


The migrant fiction works of Bruce Chatwin, Bernardo Carvalho,  
Edmund White, and David Leavitt /

*As ficções migrantes de Bruce Chatwin, Bernardo Carvalho,  
Edmund White e David Leavitt*

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**Received:** November 13th, 2020. **Approved:** November 20th, 2020.

**How to cite this article:**

OLIVEIRA, Paulo Cesar Silva de Oliveira. The migrant fiction works of Bruce Chatwin, Bernardo Carvalho, Edmund White, and David Leavitt. *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 9, n. 4, p. 219-241, dez. 2020.

**ABSTRACT**

The article investigates the production of four contemporary writers, Bernardo Carvalho, Bruce Chatwin, Edmund White, and David Leavitt. We shelter its production under the concepts of migrant fictions and fictions of tribe. Migrant fictions refer to works whose authors place themselves in the condition of migrants, either through self-exile or due to the effects of other conditions that lead them to a diasporic condition. The concept of tribe comes from our readings on Dominique Maingueneau's (2001) reflections, that deals with sets of writers brought together by thematic, theoretical and / or reflexive affinities. The main objective of this paper is to theorize the question of the elective affinities that permeate the works of the four quoted authors, aiming at a critical discussion about the problems concerning the literary reflection and the fictional discourses that represent the problems of displacement, mobility and cloister as productive spaces for the emergence of hybrid narrative texts. As a conclusion, we will show that reflect the effects of the displacement of their authors when exposed to the antinomies of an increasingly globalized and moving world.

**KEYWORDS:** Contemporary fiction; Theory; Discourse; Hybridity.

**RESUMO**

O artigo investiga a produção de quatro escritores contemporâneos, Bernardo Carvalho, Bruce Chatwin, Edmund White e David Leavitt. Abrigamos sua produção nas rubricas de ficções migrantes e ficções de tribo. As ficções migrantes dizem respeito a obras cujos autores se colocam na condição de migrantes, seja pelo autoexílio ou por outras condições que os levam à diáspora. Já o conceito de tribo é apropriado de Dominique Maingueneau (2001) e trata de grupos de escritores reunidos por afinidades temáticas, teóricas e/ou reflexivas. O trabalho tem como objetivo

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 <http://dx.doi.org/10.35572/rlr.v9i4.1760>

*central teorizar a questão das afinidades eletivas que permeiam as obras dos quatro autores escolhidos, com vistas a uma discussão crítica acerca da reflexão literária e do discurso ficcional em torno do problema do deslocamento, da mobilidade e da clausura como espaços para a criação de textos narrativos híbridos. Como conclusão, mostraremos os efeitos das tensões provocadas pelos deslocamentos de seus autores em um mundo cada vez mais globalizado e em movimento.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Ficção contemporânea; Teoria; Discurso; Híbridismo.*

## 1 Introduction

In the paradoxical and multifaceted scenario of contemporary fiction, our readings of a set of narratives whose discursive elements refer to certain (non) places allow us to think of some structures found in a particular critical-theoretical field in which we elected the term “migrant fictions” as a conceptual possibility to read literature in an age of globalization. These investigations, thus, require some preliminary considerations.

Our approach focuses on some novelists and theorists who fictionalize and question literature in a globalized world. We will bring to the debate some authors and works that make up an acute reflection on the role of the writer in the intellectual and literary fields. We propose integrative readings aiming at problematizing some critical-theoretical aspects of these writings put into circulation and comparison, help us understand the contradictory movement and the paradoxical condition of our age regarding the modern promise of progress, often oscillating between the modernity of fable and perverse modernity. The novels here analyzed reveal renewed possibilities for theoretical reflection, although we do not intend to consolidate any kind of petrified truth on today's fiction, but rather to establish a set of critical hypotheses that can stimulate the debates on what we call migrant fictions and fictions of tribe.

Firstly, in a study of contemporary fictions, themes, and authors, it is imperative to understand that the meanings of the contemporary are not the central purpose of this work, but some introductory issues must be observed. In the conceptual plethora surrounding the definition of the term, we understand the contemporary according to Giorgio Agamben (2009), as something that never ceases to return and does not stop repeating itself, although it does not require an origin. Regarding the problem of origin, Agamben asks to what or whom we are contemporaries. These questions pose two problems for the critical discourse: the first one concerns the past, the question of history as a foundational discourse; the second points to the conflicting relationships and phenomena arising from intramundane life and the existential struggle between living beings.

Agamben finds support in Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche to state that these two interwoven instances allow us to view contemporaneity as a tension between connection and dissociation:

It truly belongs to its time, it is truly contemporary, one that does not coincide perfectly with it, nor is it suited to its claims and is, therefore, in this sense, out of date; but, exactly for this reason, exactly through this displacement and this anachronism, one is able, more than the others, to perceive and apprehend his time (AGAMBEN, 2009, p. 58-59, our translation).

Our relationship with time presupposes a pragmatics which, according to Nietzsche (2005, p. 79), can happen only in the movement of the historian's gaze, which almost always turns his eyes to the past to understand the present, but with a burning desire for the future. For Nietzsche, the historian's activity is commanded by life. The historian distinguishes the historical spirits (*Historischen Menschen*) from the supra-historical ones (*Über historischen*). The historical spirits show us that the spectacle of the past determines the messianic joy and hope in the justice to come, and thus the future is hidden behind the mountain we want to climb and cross; as for the supra-historical spirits, past and present are admitted as a complex unit, never pacifying. The exposure to the infinite succession of events does not free spirits from contempt and/or saturation. Between historical and supra-historical spirits, Nietzsche understands that there is a kind of "joy" that makes history serve life and living people. The transformation of something totalized into a cognitive object is for Nietzsche a kind of dead artifact, a form of the historian's impotence in face of life: by putting itself at the service of the vital forces, the historian inserts himself in history under the risk of bringing out an unhistorical force. The new history, therefore, is not seen as a hierarchy; it does not claim knowledge as a kind of archeology, nor does it try to hold it into non-communicating vessels (NIETZSCHE, 2005, p. 67-90).

This paradoxical condition – we need history, but the excess of historical matter plasters the living – pointed out by Nietzsche and read by Agamben as a comprehension of contemporaneity is marked by an anachronistic and sometimes aporetic relationship, as the connection between the individual time and the collective historical time is fractured and the "the poet, as a contemporary, represents this fracture that prevents time to stiffen and is, at the same time, the blood that should suture this break" (AGAMBEN, 2009, p. 61, our translation). A retrospective look reveals a kind of old memory we all keep; however, this memory is disfigured because we cannot suture the past, nor even are we able to free ourselves or isolate from it.

As for the set of fictionalists here analyzed, the discussions of Agamben (2009) help us understand the historical and essential ways of reading texts. If thinking and doing are intrinsic elements of action and thinking is, according to Nietzsche (2005), the combination of both puts the circulation of the results of the vital forces in renewed and critical perceptions of history, with which we establish new connections, starting with the understanding of history as a meaningful aspect of life. History must, therefore, include and incorporate the tragic, the random, the chance, the banal, everyday life, and even, the non-knowledge to the spheres of a knowledge to come, and it differs from the modes of contemplating future only as an eternal becoming. Happiness, according to Nietzsche, contains the “faculty of forgetting”, meaning that not always we will feel the world in a historical perspective: “It is, therefore, possible to live, and even live happily, almost without any memory, as the animal demonstrates; but it is absolutely impossible to live without forgetting” (NIETZSCHE, 2005, p. 73, our translation).

For the traveler, the counterpart for these excesses and losses coming from the vital forces evidenced by Nietzsche is the momentary forgetfulness of the past: the desire to live in a kind of transitive present that launches individuals into movement, into a state of happiness that does not depend on the historical sense or the past. The traveler vibrates a string from which he draws a dissonant sound and this odd song is the result of the friction between his present experience and the elements he perceives in the past and registers in his memory.

## 2 Mapping the tribe

Migrant fictions are represented by a group of few, but representative writers who, amidst their peculiarities, are connected by a feeling of tribe, even when they apparently do not dialogue among themselves directly. We will start with a brief presentation that establishes some intersections between theoretical reflections and literary readings according to the relations between migrant fictions and fictions of tribe. In Brazil, Bernardo Carvalho is a particular case of a migrant writer. Margins, borders, migrations, displacements are probably his main themes. It is probably a very singular case in contemporary Brazilian narratives. His novels are structured in-between genres: epistolography, historical document, biographical and autobiographical reports, essays, cartographies, historical and philosophical discourses, etc. His work draws attention to the ways history, memory and fictional creation intertwine and oppose, without the ultimate prevalence of the fictional representation over other discourses. His fiction does not establish a center guided

by the fictional discourse. In *Nove noites* (2002), Carvalho's migrant prose discusses the relations between the writer, his work and the world around him, not to mention the way he deals with the biographical and autobiographical aspects of the author's experience in the fictionalization process.

In *Nove noites*, the tragedy of the young American anthropologist Buell Quain – who committed a violent suicide in 1939, at the age of 27, in the Xingu, while he was trying to return to the continent – became one of the most obscure cases in president Getúlio Vargas political period and to Brazilian anthropology. *Nove noites* invites readers to penetrate a multifaceted textual universe: a mix of epistolary novel, historical research, memorialism, documents, official notes, sparse annotations of debatable authorship and so on. His texts sometimes assume the conditions of an academic report, a diction of essay, or even of philosophical reflection. Everything leads to the establishment of certain unity which is never definite.

In *Nove noites*, the discursive game is structured by the voice of two main narrators: the narrator-journalist investigates Buell Quain's past in archives, testimonies of people who witnessed Quain's period in Brazil or were his acquaintances, even inserting a fictional story that supposedly happened in his family and that was strangely intertwined with the story of Quain, leading readers to a confusion between the narrator-journalist with Bernardo Carvalho himself; the second narrator tells the story in a series of letters addressed to someone whose identity the reader never knows. This narrative voice is Manoel Perna's, who we call the narrator-engineer. Both voices control a narrative structure permeated by letters, documents, journalistic reports, etc. In addition to these two main narrative voices, there is a profusion of other voices and discourses, although the novel is basically controlled by these two subjects of the enunciation. The narrator-journalist travels through history as a traveler goes through a city: he experiences (self) knowledge and exercises it in the rescue of a past he tries to dig from the authoritarian Brazilian political events, questioning the reasons why Quain committed suicide and the official silence about the case.

Carvalho amplifies his previous fictional production (with which he does not cease to dialogue, though), but now deepening radically the connections and dissociations between fiction, history, memory, biography, autobiography, whether by means of intertexts, metatexts and hypotexts that subvert the mechanisms of the realistic romanesque prose, or through a textual hybridity incorporated in a fragmented fictional structure that reveals a logic of supplementation and dissemination.

*Mongólia* (2003), the novel that succeeds *Nove noites*, deepens Carvalho's option for a migrant fiction that focuses on the relationships between the writer's experience and the writing

process. *Mongolia*'s backdrop is the search for a missing Brazilian photographer in the homonymous country. The connection between the narrative resources and the elements of *Nove Noites* and *Mongolia* is evident: in the latter, through a narrator who tries to restore a truth from the past by means of writing -- in this case, the disappearance of a young photographer, in *Mongolia* -- and the presence of two other narrators. In *Mongolia*, a man must find another one. Also, in *Nove noites*, the other forgotten by history (Buell Quain) is equivalent in *Mongolia* to the photographer who had disappeared in that distant country. As in *Nove noites*, the main narrator from *Mongolia* penetrates the heart of darkness of a country often ominous and crepuscular.

The focus of *O sol se põe em São Paulo* (2007), is again on a search of a character, this time in Japanese lands. According to Bernardo Carvalho (LUGAR, 2011), this is a purely fictional novel which brought him strong negative reactions, since he had supposedly eliminated from the narrative any connection with reality, according to some critics, therefore creating an absurd story from the point of view of verisimilitude. Carvalho accused the dictatorship of realism which makes any narrative experimentation to be seen as a failure in the romanesque construction. In fact, *O sol se põe em São Paulo* is an experimental writing that gives continuity to the Carvalho's creative processes and searches for a narrative that critically investigates the hierarchical homologies between nationalism and fiction in Brazil. Identity and narration were key themes in our Romantic period and they are still persistente nowadays. Carvalho's prose invests in new kinds of perspectives towards some paradigms of Brazilian literary traditions, mainly perceiving identity as a synonym for nation and nationality.

Carvalho's characters are often in search of something hidden or not well-explained in their past. His characters' image is frequently built through generalizations and idealizations almost always stemming from fantasies of originality and origin. The relations between identity and national literature are undermined by Carvalho, novel after novel, and its peak is *O filho da mãe* (2009). Before analyzing it, let's just emphasize that in *O sol se põe em São Paulo* almost all references to Brazil are eliminated or are secondary. So, the narrative becomes radically "foreign", migrant. In *O filho da mãe*, the enunciation is controlled by a third person narrator whose gaze, suggestively and dominantly, is of an individual who tries to understand the complexities of a ruined world in which the other characters exemplify the strive for survival in a threatening atmosphere. *O filho da mãe* can be read either as a fiction on the Second Chechen War or as a story of some people driven out by the war from their (imagined) communities, commonly identified by the name of nation. The

novel can also be read simply as a story of mothers who lost their sons and struggle to save them from death in the battlefields of a war-torn Chechnya.

As for the concept of tribe fictions, we need to establish some points of attraction and distance so we can analyze the naturally heterogeneous sets of subjects in dialogue. The American writers David Leavitt (06/23/1961 –) and Edmund White (01/13/1940 –) share in their fictions the same passion for maps that moves Bernardo Carvalho, besides his taste for discursive heterogeneity and his attraction to foreigners, to travels and displaced subjects. Also, Carvalho's prose investigates, recovers and/or (re) inserts the figure of the author itself in the literary discourse. His diasporic condition as a Brazilian writer who travels around the world, making this movement into a condition for his writing, not only nourishes his prose, characterized by a confessional and (auto) biographical voice, but also puts him in dialogue with White and Leavitt.

A sentence in *Arkansas* (a collection of three narratives released by David Leavitt in 1997), may sum up some important aspects of these fictionists: "Writers often hide their lives in fiction. What they almost never do is to hide fiction in their lives" (LEAVITT, 1997, p. 72). The profusion of memorialist and autobiographical writings that abound in today's editorial market reveals an attraction to the author's life as well as to the fictional representation that favors self-fiction. The works of White and Leavitt translate efficiently the idea of non-coincidence between time lived and time narrated, that kind of anachronism pointed out by Agamben and supported by a concept of history defended by Nietzsche. Memory tries to recover and document a time lived that is no longer recoverable in the present. Memory rescues what was hidden in history and at the same time reveals the conditions of production of the literary works and speeches, according to what Dominique Maingueneau (2001) called the "bio/graphic" trajectory of the writers depending on their positions in the literary field. In this sense, White and Leavitt's position on the current American literary scene reveals engagement in some political struggles: both are writers who speak in and from the margin, either because of their status as migrant writers and/or because they represent non-hegemonic groups. Gay and engaged in the cultural battles, White and Leavitt use biography, travel narratives, fictions committed to recovering the past with a decisive choice for otherness, especially concerned with the homoerotic bias. They create new existential and literary cartographies to promote otherness. Both White and Leavitt defend aesthetics, but never lose sight of the political aspects their works take. *The man who knew too much* is Leavitt's biography of Alan Turing, a pioneer in Computer Science and in artificial intelligence. With this book, Leavitt discusses sexuality and politics, which led Turing from heaven to hell, from a war hero to a criminal, in those

dark times when alterity, subjectivity and freedom were under siege in a puritan and violent England:

His fear seems to have been that his homosexuality would be used not just against him but against his ideas. Nor was his choice of the rather antiquated biblical locution “to lie with” accidental: Turing was fully aware of the degree to which both his homosexuality and his belief in computer intelligence posed a threat to organized religion. After all, his insistence on questioning humankind’s exclusive claim to the faculty of thought had brought him a barrage of criticism in the 1940s, perhaps because his call for “fair play” to machines encoded a subtle critique of social norms that denied to another population – that of homosexual men and women – the right to a legitimate and legal existence” (LEAVITT, 2006, p. 5).

White and Leavitt’s literary “choices” – whether openly fictional, or (auto) biographical, or even memorialistic – ultimately imply a political construction of literature. Even opting for the historical novel, their look never loses sight of reality, that is: even when they bring the past to the present, history always returns as fiction. This is the case of *Hotel de Dream*, by Edmund White (2008), in which the American writer Stephen Crane’s trip to Germany, due to a treatment for tuberculosis at the end of the 19th century is fictionalized (Crane died in Germany, in a sanatorium in the Black Forest, on June 5th, 1900). Aware that it may be his last chance as a writer, Crane dictates to his wife, Cora, “The painted boy”, a story inspired by Crane’s alleged encounter with a young gay man from New York. As in Carvalho’s prose (especially in *Nove noites* and in *Mongolia*), White’s narrative uses typographic resources (changes of the fonts), intertextuality, mixed genres, thus creating a narrative inside another one, in a curious symbiosis between the writer-object (Stephen Crane), and the writer himself (White). Crane’s tuberculosis and White’s HIV-positive status connects the late 19th-century story to the 21st-century fiction. The biographer and the biographed are both united by the same mission: writing literature. By emphasizing the relationship between the artistic work and the writer’s role in the intellectual field, Dominique Maingueneau (2001, p. 54, our translation), shows that:

[...] the work can only appear if, in one way or another, it finds its effect in an existence. To be an engaged writer is to sign petitions, to take the floor in assemblies, to say something about the great problems of our society; but it is also to exceed any ideological territory by writing, so that he/she has the right to place himself as a sentinel of the Good. The difficulty consists in finding the improbable point of balance between the two requirements.



Carvalho, Leavitt and White can be also read comparatively to another traveler, Bruce Chatwin. Fictions of tribe can only be materialized in these encounters, intersections. The often silenced voice of the other of history, as verified in Carvalho, echoing in Leavitt and White's writings (also found in Chatwin) is a consequence of their passion for maps, which led them to distant regions of the planet, inspiring their hybrid writings. Chatwin influenced Carvalho's works and probably a legion of other migrant writers. Writing and life experience mark Chatwin's prose. He is a traveling writer who learns while walking and observing, scanning spaces and collecting objects, stories from everywhere he visits.

The traveler can be a metaphor, but the traveling-writer of the globalized world is a true wanderer: he treads the world floor knowing that his journey is filled with trauma, either because the places he visits were colonized or later decolonized or because the shadow of the genocides perpetrated over a century of catastrophes hovers over the landscapes of the journey. The writer's task in his solitary work is to put down in words his experimentation of the dangers encountered during the journey. Representing reality through fiction is a way to revisit history, to contemplate it with refractory lenses. This is the heart of Chatwin's narratives, hybrids of travel narratives, invented stories, adventure journals, farcical writings, reports, letters, memories, essays etc. His first novel, *The viceroy of Ouidah* (1980) embodies this fictional amalgamation. In the "Preface" of the Brazilian edition, Chatwin reports the difficulties of his research on the Brazilian Francisco Félix de Souza (in the novel, Francisco Manoel da Silva) with views to write a historical essay. In the impossibility of giving unity to the material collected, Chatwin supposedly opts for the novel form: "The material I raised was, however, so fragmented that I decided to modify the names of the characters and write a work of pure fiction" (CHATWIN, 1987, p. 12, our translation). Hence the narrative starts from present time, moving backwards to the past, defying historiography with the alibi of trying to write pure fiction, only casting more shadows on the historical discourse and the fictional representation of reality.

For Chatwin, Carvalho, Leavitt and White, the right to narrate requires history. This small tribe represents the authors' condition as diasporic writers, migrants whose journeys are historical and fictional. A life devoted to writing is similar to a writing devoted to life. For the migrant writer, living means walking. Migrant narratives, therefore, reveal a pragmatics and a policy: they articulate aesthetics and experience. Experience is described through the actions of the individuals whose deeds cannot be fully recovered or described. Instead, experience returns in their discourses in the

form of fragments, ruins that cover up vestiges of the past. Hence, these “egofictions” are paradoxical forms of testimony, accounts of experiences that never return, thus the limits of memory to fully recover the past. The critical world of the text connects with the critical text of the world. Thus, authors, works and readers are mixed, the latter with the task of inferring the theoretical works that strengthen knowledge and the powers of representation that, in the semiotic game, summon the subjects to participate in the (re) construction of history through literary *Paideia*.

### 3 Mobility and closure: narrative transits

In his “Preface” to the biography of his uncle Edmund White, Keith Fleming (2003, p. xvi) states that the launch of the novel *A boy’s own story* “cemented Edmund White’s literary reputation and is still, perhaps, his most known in the work of “self-fiction”, as he calls his autobiographical fiction, in which his starting point is, in the main, real life”. In his “Introduction to the same book, David Leavitt (2003, p. xxi) states that with White, “we are in that frontier region where memorialism and fiction interpenetrate, like eros and mourning, humor and sadness, banality and beauty”. Self-fiction and frontier region are productive concepts for migrant fictions, as they express, on the one hand, the author’s insertion in what he narrates and, on the other hand, they deal with the authors’ attempts to bring his experience and transformation into narration. These are fictions in/of the limit. Self-fictional narratives challenge the unstable theoretical fields as soon as they question the boundaries between fact and fiction and the indissociation between the narrated and the lived. This fragile solidarity shows that the tribe exists even if authors like Bernardo Carvalho reject any kinds of affiliations. Maingueneau points to the existence of a “discursive community” whose narratives and authors “articulate the discursive elements based on the functioning of groups of producers and managers who make these discourses live and live on them” (MAINGUENEAU, 2001, p. 30, our translation). These alliances are not just about the present:

Furthermore, any writer is located in a chosen tribe, whether in the tribe of the writers of the past or the tribe of the contemporaries, no matter if they are known personally or not, that place them in their personal pantheon and whose way of life and works allow them to legitimize their own statements. This spiritual community that uses space and time associates names in a configuration whose uniqueness is confused with the author’s aesthetic claim (MAINGUENEAU, 2001, p. 31, our translation).

Before Maingueneau, Pierre Bourdieu (1968, p. 114, our translation) had already observed that:

Whatever he does or wants, the artist has to face the social definition of his work, that is, concretely, the successes and setbacks known to the work, the interpretations that have been given to the work's social representation, almost always stereotyped and simplifying, that the amateur audience has about it. In short, possessed by the anguish of salvation, the author is condemned to wait in a kind of uncertainty for the ever ambiguous signs of an election always on hold: he can experience the setback as a sign of election, or very rapid and booming success as a threat of curse (in reference to a historically dated definition of the consecrated or the damn artist), he must necessarily recognize in his creative project the truth of his creative project given by the social reception of his work, because the recognition of this truth is contained in a project which is always a project to be recognized.

Hence it comes the perception that there is no desert the writer can escape to. The romantic illusion of an absolute singularity is undone as the connection of these authors with their social world and their time is expanded. Through their creations, authors unveil alliances and relationships with their predecessors, that is, the affiliations that will determine the writer's links with authors of the past. Traces of writings reveal the paths of their journey and the bonds that unite them in a specific tribe. By managing their places in the literary field, writers become part of a certain discursive, affective, aesthetic community, and depending on their position in the intellectual field they also start to manage their actions in the chosen tribe. Historical fiction, autobiography and/or autofiction undo the boundaries between fiction/history; reality/imagination; biography/autobiography; fiction/non-fiction. Edmund White dialogues with the narratives of David Leavitt, Bernardo Carvalho and Bruce Chatwin, regarding the spiritual relationships shared by a certain community, as Maingueneau indicated.

A worldly-textual community implies the inscription of the subject of the enunciation in a discourse in which it deconstructs itself while deconstructing what it enunciates. It is possible to analyze the authors out of the irreducible Platonic dichotomy: whether we call the migrant writers postmodern, post-structuralist, post-colonial or whatever the prefix "post" means, their reunion in a tribe does not mean amalgamation. The writer lives in an unstable place, which Maingueneau (2001, p. 29-43) called "paratopia": an impossible form of belonging, that is, of escaping from a place. That's what makes a writer's admiration for predecessors not an example to be followed, as in a manual, instead, it is an image of the author's position in the literary field: "If I admire these

writers, it is not to try to imitate them or follow the paths they have traced, but because they are examples of what it is possible to do by taking their own, divergent path, at odds with the consensus of their time” (CARVALHO, *apud* PELLANDA, 2010, p. 32, our translation).

Fictions of tribe are defined by their interactions, injunctions and disjunctions that make distances shorter and the contemporary a form of dialogue with the past. The migrant community is essentially established by intertextual incursions that articulate common points shared by their representatives. If literary enunciation represents the world and is part of it, since it creates and lives through it, there is no literature out of a certain context. This is not simply an outside of which literature would be a kind of inside. There is transit where meaning is constantly built. Reading is a kind of travel, a way of producing meanings, but the senses are misleading. Travelers can discover themselves or get lost, as they mislead or misinterpret the signs. The cultural traveler is an example of our migrant writers, as he lives the experience of the present by scanning the body of the cities from the point of view of history and culture. He is not a *dilettant* or a *flâneur*, he is an individual whose writing project is, in many cases, political.

So, it makes sense to call these narratives and authors as creators of a series of “textual policies”. Through them, no pamphlet engagement is allowed in the process of literary enunciation: it is an activity evidenced through the discourse itself as a way of understanding and recreating history, as well as the world and the political-economic processes that shape the present and whose nomenclatures can be verified under the names of globalization, multiculturalism, minority discourses, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, liquid modernity, post-autonomy, among many other complementary conceptions.

Our small community of authors, as exemplified in the narratives here exposed, observe the nineteenth century as a horizon to the twentieth century. On the one hand, they oscillate between the criticism of the romantic project and its emphasis on the exceptionality of the figure of the creative subject; on the other hand, the realistic project bridges the gap between fictional discourse and society. Obviously, this schematic and reductive division is far from giving answers to the real questions. In the case of Chatwin, Carvalho, White and Leavitt, disbelief regarding romantic and realistic projects paradoxically evoke some paradigms that structure their narratives. From a certain perspective, the four authors understand the creation process as eminently based on aesthetics, which is obviously another vague statement. When they apparently isolate themselves in autofiction and seem to move their literature away from the political-engaged field, centering it on the process of an aesthetic and/or metafictional elaboration, consequently they

unveil some structures of the discourse as a play in which the forgotten, different, minorities and all kinds of marginal subjects can escape from the hegemonic discourses. The play of differences in the discourse points to the weaknesses and limits of memory that undermines realism in several moments. For example, in *O filho da mãe*, Bernardo Carvalho chooses the voice of a dominantly heterodiegetic narrator. His chronotope is a contemporary Chechnya in conflict with a decadent, oppressive and violent post-communist Russia. However, the set of references that feed the readers also lead them to the 19th century – to the literature of the russians Mikhail Lermontov (10/15/1814 – 7/27/1841) and Anton Pavilovitch Tchékov (29/01/1860 – 15/07/1904); to the war conflicts between russians and chechens, besides the references to Nikolai Gogol and Fiódor Dostoiévski, to name a few examples – that continues with a series of intertextual and interdisciplinary quotations related to Russian Chechen history in the 20th century.

Focusing the love story of two young homosexuals, protagonists of the novel, both victimized by the horror of war and oppression, *O filho da mãe* inserts us in the political field in which interpersonal relationships and human condition are key aspects of the war, as well as realistic principles whose postulates Carvalho deconstructs, for example, when he intertwines fictional elements and historical facts. A prose poem by Anna Akhmátova, from the book *Réquiem* (poems, 1935–1940), from 1957, thus, is not simply quoted in the novel, but it also illustrates a significant passage in which Lúlia Stepánova, a classmate of Marina Bóndareva – both women hadn't seen each other for 40 years and are reunited in the present of the narrative due to the drama of the young soldiers sent by the Russian government to fight in the Second Chechnya War – recalls the story of her grandmother, who supposedly met Anna Akhmátova at the Kresty prison door and inspired the poem “In place of a preface”, which we transcribe below:

In the terrible years of léjovshtchina, I spent seventeen months lining up in front of Leningrad prisons. One day, someone “recognized me”. Then, a woman with livid lips who, of course, had never heard of my name, came out of that torpor in which we always stayed and, speaking close to my ear (there we all just spoke in a whisper), asked me:

- And that, can you describe?

And I answered:

- I can.

Then, something like a smile appeared in what had once been his face (AKHMÁTOVA, 2018, p. 87, our translation).

The freedom with which Carvalho inserts fictional elements in the plot disregards the pretense of veracity that guides a dogmatic realistic paradigm. The novelist does not classify his work as a portrait of reality, a pure and simple representation of the historical events. The innumerable intertextual relations are not mere quotes or references: they give account of a relevant textual community in dialogues with the world. As a narrative about mothers who desperately try to save their children or as a story about women unidentified with maternal love, women's presence, besides its fundamental role to the development of the plot, directs us to a certain kind of reading. The names of the two central female characters themselves evoke two writers who had their lives marked by personal tragedies, during the purges of the Stalin era: Anna Akhmátova (06/23/1889 – 03/05/1966) and Marina Tzvétaïeva (08/10/1892 – 08/31/1941). Both would only meet in 1940, but in 1916, a year before the Russian Revolution, Tzvétaïeva had already dedicated some poems to Akhmátova. Tzvétaïeva strongly opposed the Bolshevik Revolution and, like Akhmátova, endured a life of misery and personal tragedies. By focusing on the Second Chechen War as a historical backdrop for the drama of women and mothers, Carvalho rehabilitates, even without rejecting a realistic kind of narration that could fall back on the portrait, the story of those two ostracized writers and the Russian totalitarianism in the first half of the 20th century.

Returning to the two protagonists of *O filho da mãe*, both allegorize human condition in the face of wars and dictatorships. The novel opens many possibilities of reading, among which I highlight the individual drama and the social narrative. Everything leads us to believe in a story of universal and contemporary contours, since the threat to the young boys Ruslan and Andrei are due to xenophobia – Ruslan is Chechen and Andrei is Russian – as well as to the fact that both are homosexuals. Therefore, another story can be outlined, about the love between the two boys in a world that treats them doubly as outcasts.

In the mold of the 19th century traveling fictionists and/or exiled, the narrative of these four writers is increasingly interconnected with the past. The space-time of this small migrant community of authors forwards us to certain models of writing that not by coincidence are centered in Joseph Conrad (12/3/1857 – 8/3/1924) and Henry James (4/15/1843 – 28/02/1916), two emblematic evocations, in addition to the already mentioned Russian poets and Stephen Crane, important references to the 20th century literature. Conrad was born in Poland, having obtained British nationality in 1884. James was an American settled in England, having died in London.

In Edmund White's *Hotel de Dream*, Conrad and James are both representative characters in the plot centered on the American writer Stephen Crane. James is introduced to the reader in

chapter five, in a supposed visit to Stephen Crane, who was passing through England on his way to Germany, for a health treatment. James writes to Crane a note full of terms in French and whose language Crane's wife, Cora, considers "difficult to diagram mentally, and the quotes embracing common words somewhat sinistre". (WHITE, 2010, p. 35, our translation). The visit fictionalized in Chapter 5 is a linguistic torture for Cora, since James' speech was marked by an artificial search for the right word, and the stylistic rigor of James was only matched by his contempt for the opinions of Crane's wife. White represents James's linguistic pride, ironically, as a kind of criticism of a particular model of writer, since he was considered the center of the American fictional canon of the late 19th century. In this chapter, White's statement reveals James' mannerisms and his affectation in the speech, accused by the omniscient narrator who creates an image of a snobbish and pedantic James. A self-exiled writer in Europe, and a fetish for authors who sought to rescue him fictionally (like Colm Tóibín, in *The master*), James is a counterpoint to the frank and direct Joseph Conrad, whose image is also constructed during a supposed visit to Crane. Conrad is described by the narrator as follows: "He is poor, as well as a gentleman, and proud. Foreigner (Conrad was born in Poland as Józef Teodor Nałęcz Korzeniowski) who wrote in a foreign language, he was considered an esthete of the English language, although his speech did not correspond to the primacy of his writing: "[...] Stevie realized that Conrad's literary English, so strangely fluent and nuanced and threatening on the page, was an act of will, with no guarantee of ease of conversation "(WHITE, 2010, p. 61).

If Henry James is evoked by Edmund White (also by David Leavitt, as we will see later) as a paradigm, Conrad is a fundamental horizon of Reading in Bernardo Carvalho and Bruce Chatwin. 's prose Conrad's emblematic *Heart of darkness* crystallized a model of fictional narrative and critical-political discourse; artistic writing and text of denunciation, recurring elements in Bernardo Carvalho's *Nove noites* and *Mongólia*. In a certain perspective, the influence of Conrad can also be observed in *O sol se põe em São Paulo* and in *O filho da mãe*, where the Chechnya war takes on tragic contours. Conrad's influence can be seen in the prose of Bruce Chatwin, especially in *The viceroy of Ouidah* (1998). Chatwin and Carvalho's characters are embroiled in a journey into the heart of darkness of a world where they cannot find a way out. The atmosphere of Chatwin's novel his novel is concentrated on the colonial past and the atrocities of the slave trade; in Carvalho's *O filho da mãe*, there is a search in the present for the origins of the totalitarian bias identified with the traumatic past that hovers over contemporaneity as a shadow. The structure of the novel mixes points of view – guilty mothers, tyrannical fathers, children in search for their origin

and their identity. *O filho da mãe* is a novel about a journey across the struggling frontiers of the nation. Nation, nationality and identity carry a negativity we can trace back to the theoretical and political constructions of the 19th century. Hence Carvalho's novel establishes some fragile connections with the ideas of 19th century Brazil. The nation in Carvalho will be progressively erased from the narrative, only remembered in short moments, as the exchange of passports and identities between Ruslan and Andrei, both physically similar.

In *O filho da mãe*, traveling is closely associated with mobility, but also with closure. Moving around a country in dangerous times is the terror of the traveler. Crossing borders is similar to escape from death, mainly in geographical areas where crossing the borders is hardly an easy task. These are tragic times when lives don't matter and fiction represents the unrepresented: the hopeless, the fugitives, the homeless are characters Lucia Helena called "shipwrecked people of hope"; people who got stuck in the swamp of peripheral capitalism represented by the sandy language of the contemporary novel: "something unfaithful to the narrator and the reader, as meaning is not clear at all, and consequently they are exposed to the rhizomatic form of the richer and denser processing of meaning that spreads without teleology or purpose, in the end pointing out the closure of meaning itself" (HELENA, 2012, p. 113, our translation). These are "fictions of unrest", migrant fictions, disenchanted narratives with a tragic look and the perception that something is out of order, crying out for an existential project, a planetary ethics, a global solidarity or any other names we can choose.

Lucia Helena's nautical metaphor helps us understand that the migrant fictions presuppose a journey, but the journey brings the risk of shipwreck "along the weaving of an imaginary that sees shipwreck and loneliness as two icons of a network that gives access to concepts of culture, identity and the state, especially in the West" (HELENA, 2012, p. 28). This network can bring authors together, inserting them in the cultural and political structures materialized through the representation of the journey, by means of travelers' reports fictionalized in the internal economy of the migrant fictions. In a world in which loneliness and the struggle for the expression of individuals are menaced by wars and excluding policies, our bodies should be the ultimate space of freedom, although exposition to dangers, to violence and death is the actual situation of those who, as Andrei and Ruslin in *O filho da mãe*, can only recognize solidarity in another threatened body:



It is possible that, for the pickpocket, everything is unconscious when he sees the recruit with his eyes closed and, like him, also imagines and desires. You may not realize that you ended up associating sex with ruins and risk, forcing you to discover it in the midst of a war, and to search for it, the ruins, whenever you find someone, for having been obliged to recognize in them the comforting setting of the home where comfort is no longer possible. When there is nothing else, there is still sex and war. Sex and war are what men have in common, rich or poor, educated or not. Sex and war are not acquired. The idea of a vulnerability greater than yours intensifies your love. For Andrei, on the contrary, the silent euphoria comes from the discovery and strangeness, from the novelty of intuiting that, somehow, in the midst of what is left of the lost world around him, he shares the affective memory of a man to his side. And that is not to be alone. The thief's hard cock assures him of his own desire. The war haunts them. As a souvenir for the thief, who needs to escape the past, and as a threat to the recruit, who tries to avoid the future. For an instant, they are together in the present (CARVALHO, 2009, p. 139, our translation).

This passage describes the moment when the abandoned bodies can find solidarity and rest only in sex. The war is the counterpart to this equation, as it brings both characters together, even though in destruction. There is a sense of a momentary abandonment of history, something close to the idea of F. W. Nietzsche regarding happiness, understood in Carvalho's novel as a flashlight in the dark, a possibility of breathing for those who cannot breathe.

The strained relationship between past and what will come next makes the characters Ruslan and Andrei shift the focus of their actions to the present: thus, there is journey, and journey requires experience and movement – walking, fighting, migrating, crossing borders, fleeing. Those are transitional possibilities of experiencing happiness. The migrant community, metaphorically speaking, understands survival as a translation for the unknown and the perils of the journey that must be performed. Thus, these narratives trace a communion network in which the other is called to the discourse not as a center, but as a product of the circle. Through literary enunciation, not only the purely invented figures but also the writers themselves participate in this imagined narrative that does not forget at any moment of those invisible individuals with whom we can possibly come across daily. Migrant fiction is about otherness. As an example, there is the case of Edmund White meeting Bernardo Carvalho and other Brazilian writers and artists, seeing them as distinguished foreigners, notable participants in the cultural construction of a contemporary Paris:

Brazilians have contributed greatly to the cultural life of Paris – pianist-concertist Nelson Freire, journalist Bernardo Carvalho, theater actor Antonin Interlandi and editor Alexandre Rosa (the first to review books on the Internet) are just a few names that come to mind (WHITE, 2001, p. 64, our translation).

This network forms a cooperative system: White fictionalizes Joseph Conrad and Henry James; Bernardo's Carvalho dialogue with *Heart of darkness*, in *Mongolia* and *Nove noites*; David Leavitt departing from the work of Henry James to create a narrative in which a person also called David Leavitt proposes to a student to write an essay, as a ghost-writer, about *Daisy Miller*, by Henry James, in exchange for sexual favors; Bruce Chatwin undertaking in his travel narratives a critical outline of the effects of English, Portuguese and Spanish colonialism in which Conrad's novels echo; or again, Bernardo Carvalho translating Bruce Chatwin (he translated *The songlines* into Portuguese).

Migrant writers also coincide in their professions. They are journalists, translators, editors, biographers, academics, professors. They imagine the world they travel through and write about it. In their real lives they visit these places later fictionalized. They are writers in/of transit, novelists who are bissexile travelers. Their writing rites and affiliations in the literary field constitute a singular set of works characterized by a mixture of literary genders, including those not exactly appreciated by the canon. That is the case of the travel guides, that are for Leavitt and White, in fact, affective and passionate essays and reports about the cultural travelers who Wander through their imagined cities, sometimes unaware of their dilemmas, mysteries, possibilities, conflicts, dramas and tragedies.

In *Florence, a delicate case* (2002), without ever losing sight of monuments, landscapes, places, cultural and tourist centers of the ancient Italian city, David Leavitt's travel guide is a mix of fiction and historical reconstruction; of social and cultural criticism; of reflection and analysis, with striking fictional elements typical of a storyteller/chronicler who does not dismiss imagination or invention in favor of the documentary. Leavitt does not shy away from giving his impression of the city as any incidental tourist does. About the landscape of Florence, he says: "It [reality] ceases to mean something to us – or perhaps I should say that it is we who cease to mean something to reality" (LEAVITT, 2002, p. 26). The trip is not just the result of his experience: it is experience itself the reason for the trip. From his experience, Leavitt draws materials for his reflections on the relationship between art and sexuality, a binomial that permeates much of his fictional and academic work. Leavitt cites the work *The Renaissance*, by English critic Walter Pater, uncovering in Pater's speech a series of veiled allusions to sexuality, in which "a challenging time has an urgent need for spectacular gestures" and "the mere evocation of David and Jonathan or 'the Greeks' –

or even the simple mention of the word ‘Hellenic’ – awakened the possibility of a life free from punitive Victorian rigors” (LEAVITT, 2002, p. 46).

Leavitt’s “guide” is a mix of critical theory, impressionistic reading, historical recovery, philosophical and deconstructive analysis (by turning the text against itself, displacing its apparent function) that incorporates the free essay in the fictional bias. The foreign look is that of the scholar who seeks to read the signs of the city and the historical footprints left in there, and in a very particular way it enables him to observe in those places and their cultural monuments the shadows of barbarism, detected in a critical-ideological look in which the emergence of an affective Florence comes to the surface as a space where the so-called Sodomites could use to escape, in search for a safe portico of freedom. All these discoveries depend on the reader’s sympathetic gaze, of course. Likewise, the Paris presented by Edmund White will be pierced by the writer’s affections:

Perhaps the *flâneur* should turn his back on the pearly gray matrimonial Paris, the city built by Napoleon III and his sectarian, Baron Haussmann, populated by foreign millionaires, five-star hotels, three-star restaurants and embassies: a ghost town. For the real vitality of today’s Paris is found elsewhere – in Belleville and Barbés, the quartiers crowded with people where Arabs and Asians and blacks live and blend their respective cultures in new hybrids (WHITE, 2010, p. 61, our translation).

Finally, the New York of the 70’s recreated by the memory of White, in *City boy* (2010) is a kind of “autobiography of formation”:

I suppose that finally New York is a Broadway theater where one play after another, decade after decade, occupies the stage and the dressing rooms – then clears out. Each play is the biggest possible deal (sets, publicity, opening-night celebrations, stars’ names on the marquee), then it vanishes. (...) The actors are forgotten, the plays are just battered scripts showing coffee stains and missing pages. Nothing lasts in New York. The life that is lived there, however, is as intense as it gets (WHITE, 2010, p. 96).

White’s prose is another model for the migrant narratives, with its hybrid of aesthetics, irony and carnivalizing verve, explaining thus the *modus operandi* of the tribal fictions.

#### 4 Fictional and theoretical journeys

As a provisional conclusion, we propose a theoretical reflection on the term “nomad alternative”, issued by Bruce Chatwin, with which the English writer defined his narratives and hereby we extend to the set of authors and works that we shelter under the rubric of migrant fiction and tribe fictions. The connections between mobility and closure will be seen as supplementary poles in dialogue with such fictions.

In an article entitled “The nomadic alternative”, Chatwin (1996, p. 85-99) uses the classic view of history as a dialectical struggle between civilization and natural alternatives. He quotes Diogenes, the cynic (Diogenes of Sinope, Greek philosopher born in Turkey, in 404 or 412 b. C. and died *circa* 323 b. C) to show that this distinction comes from the Classical Antiquity. Diogenes stated that men huddled in cities to escape the fury of those outside their walls and it is because they are trapped in the center of those walls that they commit all sorts of atrocities against each other. This cultural primitivism guided certain emotional impulses that throughout history have led men to abandon civilization in search for a simpler life, in harmony with nature. The image of nature as a core element was dominant in Classicism (the Arcade movement in Brazil). For Chatwin, it is curious that people discontent with civilization almost always come from the cultural world and the societies that are called “civilized”. As for the defenders of civilization, Chatwin is supported by the work of Protagoras, who claimed that civic virtues are common to men in general, and democracy, one of the greatest human virtues, is actually an attempt to return to man’s intrinsic goodness (CHATWIN, 1996 , p. 85). In this clash of ideas, nomadism as a characteristic of certain peoples who wander aimlessly from place to place can be seen as a reducing vision of a certain ideal of freedom and adventure and must be supplemented by some reflections.

Chatwin needs to recover the origins of the word nomad. It is derived from Greek and Latin, meaning “to herd”. Nomadic tribes shared strict migration patterns, often determined by natural conditions such as the climate. Nomads organize themselves into clans ruled by their elders, who are responsible for the destiny of the tribe. In the beginning, there were many criteria for animal selection according to each type of pasture, and one of the most interesting characteristics of these processes is the possibility of hybridizing species. The nomad was, however, attracted by the temptations of the city and by lust, which encouraged constant displacement. In doing so, they also tried to take advantage of the civilizations they were heading for, but they rarely, if ever, destroyed any. Their view on the civilized and the view of the civilized on them are marked by preconceived

notions. When we reduce the complexity of peoples' lives to some ideological sets of values, prejudice and ignorance are the only results, Chatwin understands. As the nomads are the ones who can establish more proficuous contact with the civilizations they travel through, it seems correct and obvious to conclude that they are able to profit from these exchanges. Contemporaneity established the idea of mobility as a whole set of cultural, economic and political issues resulting from many and ceaseless displacements commonly grouped under the name of globalization.

Marc Augé (1994) proposes to think of contemporary society through an “anthropology of supermodernity” in which the discussion between the near and the distant needs to be problematized. Anthropology, he says, “deals, at present, with the question of the other” (AUGÉ, 1994, p. 22, our translation), which distinguishes it from history and other social sciences. Thus, the idea of a historical anthropology is, for Augé, at least, strange. If we think about anthropology on renewed bases we understand that time is no longer seen as a single principle of intelligibility as it was before, when it was confused with the idea of progress. Space is understood in modernity as a possibility to shrink distances between the regions of the planet. Time and space must then be considered under the category of excess specifically in the supermodernity, says Augé. These hypotheses are provocative due to their paradoxes; at the moment we discuss displacement as a kind of excess in the globalized world, we also see on the horizon that an opposite movement can also be perceived in the “clamor of particularisms” which adds to the reflection of time and space the figure of the “ego”, as Marc Augé correctly points out. This is a figure

[...] which returns, as it has been said, even in the anthropological reflection, since, in the absence of new fields of reflection, in a universe without territories and requiring theoretical inspiration, in a world without great narratives, the ethnologists, that is, certain ethnologists, after having tried to treat cultures (localized cultures, cultures à la Mauss) as texts, became only interested in ethnographic descriptions as texts [...] (AUGÉ, 1994, p. 38, our translation).

This individual – and not just the text or the ethnographic description – becomes the turning point of Anthropology. For Augé, the 21st century will be, or will continue to be, anthropological as long as its themes continue to be studied, even if under new circumstances. Literature, being neither an ethnography nor anthropology, incorporates, reflects and fictionalizes in its discourse the complexities of the time-space issues of the world, inventing some new and specific orders, one of them led by the idea of the “egofiction”. Literature fictionalizes contemporaneity as a fluid, liquid space (BAUMAN, 2005) of “selves at risk” (HASSAN, 1990), being, therefore, “fictions of

unrest” (HELENA, 2010) that outline a crowded planet full of citizens who urge for the present, and at the same time fear the astonishing acceleration of time in a fluid space where “the closing áreas are increasingly numerous in a world where everything circulates and becomes uniform” (AUGÉ, 2010, p. 8- 9).

Migrant and tribe fictions make us reflect on these paradoxes by resorting to hybridism, as we read in Chatwin, Carvalho, White and Leavitt. In their prose, we find not only a nomadic mobility among the complexities of a modernity of the promise that is frequently unreal and nor reached by most people: we also identify a planetary society in that the circulation of knowledge can stimulate us to understand the cities as complex organisms, most of the times spaces that maximize mobility and that is under the risk of cloistering. The resurgence of fundamentalisms, of the pandemics and the growth of political authoritarianism threaten the ideas of progress in supermodernity and its beliefs in speed and fluidity.

In a hyperbolic time and space with so many promises of emancipation, possibilities and dangers, the presence of a restless and at risk “I” is manifested in the figure of the lone traveler, as in the cases of the writers here studied, whose journeys express their amazement at a conflicted world in writings that call upon the tribe and make the migrant writers privileged wanderers and observers of a world that at the end will resurface in the pages of their fictional narratives.

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