

Gunk-eyed Literature: memory in the novels *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*, and *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*, by Evandro Affonso Ferreira / *Literatura-remela: a memória nos romances ‘O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam’ e ‘Nunca houve tanto fim como agora’*, de Evandro Affonso Ferreira

*Maria Regina Soares Azevedo de Andrade**

Undergraduate Student in Portuguese Language at Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). Undergraduate researcher (PIBIC/CNPq). Main subjects: contemporary Brazilian literature and memory.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2411-8938>

*Juliana Vargas Welter***

Ph.D in Brazilian Literature at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Professor at Department of Languages, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). Main subjects: Brazilian Literature.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4475-4096>

Received: March, 17th, 2022. **Aproved:** March, 25th, 2022.

How to quote this article:

ANDRADE, Maria Regina Soares Azevedo de; WELTER, Juliane Vargas. Gunk-eyed Literature: memory in the novels “*O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*”, and “*Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*”, by Evandro Affonso Ferreira. *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 11, n. 1, p. 113-126, march. 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8367223>

ABSTRACT

This work aims to investigate the memory feature in contemporary Brazilian Literature in the novels “*O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*” (2012) and “*Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*” (2017), both written by Evandro Affonso Ferreira. For this purpose, the theoretical references on memory were based on the works of Candido (2006), Gagnebin (2006), Halbwachs (2004), Ricoeur (2007), Sarlo (2007) and Schollhammer (2007). Candido (2006) states that literature and society are inseparably connected, as the former is interwoven with representations of the latter. Therefore, the hypothesis is that the recurrence of the memory feature characterizes a Brazilian literature that remembers through writing, given the need to account for a violent and unsolved past. Finally,

*

 regina0azevedo@gmail.com

**

 julianewelter@gmail.com

by analyzing the aforementioned literary works, it is possible to verify that the use of memory is a means to reclaim other versions of History, bringing up individuals and narratives made invisible historically.

KEYWORDS: Memory; Society; Contemporary Brazilian Literature; Novel; Evandro Affonso Ferreira.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, buscamos investigar o dispositivo da memória na literatura brasileira contemporânea a partir dos romances *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam* (2012) e *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora* (2017), ambos de Evandro Affonso Ferreira. Para isso, valemo-nos das contribuições teóricas, no que tangem a memória, de Candido (2006), Gagnebin (2006), Halbwachs (2004), Ricoeur (2007), Sarlo (2007) e Schollhammer (2007). Como compreende Candido (2006), literatura e sociedade estão indissociavelmente ligadas, sendo a primeira imbricada de versões da segunda. Nesse sentido, a hipótese é de que a recorrência do recurso memorialístico caracteriza uma literatura brasileira que rememora por meio da escrita, e o faz diante da necessidade de ajustar as contas com um passado violento e não resolvido. Dessa forma, analisando as obras literárias supracitadas, é possível verificar que o uso da memória é um meio para reivindicar outras versões da História, trazendo à tona indivíduos e narrativas historicamente invisibilizados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Memória; Sociedade; Literatura brasileira contemporânea; Romance; Evandro Affonso Ferreira.

1 Introduction

Não permita Deus que eu morra
Sem que volte pra São Paulo
Sem que veja a Rua 15
E o progresso de São Paulo.

(Oswald de Andrade, 1925)

It is from Oswald de Andrade's verses, in *Canto de regresso à pátria*, that we commence our study. The poem does not depict the idyllic and beloved land described by Gonçalves Dias, but portrays, instead, a city and a nation in plain, modern reality, with the intensification of the urbanization and the industrialization process. Thus, in order to understand what that country is about, as it has also been sung, we can search for answers in different fields, including the literary one. According to Candido (2006), literature is a language that provides us an interpretation that does not mirror society, but is rather a version of it.

From that perspective, this study aims to analyze two novels written by Evandro Affonso Ferreira - *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam* (2012) and *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora* (2017) - both awarded the first place at the Prêmio Jabuti (the "Jabuti Award"), in 2013, and at the Prêmio Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (the "National Library Foundation Prize"), in 2018¹, respectively. With regard to the literary field investigated here, we

¹ This work derives from a research project called 'Narrar é resistir?': literatura brasileira contemporânea e memória, uma análise preliminar ('Does narration mean resistance?': Brazilian contemporary literature and memory, a

briefly introduce the author as well as the aforementioned novels: Evandro Affonso Ferreira was born in 1945, in Araxá (MG), and settled in São Paulo, where he started working as a bookseller, at a used bookstore called *Sagarana*. Interviewed by the Paraná Public Library's Newsletter in 2020², the author calls himself “unplugged”, “a Pre-Socratic being”. On the same occasion, he declares to be a writer “with few readers – selected ones, to be precise”. His works are filled with metalanguage and hermeticism: characteristics of which the author is very proud.

In *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*, we are faced with a tormented man that has been wandering for ten years through the streets of a metropolis while longing for the return of the woman he loves. After his relationship ended, this unnamed narrator starts carrying the *Adagia* by Erasmus of Rotterdam with him in search of poetic or symbolic clues regarding that woman (from whom we just know the first letter of her name: 'N'). Under a viaduct, during the moment of the narrative, he tells his abandonment (trigger), and longing story (with sort of deranged hopes about the return of that woman) to a listener. Besides the narrator who is also the protagonist, there are mentions only about the “immortal beloved woman”, the “mollusk-woman”, and the “butterfly-boy”, being the last ones a part of his lifestyle as a homeless person. While the narrator tells his story, he also talks about the hardships of disadvantaged people in the city, that is, the ones who are denied the minimum conditions of a decent life.

On the other hand, *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora* tells the story of a quintet of “disadvantaged” people trying to survive on the streets of São Paulo, in the open air, amid “snots” and “eye gunk”, while the rest of the city either looks down on them or does not even look at all. The narrative is conducted by Seleno, who recollects and writes on his journal about the ten years living on the streets of a big city. His recollections bring forth the quintet that he was part of along with four other mates, of whom only two of them are named: Ismênio, the “lyrical” youngster that kills himself; and Eurídice, his lover, who dies at the age of 15. We are told not only about the hardships of life on the streets (the emptiness of their early lives, their invisible presence on the

preliminary analysis'), linked to the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. We aim to investigate the versions or the interpretations that Brazilian literature provides of its country. The project analyzes novels that were awarded between 2001 and 2018 in three of the major prizes in the Portuguese Language: the National Library Foundation Literary Award, the Jabuti Award, and the Oceans Award (former Portugal Telecom). The findings indicate that the memory feature is used in 57 awarded novels, from a total of 102. Regarding this article, the samples analyzed are from 2013 to 2018, and consist, more specifically, of two novels taken from the bigger sample.

² FERREIRA, Evandro Affonso. Um inventariante dos espólios afetivos. [Interview given to] Ronaldo Cagiano. *Cândido* – Jornal da Biblioteca Pública do Paraná, Paraná, 14 jan. 2020. Available at: <https://www.bpp.pr.gov.br/Candido/Pagina/Entrevista-Evandro-Affonso-Ferreira#>. Accessed on: 12 march, 2021.

city's topography), but also about how Seleno reconstructs his experience “decades later”. Therefore, the words he writes are also “funeral rites” for that time and those people.

2 Memory and the novels

It can be said, both in literature and in life, that memory is not only related to the individual, even though he is the only one who, apparently, brings back memories. Remembering is an effort that also requires support from memories of places, of people and, as analyzed here, of the country in which one lives. On this regard, besides individual memory, there is also the collective memory – on which the former relies (HALBWACHS, 2004).

In this study, we understand memory as the act of bringing back an event to the present moment, thus, giving it a new temporality (SARLO, 2007). This means that recalling a story is also a way of a recreating it, therefore, this becomes an act - why not - of fictionalization. In this perspective, we aim to analyze specifically who remembers, what they remember, and how they remember it (RICOEUR, 2007). For this reason, regarding the aforementioned works, we aim to “decipher the clues”, and also “collect the narrative remains” from those memories (GAGNEBIN, 2006, p. 118).

Our analysis pointed out the connection between first-person narrators and the presence of memory. We also noticed the presence, in both novels, of themes such as violence and urban space. At first sight, even though it is noticeable that each novel has its own peculiarities, there are significant similarities between both works. Although we attribute such similarities mainly to the author's writing style, there seems to be correlations between theme and form, that is, between the issues and the way of narrating them. Both novels focus on the homeless, represented here as individuals to whom the society and the State turn their backs. Besides, they also represent an issue that goes beyond the individual which is, in fact, a problem of exclusion and social inequality – that is, a structural and collective issue.

2.1 Memory in *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*

In *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*, the city is portrayed as a place of exacerbated violence, where there is no humanity, solidarity nor cooperation: “any

stray dog shows more substantial solidarity than the majority of us, humans [...] the metropolis is in a rush and has no time to care for the disadvantaged ones “(FERREIRA, 2012, p. 42)³.

The ‘disadvantaged ones’, thus, seem to belong to a different city, given that the metropolis and society as a whole have turned their backs on them. This matter is more satisfyingly explored on the following novel, in which this non-place – a space that is geographically and symbolically marginalized – is even nominated as ‘the open air’. We are, then, told the story of a “metropolitan hermit” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 12), a “victim of obsessive hope” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 37), who becomes homeless, apparently, after a disappointment in love. He wanders the streets while experiencing mental confusion and flashes of memories.

Formally, the novel is built as a single paragraph, while the sentences alternate between a) the narration of a scene that takes place in the present, b) the narrator’s thoughts, and c) the remembrance of a different life with the woman he loved. In order to exemplify this, here is the reproduction of each of these moments: “Look: butterfly-boy brought a small sunflower vase to mollusk-woman” (a scene in the present); “The enigmatic love of the couple is as mysterious as a mushroom that playfully emerges from the bottom of the manure” (narrator’s comment); “Unexpected attitude: mollusk-woman suddenly throws the sunflower on the floor, stomping on it” (continuation of the scene in the present); “Now, in the likeness of shabby men, he is going to wander about [...] Runaway wanderer – just like my thoughts” (narrator’s comment); “I am talking about the woman I love, the one that set sail. Sometimes, I deceive myself by seeing her face in the face of a random stranger” (remembrance of the beloved woman) (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 52-3).

As previously illustrated, most of the times, memory emerges in the narrative triggered by something in the present. In the previous case, the narrator observes a failed love attempt and, when disappointment takes place with one person leaving, the narrator recalls the woman he loves, for she also “set sail”. The memory moments are generally preceded by expressions such as “mm-hmm” and “yes”, which seem to be an attempt to simulate a conversation between narrator and reader, thus, an attempt to build an oral narrative, as if reader and narrator were side by side, simultaneously living what is being narrated. The linguistic resources associated to the speaking form still represent a reaffirmation of what is being remembered: as the narrator tells the story, he validates his own memories.

³ The original excerpt, in Portuguese, says: “vira-lata qualquer é mais substancioso em solidariedade que maioria de nosotros humanos [...] metrópole apressurada não tem tempo para acudir aos desvalidos” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 42).

The construction of this narrative together with an alleged listener subtly leans on moments in which the listener seems to walk side by side with the narrator, seeing what he sees and also seeing him (in this case, even paying attention to his shoes):

That bird over there; look; yes: on the wall of the house ahead; it also brings back memories of our low flights over innumerable subjects related to the uneasiness of the soul. Very well observed: a rubber sandal on the right one, and a sneaker on the left one. I found them in a garbage bin. I like to see my feet this way: aesthetically unbalanced. [...] (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 9-10).

The listener is referred to as “sir” and considered to be a writer. That would justify the intellectualized references and the hermeticism that encompasses the whole book. The distance between the narrator and the reader (or the listener) is also explored. I know that, [...] unlike you, sir, [the woman I love] will remain very close to me: she got used to the bad smell of people at the hospitals in which she worked (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 47). This seems to criticize, in fact, the distance between the person who lives the situation and the person who writes about it by considering that the narrator is not the author of its own work.

In addition to that, an important feature of that work is the symbolization that comes from apparently obvious elements. The relationship with his beloved one, who is referred to just as ‘N’, is the best example. At one point, the narrator compares his ex to an oncologist who would cure him from the abandonment cancer:

But she will come – maybe still today. My oncologist will save me from this cancer that we euphemistically call abandonment. She will cure me from this solitude, from this helplessness – they both eat me up inside. She is possibly going to come today. I am talking about my beloved [...] (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 52).

In this sense, the symbolism does not stop there: that affective relationship is extended to material elements. At one point, the narrator says: “Look: N. [...] I sleep every night this way: with my face rubbing against the first letter of her name” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 12). This happens due to the fact that the narrator carries many amulets, which include the adagia book mentioned in the title. Another one is a mat on which a letter N is engraved:

But I will not get rid of the mat, for it is my amulet: I have been carrying it for over three years. I always sleep while staring deeply into this N – a delusional lullaby. It is a Morpheus’ letter that nurses me, calms me down, and comforts

me. For many times, I have caressed it while imagining that my fingers slide through her deliciously mountainous parts. N is also for nectar. (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 31).

The mat might be just a material improvisation: an alternative way that allows a homeless person to rest his/her head at night, and sleep. The beloved one might be the one he loves, indeed. Nevertheless, it is possible to associate the 'N' not only to the initial letter of an ex-girlfriend's name, but also to 'Nothing'. Therefore, the narrator pursues Nothing, gets attached to Nothing, loves Nothing, possesses Nothing.

Hope is also a recurrent theme in the story. The narrator makes us believe that he wanders in search of the woman he loves. However, throughout the narrative, we understand that she is someone from the past, that he does not have her anymore. He holds on to her – to the memory of her - one more time, like an amulet. Therefore, the 'N' is a “trademark of hope” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 37). Consequently, from a symbolic perspective, once again, there is no hope: hope is Nothing.

In any case, it is possible to verify a constant pessimism, be it in the resolutions of the narrative events or in the narrator's own perspectives. Even in other parts of the novel, such as “I am not giving up. The woman I love will come” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 36), and “Yes: hope is my shelter” (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 42), this interpretation is justified. The narrative bursts into a mix of anxiety and mental confusion. The narrator is aware of his lack of clarity: according to him, it is just a matter of time until life comes to an end:

Say-and-repeat is mild madness that drags itself in a sluggish manner. [...] it prevents me from understanding why I carry this adagia booklet by an unknown author from the XVI century with me all the time – besides, I do not know the reason why I carry this mat with a shoulder strap, and an N engraved on one of its extremities. But the woman I love will come before clarity shows its true colors. (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 44)

It is possible to assume, from this excerpt, that throughout the ten years that the narrator has spent wandering the streets, his motivations and his passion crumbled. For that reason, he has no more hope or clarity, and yet he tries to convince himself that he will reunite with the woman he loves in order to find any reason to live, just like he does with crumbs. Through the memories that the author brings back, he recalls the moments of affective and intellectual intimacy he lived with his ex-girlfriend.

The hermetic language of that novel (or Evandro Affonso Ferreira's language) matches the intellectualism of that character, which derives from his life before the streets. However, the way the narrative is told in a single paragraph, as well as the use of oral expressions ("mm-hmm" and "yes") suggest that the narrator is telling his story to someone. That assumption is weakened due to an aesthetic issue that leads the reader to disbelieve the narrative. Whoever reads that novel might wonder: "who talks like that?" and/or "would a beggar - who has been on the streets for ten years- talk like that? How come?".

That narrative incoherence seems to unveil an aesthetic contradiction that exposes how Brazilian society functions (and how it contradicts itself). Therefore, the contrast between theme and language aligns with the contrast between classes, and sheds light on social issues (the existence of a homeless group as opposed to the existence of other classes that formally represent the city). By recurring to hermeticism and intellectualism to address misery, the narrator probably makes the same move that he himself criticizes: turning his back to that group and to its issues.

2.2 Memory in *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*

The novel *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora* (FERREIRA, 2017), on the other hand, is narrated by Seleno, a teacher that spent a big part of his life living (or rather surviving) on the streets. The narrative is filled with metalinguistic and lyric features, and the hermeticism is present once again, which seems to be an aesthetic trait in the novels by Evandro Affonso Ferreira analyzed in this study. However, in this novel, that characteristic is justified by the fact that the narrator became an intellectual. He writes in order to remember: "[...] before this memories notebook, I revisit the past, and ask the words for help so that, together, we are able to go back to the times of eye gunk, of snots; to the times of despair, of sorrow. Words and I, together, trying to make use of mnemonics" (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 157). Regarding the importance of that memory, the narrator adds:

Oh, I need to find the mnemonic elixir, I cannot forget, never forget, all the stories of the dead, there are still many pages on this memories notebook that I carry with me. Yes, it is by focusing on memories that I might plainly observe my own grief, the multiple grief, a multifaceted one. I need to find the

mnemonic elixir to eliminate the woodworms that frequently appear on it, on my memory. (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 133-4).

Selene, who is now a teacher, has gone through a social change, and this is what motivates his narrative: he has a duty to fulfill regarding “the ones he holds dear”, more specifically, the “dead ones”. The story told by the character is a rescue and remembrance narrative strengthened by duty and by the need to keep the memory of the group (the ‘disadvantaged ones’) alive. This gesture becomes even more important if we consider that he is the only character capable of telling that story, given that his companions are neither part of his life nor part of the narrative anymore. Even so, it is important to analyze how Selene decides to face that task.

In that regard, in a metalinguistic sense, words serve as a way of expressing grief and paying homage to his friends who did not meet the same fate. The title of this romance (“There was never any more ending than there is now”⁴) has a sophisticated intellectual association, given that it is an inversion of a verse written by the poet Walt Whitman, “there was never any more inception that there is now”, from the poem ‘Song of myself’ (1855). Whereas Whitman’s tone is a laudatory one in the poem, Affonso Ferreira’s tone is tragic in the novel. However, they both share the intensity and the urge to write, to tell, to record, and, mainly, the urge to remain.

Selene refers to the place where homeless people live as ‘the open air’: a city within the metropolis. In a similar way, the group of people (the author only mentions two characters’ names: Eurídice and Ismênio) that shares the non-space with him is called the “farandole”, whose meaning – which is quite unknown – refers to the idea of a group of beggars, of shabby men. Throughout the narrative, the dangers of that lifestyle are emphasized as a way of reinforcing the idea that the life of the homeless does not encourage their development: “Snots? Eye gunk? They are intrinsic to The Open Air, and to disregard, and to abandonment, and to indifference as well” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 36). The link between the narrator and that fact is ambiguous: if, on the one hand, he seems to feel guilty for being the only one who had the chance to change his life, on the other hand, the hermetic way he chooses to narrate the story is a denial of his past. That means that he attempts to distance himself from it while making sure that he is in a different position now: he no longer belongs to that narrated universe.

The denial of rights to the city is discussed and highlighted throughout the book. In a similar way to the other novels, the narrator formally opts for repetition. The criticism is more

⁴ The title of the novel, in Portuguese, is: *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*.

directly built in paragraphs starting with questions to himself and to the reader: “Quintet of the disadvantaged ones?”, “Snots, eye gunk?”, “Hopelessness?”. This repetition resource might be closely associated to the memory, given that the latter is shapeless, and is built throughout the narrative, as the narrator himself suggests when using expressions such as “I call to memory”, before writing about his recollections.

It is interesting to think, though, that the aesthetic resource of repeating questions and other elements is, in itself, another way of criticizing. Differently from the aforementioned questions, the city (“City?”) appears only once throughout the narrative as the “Butcher of our hope” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 37). The denial of that right is masterfully done, for it is adapted to the personality of each character. The opinions arise by means of Seleno, of course. According to him, Ismênio, the poet of the group, says: “once, the farandole was lying down under the viaduct [...], we spotted a huge airplane up above, piercing the clouds. Ismênio’s observation: *they build things that almost reach heaven but they cannot save us from hell*” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 116). On another occasion, It is Eurídice, Seleno’s lover - who has, at times, a more critical and ironic character than the rest of them -, who says: “They say God knows everything, but I know one thing that he does not know: how to share quilts” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 117).

Another criticized issue refers to kids that do not have a childhood due to living on the streets. The composition of the group of children and teens constantly changed: while some were left behind, others arrived. However, they all shared the fact that they were born “deprived of people’s regard – an empty childhood, filled with cursed spells” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 12). On the first pages, Seleno claims that he survived despite having lived on the streets from twelve to twenty-two years old. Moreover, it takes a long time before he says his name, which is understandable considering that, “for homeless underage kids, growing old is something unimaginable that possibly takes place beyond the Pillars of Hercules - unreachable” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 35), it might be hard for him to understand his condition as a survivor.

In that regard, the decision of writing might be understood as an assumed duty. Díndima, the person responsible for taking Seleno off the streets, encouraged him: “She kept saying: Write, Seleno, write, it is up to you to write the first Snotty Poem, the first Gunk-eyed Poem in literature (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 135-6). Given that he is a survivor, it is his duty to write, in homage to himself and his partners, about “snots and eye gunk”.

Even though they share similar characteristics, both novels diverge in the sense that, whereas one of the narrators lived on the streets for many years and now remembers that life, the

other one narrates directly from the streets (where he has been living for ten years), recalling his life before becoming homeless. Seleno, the teacher, is an intellectual that recalls his past on the streets from a comfortable position in the present, and he does so by using a fluid metalinguistic discourse, filled with poetic and audible images, whereas the other narrator wanders the city in a confusing and helpless manner. That is why his writing pace is slow. The reading is both slow and hard, just as the narrator's walk: "Due to his turtle-like walk, he will possibly arrive the day after tomorrow. He walks slowly, lonely." (FERREIRA, 2012, p. 61). In some moments, this memory - that happens to be individual, and mostly destined to the woman he loves - seems to be unbearable. Therefore, the narrator's suggestion is "to forget so that you do not go crazy", in which the verb "forget" works as a synonym for interrupting the stream of the narrative, given that memory and narrative slowly walk together.

It is important to point out a similarity that occurs in both novels: the way the stories are narrated is similar in many aspects, such as the hermeticism, the erudition, the use of alliterations, long and complex periods, repetitions, and intertexts⁵. Aside from the notion that this apparently constitutes a formal problem, given the questionable fact that different narrators, in different novels, tell different stories the same way, with the use of similar expressions (such as "farandole", to refer to homeless people), that aspect seems to indicate a purpose or a trait of the author himself in his novels: working on the language is more important than working on the narrative; the unsaid lies beyond what is said; besides reading the lines, read between the lines. That means that, most of all, we have been dealing with a language exercise.

This idea corroborates with the fact that, so far, the stories have been told by quite unreliable narrators, given that a) they are first-person narrators b) they look back on memories for different reasons; c) they usually experience mental confusion; d) they question themselves, at some point, in the narrative, regarding the veracity of what is being told. In the last paragraph of *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*, the narrator questions himself: "it would be coherent, who knows, to imitate the Greek philosopher who, after carefully narrating everything that happened in court - the court that condemned Socrates -, surprised the readers by stating that he was not

⁵ In a previous moment of the research project that encompasses this study, we analyzed the novel *Os piores dias de minha vida foram todos* (FERREIRA, 2014), written by the same author, to which we will turn in order to compare and systematize our interpretations. The story is told by a dying narrator who starts an imaginary dialogue with Antigone's archetype. The narrator's stream of consciousness walks through the city filled with pessimism and criticality, as he remembers his losses and recalls the relationship with a friend that happened to be a writer. The same features associated to how the narrative occurs are also found in that novel.

even there” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 158), in a position to, once again, prioritize form instead of content.

Final Considerations

The triad that seems to unite both novels is formed by inequality, language, and their relationship with the city. The analyzed works focus on individual memory, and their first-person male narrators share a sort of collective spirit as their most evident trait, for they represent their “fellowmen” somehow. For that reason, individual memory is presented as being intrinsically connected to collective memory, thus, relying on others, and on the city space (more particularly, the streets) to narrate and to recollect.

In *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*, the narrator uses memory to trace the path of his life which is, consequently, intertwined with other characters' lives, especially represented by homeless people or characters who interact with them. On the other hand, in *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*, memory is both a salvation boat as well as a curse: the narrator holds on to his memories (especially the ones involving the woman he loves) by trying to maintain his sanity and keep his hopes alive, whereas those memories make him hate his present situation even more.

It is interesting to consider how narrators chose to narrate and recollect. In both novels, formal work is a main concern, thus, the stories of those marginalized, disadvantaged individuals are told in an erudite, almost pedantic, manner. There is a latent contrast between formal wealth and social poverty in the stories, which seems to be associated to the contradictions of the country itself and of the urban center where the narrative takes place: on the one hand, fancy words/ socioeconomic wealth; on the other hand, the (almost) untold story about dirt/poverty.

As previously stated, both novels share the same theme regarding the homeless, who are seen, according to Seleno in *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*, as people who differ from the image of Brazil that society tries to create. He says: “We were not [the homeless people] in conformity with its favorable-to-progress topography. We were the antithesis of the future. Waste containers for rubbish, like us, have not yet been made” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 43-44). This excerpt raises many concerns: among them, there is the idea that society tries to hide and deny the existence of marginalized individuals; and there is also the notion that these people are a metonymy for the existence of misery, which is understood as an obstacle to progress.

In this sense, by understanding Brazilian literature as an interpreter of its home country, we observed that the recurrent use of memory is a tool to try to understand individual and collective issues, that is, to raise concerns about the individual, and about society. Therefore, memory consists of a narrative feature regarding a literature that interprets its home country by voicing concern for its violent and unsolved past. Moreover, this literature denounces our present as an “antithesis of the future” (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 43). In other terms, it shows that, by only looking into the future, and by projecting an image of a country without poverty, we are, in fact, not looking anywhere. As pointed out by researcher Karl Erik Schollhammer, nowadays, due to the “growth of social problems in the big cities, and due to a life of exclusion and marginalization of entire generations that were deprived from education, work, or other dignified alternatives for their survival”, it is no more possible to believe “in the myth of the Brazilian non-violence” (SCHOLLHAMMER, 2007, p. 24).

If the narrators analyzed in this study refuse to turn their backs on the past, thus, turning to the city in order to (re)organize individual memories, the social commitment that might be intrinsic to that gesture becomes flawed, and questionable due to a language choice. That means that, instead of promoting union, identification and/or representation, this choice creates a barrier denoting distinction and estrangement between a group of disadvantaged people and an intellectual who writes in a hermetic manner, and uses references from an entirely different universe. For this reason, the novels are estranged from social criticism, and focus on an aesthetic project that is not necessarily successful.

The proposition, attempted in both novels, that the narrators represent the group that they belong to - that is, the group of homeless people trying to survive in a big city- is a slippery thing. The narrative, which involves truly seeing others, the city, and life on the streets, reveals those narrators as representative of a portion of society. However, the aesthetic, metalinguistic, and intellectual concerns overshadow the verisimilitude of the narrative itself.

It is necessary to point out that individual memory is also a collective one, as previously mentioned, for an individual carries “the dead” along with him. That is, the individual is accompanied by his social group, his traumas, his past, and, finally, by his home country’s history. Given that our country (Brazil) has an unresolved past, that mark remains in us and in our literature. Considering Jeanne Marie Ganebin’s idea that “we have to remember the past, but not just for the sake of remembering it as a sort of worship”, it is important to observe that the narrators in those novels do not recall the past just for the sake of it, but they do so, possibly, to

provide us with “analysis tools for a better recognition of the present” (GAGNEBIN, 2006, p. 103).

In that sense, we understand that the recurrent use of memory in contemporary Brazilian novels might represent the need – or even the attempt- to recollect the past in order to have a better understanding of the present. Moreover, remembering is both an individual and collective duty, as well as a way of reorganizing the past and collecting its remains.

References

- CANDIDO, Antonio. *Literatura e Sociedade*. Rio de Janeiro: Ouro sobre Azul, 2006.
- GAGNEBIN, Jeanne Marie. *Lembrar, escrever, esquecer*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006.
- FERREIRA, Evandro Affonso. *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2012.
- FERREIRA, Evandro Affonso. *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2017.
- HALBWACHS, Maurice. *A memória coletiva*. São Paulo: Centauro, 2004.
- RICOEUR, Paul. *A memória, a história, o esquecimento*. Campinas, SP: Editora da Unicamp, 2007.
- SARLO, Beatriz. *Tempo passado: cultura da memória e guinada subjetiva*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras; Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2007.
- SCHOLLHAMMER, Karl Erik. Breve mapeamento das relações entre violência e cultura no Brasil contemporâneo. *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, Brasília, v. 29, p. 27-57, 2007.