) boil down to a material construction, whose limits and potential depend precisely on the circumstances in which they were manufactured. This is exactly the protagonist's weakness: what is described as his body is

⁹ The myth of Don Juan is evoked several times throughout the story, although it is always, after all, a 'reverse' use of this myth (Tocco 2016).

the source and condition of his existence. The removal of the outer shell becomes the iconic moment of the story and is represented as a tragic event. When he reveals himself for what he is, and Margarida refuses to accept his diversity, the putative automaton loses its place in the world. When Margarida realizes that she has failed to fathom out the machine, and because she does not accept this inhuman, deformed, and different being, she loses her centre and her reason to live, to the point that she will take her life. The Viscount is to commit suicide too: he throws himself on the floor, rolls over the live coals on the hearth and is roasted to death. And then Margarida's father and brothers (the cannibals of the title) have that chunk of flesh they did not recognize as human for breakfast, this being another theme, another motif within the great parody conveyed by *Os canibais*.

Another simulacrum in human form, which is not really a statue, can be found in the play *Antes de começar* by modernist poet José de Almada Negreiros. Written around 1919, performed in 1949 and not published until 1956, the text stages two *bonecos* (puppets, marionettes) just before the curtain rises. The two protagonist puppets (a male and a female) stand on the empty stage of a theatre and eventually come to life, stand up, speak, and move. They do not let themselves be seen by humans, nor do they interact with them; on the contrary, they are afraid (especially the female) of being discovered. Thus, in the dark freedom offered by the closed curtain, they can finally talk to each other and express their thoughts about the world and interpersonal relationships. The female puppet's speech is particularly interesting, because it introduces and indulges in the theme of doubles or mirroring; she talks about herself and the woman who manufactured her. The following couple of lines are worth quoting:

- ...You are right, all too often do I forget that I am a puppet and start thinking *exactly* as if I were a girl. (Negreiros 2017: 17)

- She copied herself *exactly* on me!... (Negreiros 2017: 23)

To better appreciate the work of this eclectic Portuguese artist (who, notably, was not only a poet, a novelist and a playwright, but also a dancer, and mainly a plastic artist), it is necessary to underline that he dedicated himself to theatre as a 'total' performance (suffice it to recall the *Manifesto anti-Dantas* of 1916), and that he was also deeply interested in Fernando Pessoa's so-called 'static theatre', i.e. a theatre without action, a theatre of thought, feeling and speech. On the other hand, it is also worth stressing that puppet theatre had contributed to dramaturgic development in Por-

tugal. If we consider that the most highly regarded author on the 18th-century Portuguese-speaking scene was António José da Silva, known as *O Judeu* (the Jew), who wrote several plays specifically involving puppets, we can understand the special importance that this genre had in the country, then and later on, and not only at a popular level. Similarly, *Antes de começar* can be related to Hoffman's fairy tale *The Nutcracker* (*Nußknacker und Mausekönig*, 1816), although in this case it is not the toys that come to life when humans are not looking, but puppets («characters human and inhuman, close to objects», Gross 2011: 2). At a time when Almada was devoting special attention to artistic and playful activities to be carried out with his young friends from the *Clube das cinco cores* (the five-colour club) – such as choreographies based on fairy tales for which he also created the costumes –, Hoffmann's text or the ballet it inspired may have acted as an intertext or a subtext for this play¹⁰.

If, in the context of the theme of the living statue, the opposition between real and unreal, mobile and immobile is a structuring motif, in this case, since we are faced with puppets that are also theatre actors, the perspective also shifts to the dichotomy between passivity and activity. Moreover, as far as puppet theatre is specifically concerned, the nature of the movements of this human artefact has been debated since Kleist's time (1992):

It is both more material and more spiritual at once, an Edenic creature, in fact, its stories bound to an unknown innocence and simplicity of means. (Gross 2011: 63).

And it is precisely this aspect of spirituality and morality that Almada will emphasize in his *bonecos*. The last words of the male puppet will be, not surprisingly:

It is only those who do not know how to listen to the heart who do not understand it... It is always striking the hour that we are waiting for... that hour which exists beyond all wisdom... and which has the most simple form of a natural heart!... (Negreiros 2017: 31)

¹⁰ The group comprised young amateur dancers from Lisbon's high society, with whom they organized performances to raise funds for the 'war godmothers'. One of these shows was entitled *O sonho do estatuário* (1918) and told of a character who, having fallen asleep in a garden, dreams of awakening all the decorative statues in order to dance with them (Ferreira 2014).

A first conclusion?

Let us return to some of Gross's questions which have been developed within the confines of our research: what does the stillness of the statue become a figure of? What crisis does the animation of the statue entail? What does it mean for the statue to step down from its pedestal? Is it possible to give a coherent and organic answer at the end of this journey?

One can perhaps generically conclude that in Portuguese-language literature, apart from the peculiar hybridizations relating to the love-theme conventions, the axis on which the use of the living statue pivots is that of criticism, especially social criticism.

If Adamastor is turned to stone to punish his male arrogance (like the Propoetides, the blasphemous prostitutes, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in the episode immediately preceding the story of Pygmalion), the figure of the living statue in other texts is more often used as a key to denounce the distortions of society, as in *Visita das fontes*, in *Jardim do Alto Maior*, and in *Rapaz de bronze*. After all, even in *Yaka*, the use of the statue-witness is a harbinger of criticism and denunciation of the imperialist narrative concerning colonialism in Africa. On the other hand, literary rather than social criticism can be found in the parody informing *Os canibais*. Even the reformulation of the Pygmalion myth, however, is never an end in itself: *Estátua* represents its rejection; *O primeiro beijo* conceives it in terms of unconscious adolescent erotic urges; *Loucura*, as we have seen, also introduces the theme of the double, and the text stresses the impossibility of establishing a traditional relationship while simultaneously expanding on the fear of death. We also find the theme of the double in the play *Antes de começar*, in which the *boneco* artefact is constructed in the image and likeness of its creator.

Although science fiction does not play a major role in Portuguese-language literature or, in any case, the robotic or artificial simulacrum does not appear as a prominent protagonist in it, on the other hand, the living statue, in the cases that we have analyzed, has been and continues to be a prolific motif in almost all literary genres – novel, poetry, and drama.

Works Cited

- Asimov, Isaac, *I, Robot*, New York, Doubleday, 1950.
- Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacres et Simulation*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.
- Carvalho, Álvaro de, *Os canibais* (1868), *Contos*, Ed. Gianluca Miraglia, Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim, 2004: 215-266.
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Différence et répétition* (1968), Engl. transl. *Difference and Repetition*, London-New York, Continuum, 1994.
- Dias, Mariana Sousa. "História, ficção e papéis da memória em Yaka, de Pepetela", *Revista Memento*, 3.2 (2012): 50-72.
- Ferreira, Sara Afonso, "Os Bailados russos e o Clube das cinco cores", *Revista de História da Arte*, 2 (2014): 438-448.
- Fusillo, Massimo, *L'altro e lo stesso. Teoria e storia del doppio*, Modena, Mucchi, 2014.
- Gross, Kenneth, *Puppet. An Essay on Uncanny Life*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Gross, Kenneth, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2019.
- von Kleist, Heinrich, "Sul teatro di marionette" (1816), R.M. Rilke - C. Baudelaire - H. von Kleist, *Bambole*, Firenze, Passigli, 1992: 67-93.
- Lispector, Clarice, "O primeiro beijo" (1971), Engl. transl. Katrina Dodson, "The First Kiss", in *Complete Stories*, New York, New Direction, 2015 (ebook).
- Micali, Simona, *Towards a Posthuman Imagination in Literature and Media: Monsters, mutants, aliens, artificial beings*, Oxford-Bern-Berlin-Brussels-New York-Wien, Peter Lang, 2019.
- Negreiros, José de Almada, "Antes de começar" (1919), *Teatro escolhido*, Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim, 2017: 15-31.
- Ovid, Publius N., *The Metamorphoses*, translated with an introduction and commentary by Michael Simpson, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 2001.
- Pepetela, *Yaka*, São Paulo, Ática, 1984.
- Pessanha, Camilo, *Clepsidra*, Lisboa, Edições Lusitania, 1920.
- Sá-Carneiro, Mário de, *Loucura* (1912), Digital Edition, Projecto Adamastor, 2013.
- Sampaio, Jaime Salazar, "Nos jardins do Alto Maior" (1962), *Os Visigodos e outras peças*, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, 1968: 67-86.
- Silva, António Damião Caetano da, "A estátua viva - corpo e temporalidade na perversão", *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicopatologia Fundamental*, VI.3 (2003): 120-143.

- Stoichita, Victor I., *The Pygmalion Effect. From Ovid to Hitchcock*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Tabucchi, Antonio, "Da Adamastor a Polifemo. L'antinomia acqua/pietra in Camões e Góngora", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, 3.2 (1973): 581-591.
- Teixeira, Judith, *Poesia e Prosa*, Ed. Cláudia Pazos Alonso - Fabio Mario da Silva, Lisboa, Dom Quixote, 2015.
- Tocco, Valeria, "Da Burlador a Marialva: breve nota su Don Giovanni in Portogallo", *Una gigantesca follia. Sguardi sul Don Giovanni*, Eds. Maria Antonella Galanti - Sandra Lischi - Cristiana Torti, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2016: 129-140.

The authors

Valeria Tocco

Valeria Tocco is Full Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Literature at the University of Pisa. She has worked on Portuguese literature from the 16th-17th centuries (*Palacian* poetry, sapiential literature, sentimental novella, Petrarchism, Camões) to the 20th century (Eça de Queirós, early and late Modernism, Pessoa, Almada Negreiros, post-modern novel). She has devoted herself to translation (Pessoa, Almada Negreiros, Gil Vicente, Melo), and to translation and linguistic studies. She is the author, among others, of the annotated edition of the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (Milan, 2001) and the *Breve storia della letteratura portoghese dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Rome, 2011).

Email: valeria.tocco@unipi.it

Sofia Morabito

A PhD student in Portuguese and Brazilian Literature, Sofia Morabito has worked on themes of Portuguese (Ruben A., Sophia de Mello Breyner, etc.), Brazilian (Guimarães Rosa) and African (Pepetela) contemporary literature. She is also interested in translation, a field in which she won the first Claris Appiani Prize 2019 for literary translation for her version of *Fidalgo Aprendiz*, conducted with Valeria Tocco. She is currently a research fellow at the University of Pisa with a project on Castilian translations of

the *Imagem da vida cristã* (1563 and 1572) by Frei Heitor Pinto.

Email: sm.sofiamorabito@gmail.com

The article

Date sent: 31/03/2022

Date accepted: 31/07/2022

Date published: 30/11/2022

How to cite this article

Tocco, Valeria - Morabito, Sofia, "*Ciranda de pedra: Manifestations of the Living Statue in Portuguese-language Literatures*", *Entering the Simulacra World*, Eds. A. Ghezzani - L. Giovannelli - F. Rossi - C. Savettieri, *Between*, XII.24 (2022): 509-529, www.betweenjournal.it