

Dissident body: the representation of old age in *Ojiichan*, by Oscar Nakasato /

Corpo dissidente: a representação da velhice em 'Ojiichan', de Oscar Nakasato

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ABSTRACT

In a society that measures human value by utility, the elderly body is rendered invisible. Under a patriarchal bias, elderly women are discarded due to the supposed loss of "femininity", while old men are sidelined as soon as they cease to be seen as economic drivers or symbols of power, ironically becoming hostages to the logic of productivity that they themselves helped to institutionalize. The literary field, featuring elderly protagonists, is not immune to this, representing precisely the various layers of exclusion that segregate the elderly. Based on this, this article aims to investigate the approaches and procedures adopted in the contemporary fictional narrative of *Ojiichan*, a novel by Oscar Nakasato, regarding the theme of old age, examining how Satoshi, the novel's protagonist, embraces or subverts

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stereotypes related to senescence. This study presents a bibliographical-interpretative methodology, mobilizing an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, articulating literary contributions (Secco, 1994; Berry and Skagen, 2020), philosophical contributions (Améry, 1994; Bobbio, 1997; Cícero, 2021), and contributions from age studies (Beauvoir, 2024; Bosi, 2023). From the analysis undertaken, it is observed that the aging process of the main character is structured in dynamics of acceptance, resistance, frustration, and reinvention. This reveals the complexity of the literary representation of old age, while also highlighting the problematization of the place given to the elderly in Nakasato's novel.

KEYWORDS: Old age; Ageism; Old body; Ojiichan; Oscar Nakasato.

RESUMO

Em uma sociedade que mede o valor humano pela utilidade, o corpo velho é alvo de invisibilidade. Sob o viés patriarcal, a mulher idosa é descartada pela suposta perda de “feminilidade”, enquanto o homem velho é escanteado assim que deixa de ser visto como motor econômico ou símbolo de poder, tornando-se, ironicamente, refém da lógica de produtividade que ele mesmo ajudou a institucionalizar. O campo literário, ao trazer como protagonistas idosos, não se mantém alheio a isso, representando justamente as diversas camadas de exclusão que segregam o idoso. A partir disso, este artigo tem como objetivo investigar as abordagens e os procedimentos adotados na narrativa ficcional contemporânea de Ojiichan, romance escrito por Oscar Nakasato, no que toca à temática da velhice, averiguando-se como Satoshi, protagonista do romance, acolhe ou subverte os estereótipos relacionados à senescência. O estudo apresenta uma metodologia de natureza bibliográfica-interpretativista, mobilizando um aporte teórico interdisciplinar, articulando contribuições literárias (Secco, 1994; Berry e Skagen, 2020), filosóficas (Améry, 1994; Bobbio, 1997; Cícero, 2021) e dos estudos etários (Beauvoir, 2024; Bosi, 2023). A partir da análise empreendida, observa-se que o processo de envelhecimento do personagem principal estrutura-se em dinâmicas de aceitação, resistência, frustração e reinvenção. Revela-se, assim, a complexidade da representação literária da velhice, ao mesmo tempo que se evidencia a problematização sobre o local que é dado ao idoso no romance de Nakasato.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Velhice; Ageísmo; Corpo velho; Ojiichan; Oscar Nakasato.

1 Introduction

From the state of Paraná and grandson of Japanese immigrants, Oscar Nakasato grew up amongst voices that rarely took the spotlight. The absence of Japanese-Brazilian protagonists in fiction, an absence that influenced both his identity and craft, became a driving force in his writing. Thus, *Nihonjin* (2011) was born, the author's debut novel that follows three generations of a Japanese family living in Brazil and questions, with rigor as well as sensitivity, what it means to be Japanese-Brazilian. Woven between departures and permanences, the book earned him the 2012 Jabuti Prize in the “Best Novel” category.

Nakasato's restlessness did not cool down after that; on the contrary, it deepened and returned under a new perspective in *Ojiichan* (2024), his third novel. Like in *Nihonjin*, characters of Japanese descent are put at the center of the narrative, but the focus is shifted. Satoshi, the protagonist, has his Japanese-Brazilian condition converse, and at times collide, with the experience of being an old man. At seventy years old and pushed into mandatory retirement, he sees himself confronting the multiple facets of growing older. Nakasato's gesture is aesthetic and

political, as the narrative takes the old body away from its marginalized position and into the limelight.

In an interview with *O Globo* paper, the author, now an elderly man himself, underlines this concept: “[...] we don’t see old people as protagonists, only as secondary characters. In literature, in movies, in the arts in general. This is the reflection of a society that overvalues youth, and subsequently, undervalues old age” (Nakasato, 2024, n. p.). And, to *Folha de S. Paulo* paper, he adds: “for many years, this bothered me a lot, and the novel is a result of that” (Nakasato, 2024, n. p.). The author’s point of view does not walk alone. Studies in Social Gerontology (Kafková, 2016), anthropology (Goldenberg, 2020), philosophy (Améry, 1994; Bobbio, 1997), and cultural critique (Sontag, 1972) reproduce the same perception of old age in modern times – highlighting a scenario marked by marginalization and silencing.

As observed by Elizabeth Barry and Margery Skagen in the introduction of the novel *Literature and Aging* (2020), “there are many cultural expectations of ageing, and these are increasingly negative – the idea that old age might be venerable giving way in the cultural discourse to a litany of losses and exclusions” (p. 2). This marginalization is legitimized by explicit and tacit norms that alienate elderly people from public spaces of debate and deliberation, normalizing the association between old age, unproductivity and obsolescence under the guise of supposed tradition, “[...] attitudes that individuals have in society and that are guided by habit, by the idea that things have always been like this” (Silva, 2009, p. 405). Against this normalization, it is worth remembering, as discussed by Ecléa Bosi, the historical context of aging, as the modern idea of “being old” does not coincide with other periods’ conceptions: “old age is a social category. [...] each society experiences the biological decline of man differently” (2023, p. 79).

Thus, in the light of what Hobsbawm (2006) calls *Invented Traditions*, practices “[...] that seem to be or are considered ancient are actually quite recent, when they are not invented” (p. 9), which are legitimized by repetition and ritualization, it is noticeable that current beliefs about senescence may be read as such traditions. In this way, social productions act by reinforcing norms that frame aging in limited roles, whose primary function is to legitimize exclusion. They are reinforced by a false aura of naturalness, when, in reality, they are sustained by an invented tradition.

This process is aligned with a patriarchal logic, which, while submitting women to a double exclusion – in which misogyny is combined with ageism in order to erase their existences and

desires (Sontag, 1972) – also punishes the elderly man through structures that he himself upholds. Aligned with models of productivity that link human value to economic performance and vitality, patriarchy sidelines the older people who do not meet these potency ideals. This way, aging acts as a driver of obsolescence. Once destitute of his function as a provider, a man sees his body discarded by a structure that he himself upheld. This highlights how ruthless the logic of male domination is; it dehumanizes the individual as soon as he stops corresponding to the ideal of productivity that he once personified. It is to this conviction that the present work is subscribed.

It is of interest to us to investigate the approach and procedures adopted in the contemporary fictional narrative of *Ojichan* as it pertains to the topic of old age. With a primary focus on Satoshi's construction, we will analyze the way the character interacts with the process of getting old and to what extent he welcomes, negotiates, or subverts the traditional norms and stereotypes related to senescence. Thus, the study confronts a persistent gap in literary criticism: though the topic had developed in other areas' research agendas, the analyses that investigate this phase of existence through the lenses of literature are still quite rare – a shortage pointed over three decades ago by the still active literature professor Carmen Lucia Tindó Secco.

Beyond this introductory section, we have outlined our reading in three other segments. In the section entitled "Amidst conformity and resistance", we examine how the topic of old age initially comes up in the novel. Here, we highlight how Satoshi presents an aging process marked by a dilemma of either resisting or accepting the imposed traditions that surround senescence. The following section, entitled "Reclaiming the Self: old age as reinvention rather than rupture", presents the moment in which the character breaks away from traditional perspectives and refuses a stereotypical senior experience. The reflections and textual analysis of both sections will be sustained by an interdisciplinary study, supported by theoretical contributions from areas of knowledge that seek to investigate the meaning of senescence. Finally, in the "Final considerations", we will conclude that Satoshi's process of aging presents stages of acceptance, resistance, frustration, and reinvention, with the prevailing view that old age does not represent a conclusion, but rather a continuation.

2 Amidst conformity and resistance

When we think about old age, the first image that comes to mind is usually that of white hair and wrinkles. Thin, dried-up skin usually follows, as well as a sagging posture, limping footsteps, and sometimes, a hearing aid that allows for blurry glimpses into a world that was once clear; “as aging people, we become aliens to our bodies” (Améry, 1994, p. 127). This image is not accidental; it is the lingering cultural memory of different social groups surrounding old age, a framing that associates senescence to frailty (Cícero, 2021) and suggests – almost as a conditioned reflex – that a human being “realizes” he has gotten old as soon as these signs begin to appear. Nakasato introduces the main character in *Ojichan* precisely through the lens of this physical transition.

Having recently turned seventy, Satoshi recognizes, without denial, the transformations time had operated on his body, that “[...] leisurely painted his hair white, created cracks on his skin – especially on his forehead and in the corners of his eyes” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 21). Most interestingly, these changes do not seem to have undermined the character’s self-esteem. What does shake him is the medical recommendation that, due to his old age and health condition, he no longer eats *paçoca*. The ban distresses him and, in a line that combines humor and pain, he states that “you are heartless, Dr. Felipe, [...] this candy is half of my happiness” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 21). Here, it is notable that the character does not harbor an explicit rejection for the physical transformations of aging, experiencing the process as something biological and devoid of subjective crises.

The novel’s central conflict, therefore, is not born from internal anguish, but rather an external violence. The harmony between Satoshi and his image is broken the moment he confronts society’s gaze, full of stigma and bigotry. This transition becomes evident when the narrative points out that “a man is old when people no longer take his opinion into consideration. Satoshi understood that he was old when they cut the jaboticaba tree” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 13). This passage opens and guides the initial reading of the novel, highlighting how getting old means having to depend on the relationships Satoshi maintains and the space he occupies in life, besides revealing the silencing mechanism that strips old people of their prestige and decision-making power. When nobody listens to him, he stops participating in the choices that affect his own life. What causes the most harm is that this symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2023) comes from inside his own house. It is

exerted by his daughter Cecília, who, now widowed, decides to live with her parents, justifying her presence with the desire to care for them – especially her mother, Kimiko, who suffers from dementia. Within the caregiving rhetoric, an authoritarian tone is installed, firm and incontestable, which takes over control of the domestic routine and begins to silence her father's wishes.

The daughter's first concrete gesture, upon moving into her father's home, is the destruction of something of great symbolic value to the old man, "[...] the jaboticaba tree that he planted himself" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 17) almost thirty years before, and which has since then been taken care of and watered with love and dedication. This tree, which was part of Satoshi's memories of his grandchildren's childhoods, where they played and bonded with their grandparents, is taken down without him ever being consulted. The protagonist's daughter does not ask, does not talk, she simply decides. In this scene, Satoshi experiences extreme distress. Upon seeing the clearing where the tree once was, he "[...] felt dizzy and had to lean his hand against the wall" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 17). Cecília, however, appears unsympathetic to her father's pain, proudly describing to him the gesture that, to him, represents great loss and suffering: "without looking at her father, she said, see, tōchan? I had the jaboticaba tree cut down. But how? Who told her she could cut down the tree? She continued, excited, how long has it been since anybody climbed it, right, tōchan?!" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 17). Her lively posture violently contrasts with Satoshi's growing, silent feelings of indignation and powerlessness. He watches, without saying a word, as his wishes are disregarded and something within his own home, which symbolized an essential part of his identity, is destroyed. After all, gardening had always been one of his greatest passions.

After that, the old man walked "[...] to the empty space that remained, put his foot over the stump. The ten centimeters that were left of the jaboticaba tree. His daughter did not comprehend the meaning of that gesture" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 18). The only comfort found by the protagonist in view of the situation is provided by his pet, a dog named Peri, who "[...] seemed to understand his frustration. At times, he would stare into the same emptiness the man was staring at; other times, he would lift his gaze towards him" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 18). Invisible to human eyes, it is ironic that the only being who notices how Satoshi is feeling is somebody equally incapable of communicating its own frustrations to the outside world. The representation of Satoshi's relationship with the dog highlights a capacity for empathy that transcends verbal language. The animal, in its simplicity, offers a way of understanding and acceptance that humans, in their complexity, often fail to provide.

The violence perpetrated by Cecília intensifies the moment the elderly man enters the other rooms in the house:

The surprises wouldn't stop. When Satoshi entered the dining room, he saw the new table, the new chairs, a shine that hadn't come from varnishing – because he had sanded the old table himself, had applied the thick, viscous liquid over it, and it had never shined like that, even when it was new. [...] Cecília, smiling, proud of the furniture she'd bought, said, see how pretty, tōchan? And began to explain that she had bought those cushioned chairs because nobody used zabutons anymore. It's a lot softer than zabutons, she said, and tōchan won't have any ass pains whatsoever. But he had never felt any pain in his ass when he sat down – where had Cecília gotten that preposterous idea? [...] He walked closer, ran his hand over the table, the surface so smooth and cold that it made him shudder (Nakasato, 2024, p. 19).

Despite feeling “[...] ridiculous, a foreigner” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 20) inside his own home, it is noticeable how Satoshi's silence persists in the face of his daughter's actions. Between the two, a genuine dialogue in which the father is able to openly share his perspective or directly express his emotions over the incident is never established. His inner life is solely revealed through the impressions and reflections mediated by the narrator, which allows us to subtly glimpse into the intimate dimension of his pain. This silence, however, must not be interpreted as an act of conforming to Cecília's impositions, but rather as an expression of the marginalization to which the old man is subjected to exclusively because of his old age. The daughter interrupts his life, replaces warmth with packaged certainties, and, in that, strips him of his right to desire and dream for himself.

Instead of taking into account what he has to say or considering his needs, we witness the daughter's presumption; Cecília believes that she, alone, knows what is best for her father. Thus, Satoshi's horizons narrow, his will is annulled, as if being in possession of an old body is enough to disempower him from desiring and thinking for himself. Satoshi's experiences illustrate the warning given by Ecléa Bosi (2023) about how the industrial paradigm has constricted the ways through which knowledge and customs are passed on. It is as if all that the character has created throughout his life – his history, experiences and memories – have lost all of their value. Instead of protecting this inheritance, Cecília opts for discarding it in the name of a logic that only favors the new:

Industrial societies are cruel to elderliness. In more stable societies, an elderly man might begin constructing a new house or planting a new garden, preparing the flowerbeds and sowing the seeds. His son will continue the work. When historical shifts accelerate and society begins to extract its energy from class divides, creating a series of ruptures in the relationship between men and men's relationship to nature, all sense of continuity is plucked from our work. Tomorrow, they will destroy all that we have built today. Simone de Beauvoir

writes in her novel about old age: 'The trees an old man plants will be felled. Almost everywhere, the family unit has been destroyed. Small companies are either absorbed by monopolies or relocated. The son will not recommence the father, and the father knows this. When he is gone, the estate will be abandoned, the inventory will be sold, the business will be liquidated. The things he accomplished which gave his life meaning are as endangered as he is (p. 79-80).

The aggressions won't stop outside of the home environment. During his seventieth birthday, Satoshi is congratulated by his coworkers, especially the younger ones, who, in a celebratory tone, affirm that retirement will be his true birthday gift: "retirement, Satoshi! That's the gift! And what a gift!" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 22). To them, there would be nothing more appealing, since they seem to believe that, in old age, continuing to work does not make any sense (Secco, 1994). What the character's coworkers don't realize is that he does not share in that joyous feeling; in fact, "retirement arrived without warning and settled like a guest who feels much at home. Even though he knew that it would come, Satoshi hadn't prepared himself" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 26). To the old man, retirement is something being forced upon him, an uninvited guest who does not merely visit, but "settles", removing the idea of choice or active invitation on the part of the protagonist.

Satoshi wants to keep working and cannot understand why he has to stop doing something he loves just because of his age. Feeling like the space in which action happens, rather than the one who executes it, the elderly man tries everything in order to keep his job:

Satoshi looked for Professor Maria Eugênia da Rocha Tavares, head of the Education Center, to talk about the possibility of continuing to work as a state professor, though he was aware of the norms and knew that at seventy, retirement was mandatory. He carried a folder with numerous documents, as well as a copy of the e-mail he'd received informing him of his age-mandated termination. He was still hopeful that there would be some sort of loophole in the law that would allow him to keep teaching at the school. (Nakasato, 2024, p. 31)

The character's behavior works as a crack in the narrative, breaking away from the passivity presented at the beginning of the novel and exposing the ageist logic that seeks to annul Satoshi's autonomy. This shows us that, even in the face of adversity, the elderly man still refuses to allow others to discard his individuality; thus, not allowing them to determine his value and choices (Améry, 1994). Unfortunately, Satoshi's attitude has no effect, as the head of the Education Center only tells him to "go rest, Professor Satoshi, you have already done enough for the school!"

(Nakasato, 2024, p. 38). After this incident, Satoshi's colleagues decide to throw him a farewell party in an attempt to express their affection and recognize the gap his absence will bring. However, this considerate gesture is contrasted with the abrupt, violent nature of the termination imposed by the institution. The professor is not even granted the opportunity to say goodbye to the school environment or to collect his personal belongings. Such experience is similar to that of an eviction, transmitting the feeling that his presence has become irrelevant to the school, as if, per the institution's logic, the old is obliged to make space for the new:

When he was alone, Satoshi realized that the little locker door that had belonged to him for so many years, a door that gave him access to two shelves for his books, his folders and his erasers, had somebody else's name on it. LUCAS MACHADO. It was his replacement. Satoshi had met him two days ago, when he came to talk to the principal and familiarize himself with the school. He was very young, tall, with a confident walk and a confident voice. It's so nice to meet you, he said upon greeting him, you are a legend! Satoshi shook his replacement's hand, and the young man looked at him with the emblematic arrogance young people often wore. On the door, the letters were in Arial Black, large, on a paper carefully attached with transparent adhesive tape. There was no doubt that those two shelves no longer belonged to him. Satoshi approached the locker, opened the door. The shelves were empty. The paper on which he had printed his class schedules, which he had attached to the inside of the door, had been removed. He looked around and saw an old cardboard box on the floor, in the corner of the room, with his name written on it with a permanent marker on bond paper.

[...] Satoshi did not open the cardboard box to check if everything that belonged to him was there. He left without looking back, closing the door carefully to not make noise, fervently hoping not to meet anyone on the way to the parking lot (Nakasato, 2024, p. 43-44).

The choice of a discreet exit, driven by the desire not to meet anyone, carries a tone of weariness and detachment, almost like someone who no longer has the strength to confront anyone. Thus, one perceives that the protagonist little by little gives way to a feeling of resignation, accepting, without fighting, what is imposed upon him. Nakasato's narrative becomes even more complex when Satoshi's daughter suffers a heart attack and passes away, for "Cecília had mortgaged the house in which they lived to pay a debt of her son without consulting her father" (Nakasato, 2024, p. 58), and now the elderly man finds himself forced to look for a new place to live. This situation arouses the indignation of the eldest son who lives in Japan, who, on the phone, expresses outrage both at the attitude of his nephew and that of his deceased sister, stating that he would like to return to the country to assume the care of his parents:

[...] Roberto picked up the phone again and told his father he would return to Brazil. Tōchan, he sobbed, it is my duty to take care of tōchan and kāchan. **He recalled the Japanese tradition that the care of elderly parents falls under the responsibility of the eldest son.** And now the responsibility had increased, for he had become the only son. He said it all in a rush, with a choked voice. Then he remained silent for a few moments.

“But how can I return, tōchan?” He explained that during the economic crisis of 2008, he and his wife had to accept a salary reduction to keep working. At the beginning of 2009, Rosângela lost her job, and they needed to use their savings. The companies cut the zangyōs, and many workers were dismissed (Nakasato, 2024, p. 59, our emphasis).

The passage, marked by a strong sentimental charge, intensely reveals an extremely complex representation of the concept of old age. As previously stated, “[...] the man never lives in a natural state; in his old age, as at any age, his status is imposed upon him by the society to which he belongs” (Beauvoir, [1970] 2024, p. 19). Thus, just as the values and conceptions associated with this stage of life are shaped by cultural and social circumstances, geographical issues also influence this process of construction. The narrative highlights the issue by exploring the differences in family care for elderly parents. Through the construction of the plot, we perceive how the narrative voice attributes distinct roles to the characters according to the cultural context. In the representation of Japan, the narrative attributes to the male children, especially the firstborns, the function of caregivers. In the Brazilian setting, however, driven by a patriarchal logic, the writing shifts this burden to the daughters, especially those who remain single, as is the case for Cecília, as if caring for elderly parents were an intrinsically feminine duty.

After the conversation with his son ended, Satoshi felt misunderstood and little welcomed. Roberto believed that his father had called moved by the weight of age, as if he were asking for care for the old age that had arrived. But the call was not born from the need of care, but rather from a concrete urgency. What Satoshi wished, without having the courage to say directly, was that his son would offer him the apartment he kept rented out in Brazil. Although there was affection in the son’s gesture, there was no true listening. The novel’s protagonist needs a home, a space of his own that would welcome him, not promises of protection: “when he decided to call his son, he expected to hear from him that he would ask the tenant of his apartment to vacate it so that his parents could live there. Roberto made no reference to the property, and Satoshi did not bring up the subject” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 60). Upon hanging up the phone, “[...] Satoshi felt himself seated on a chair suspended in the air. Around the chair, an infinite space, a void” (Nakasato, 2024, p.

60). It is with this feeling of helplessness, of being bound to something unstable or unreal, of inhabiting an infinite and empty space around him, that Satoshi embarks on the search for a new home.

3 Reclaiming the Self: old age as reinvention rather than rupture

The Arvoredo condominium is the new place Satoshi chooses to reestablish himself in, however, this is not that simple to do. When carrying out the move, the elderly man “[...] had to get rid of everything that did not fit in the apartment. First the heavy dark mahogany dresser, a family heirloom from his wife, where duvets, blankets, and pillows were stored” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 63). Although they are only physical goods, one can see that they carry a value that goes beyond matter, for they are objects that integrate the life trajectory of the elderly man and his family. At the same time, Satoshi receives the news that, in his new housing, only small dogs are accepted.

Therefore, he decides to find a new family for Peri, the little dog that he loved so much and who was, in many ways, the only member of the family – and even of society – capable of perceiving his frustrations. Overcome by a great apathy, he accepts the imposed conditions without fighting, resigning himself in the face of loss: “maybe it really was better for Peri to have another owner, someone who lived in a house” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 67). The owner took the animal to “Esperança, a shelter maintained by a non-governmental organization” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 67), and thus, he said goodbye to his friend of so many years.

Satoshi’s days become increasingly lonely, for, although he still has the company of his wife, her dementia prevents her from understanding what is happening around her. Immersed in this solitude that runs through his being, and trapped in a routine dedicated only to caring for his companion, the character ends up developing the habit of observing, through the window of his apartment, the life that unfolds in the condominium. Soon in his first observations, his attention is drawn to the presence of a nearby playground, where he often saw an elderly man reading:

The distance did not allow Satoshi to make out the man, but he seemed to be someone of advanced age, perhaps older than himself. He was thin and always wore a grayish T-shirt and shorts and sandals. He imagined him a widower and lonely. A man who sought companionship in books (Nakasato, 2024, p. 74).

Over time, this gesture of investigation transforms into an almost daily ritual, until the constant figure of this reader comes to have for Satoshi not only a familiar face, but also a name: “the man who read books sitting on the bench under the sibipiruna was a retired journalist and his name was Altair Maluf. Satoshi met him in the elevator of the Quaresmeira tower. They greeted each other in a protocol manner, and Satoshi watched the other press the button for the fifteenth floor” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 83). However, what in fact brings the character closer to the figure of the reader is the perception that “in the condominium, there was a reasonable number of elderly people, but most went out little from their apartments” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 83). At that moment, he recognizes that this is also his situation. Therefore, he decides that he wishes to make new friends:

[...] that is why he went down to the courtyard on a Tuesday when he saw Altair under the sibipiruna. He sat down next to the man and introduced himself: “I am a retired professor looking for something to do when I am not taking care of my wife.” Altair smiled, seeming to cheer up. He closed the book and carefully placed it on the bench to talk. The title caught Satoshi’s attention: *Dois irmãos* (The brothers). I am rereading it, said the man, noticing the curiosity (Nakasato, 2024, p. 83).

It is during this conversation that Altair reveals to Satoshi his love for literature and shows that, contrary to what he had imagined, he does not read only to fill an inner void, but rather for pleasure. He also dispels another mistaken impression of Satoshi’s, by telling him that he is married and maintains a good relationship with his wife, Anelise. From that moment on, a friendship is born and Altair presents to Satoshi a new way of understanding old age, not as rupture, but as a continuation of adult life, a time in which it is still possible to discover new interests and cultivate new tastes. Thus, the elderly man discovers the pleasure of reading and opens himself up to the literary universe. He and Altair then begin to meet frequently to talk about Brazilian works, meetings that little by little take the form of a private reading club, made just for the two of them: “Raduan Nassar, he read on the cover. I have never heard that name, he murmured. Altair remained silent. Satoshi opened the book” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 105) and “[...] began to read the first chapter” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 105). The way in which the literary production develops echoes a perspective that Norberto Bobbio presents in some of his reflections. In his essays, the scholar insists on the notion that the possibility of learning is continuously renewed; thus, “it is never too late to learn” (1997, p. 8). Therefore, old age, like any other phase of existence, should not be understood as a limit, but as an opportunity to continue discovering, learning, and living new experiences.

Altair is not the only one with whom Satoshi builds a friendship, he also gets close to D. Estela, his window neighbour. Satoshi vents to the lady, telling another character in the novel for the first time “[...] about the great changes in his life after retirement – the death of his daughter and the move to the apartment” (Nakasato, 2024, p.109). The elderly woman also shares her anxieties with the man. More explosive than the protagonist, she does not hide the hardships she faces and denounces loudly and clearly the marginalization she faces, touching upon a point in the aging process that Satoshi never mentions, death:

Let's be realistic, she said, what future, Mr. Satoshi? What she did was adapt to the conditions imposed by old age. She liked living alone, for no one disturbed her, told her what to do, how she should behave. The only reason she did not have greater autonomy was because her health was not the same as when she was young. [...] She smiled, when I get older, Mr. Satoshi, I will buy one of those chairs and take a bath sitting down. Then she wiped the smile from her face and said that getting old was awful. It seemed that she was going down a hill, and there was no longer any way to go up... or even to stop going down. Her heart was not in the best shape either. [...] She feared dying alone and spending days without anyone knowing of her death, giving off a bad smell. Precisely she, who liked to always smell good. Her idea was to hang, every morning, a little green handkerchief on the doorknob of the living room window and remove it before nightfall. Satoshi would be the window inspector. If during the night he still saw the handkerchief or noticed its absence during the day, he should go to her apartment to see what had happened (Nakasato, 2024, p. 109-110).

The experience of Satoshi and D. Estela is constructed in a divergent manner within the text, showing how the narrative inscribes the aging process as a heterogeneous process. Although both elderly individuals suffer from the marginalization imposed by a traditional concept of old age, this does not mean that the two characters face it in the same way. Each one experiences this stage of life in a singular manner. Satoshi is quieter and more reserved, reflecting about his own old age more internally than externally. D. Estela, on the other hand, externalizes her anxieties and vehemently argues her indignation, ultimately assuming old age as the arrival of the end of life. Her open way of positioning herself resonates with the perspective that “[...] the old man realizes that he is going down the staircase of life step by step and, however small that step may be, he knows not only that there is no turning back but also that the number of steps ahead of him is always smaller (Lafer, 1997, p. 28). Painfully, what happens is precisely what the lady so feared. D. Estela passes away in her sleep, and Satoshi is the only one by her side, since the elderly lady had no children or grandchildren to turn to:

So he took the key to her apartment and went there, almost running. When he inserted the key into the lock, he realized his heart was racing. [...] He walked cautiously to the bedroom, which had the door ajar. She was in bed, lying on her back, right in the center. Her countenance was peaceful, she seemed asleep. Satoshi called her softly. Then he put his finger on her wrist, followed by the palm of his hand over her chest. She was dead (Nakasato, 2024, p. 147).

After so many twists and turns in his life and, above all, after the loss of his friend, Satoshi decides to return to the shelter where he had left his former pet. Upon arriving, he is received by Douglas, the person in charge of the place. The dog Peri [...] recognized his former owner immediately. He approached, wagging his tail and raising his paws on the gate, wanting to cross it with his euphoria. A dog does not forget its owner, said Douglas” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 160). Satoshi states that he had gone to the place only to visit and find out how his old friend was doing, but, at that instant, he realizes that he could not abandon him once again. Fearful because of the condominium rules regarding medium-sized dogs, the elderly man is reassured by the shelter worker, who shows him [...] on the internet the laws that protect the right of the condominium resident to have his pet” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 162). Thus, Satoshi decides to take Peri with him to the apartment. The other condominium residents were not happy with the character’s attitude, claiming that they were even [...] gathering signatures to expel Peri from the condominium” (Nakasato, 2024, p. 163).

However, the condominium manager reassured the elderly man by stating that the prohibition of the animal had no legal support, thus allowing him to stay with his companion. The abandonment and the subsequent readoption of Peri cannot be understood merely as a practical choice; this gesture reveals, more deeply, significant aspects of the aging process experienced by Satoshi. By deciding to give up the animal, the narrative denounces the internalization, on the part of the character, of a stereotyped view of old age, a conception that associates this stage of life with the exhaustion of future possibilities (Améry, 1994), as if, after the peak of existence, only decline remained. In this act, an implicit acceptance of a traditional belief manifests itself that links aging to the dissolution of affective bonds and to the weakening of interpersonal ties.

Senescence is, thus, represented as a time of farewells, marked less by continuity than by ruptures, in which the proximity of death would seem to make the maintenance of relationships and the projection of new meanings for life unviable. However, upon returning to the shelter and deciding to take Peri back home, the character performs a final movement of reconciliation with

himself. It is not merely a matter of recovering the animal, but of recovering his own vitality, his memory, the Self itself. The elderly man understands that he does not need to give up essential parts of his life just because he is aging, realizing that this process does not need to be lived as depletion, but as a space of reconstruction and new possibilities, and not as an end.

Final considerations

This article sought to analyze how the theme of senescence appears in the novel *Ojiichan*, by Oscar Nakasato. To this end, the approaches and procedures adopted by the author were considered, in addition to investigating how Satoshi, the main character of the work, relates to the aging process. With the close analysis of the novel, it was possible to perceive that the character's senescence process is organized in movements of acceptance, resistance, frustration and reinvention. At the beginning of the narrative, Satoshi occupies a silenced position both in public and private spaces, suffering constant violence from his own daughter and his coworkers solely for being an aged man. The elderly man becomes aware of this condition and, from the very first moment he perceives it, he feels indignant. His voice is not heard and the other characters show no interest in knowing his opinion; it is as if Satoshi did not exist, since others make decisions for him. Old age places him in the position of someone who can no longer want, and in the face of this exclusion, Satoshi tries to externalize his frustration, but ends up sidelined. Therefore, the effort to keep his job is denied to him only because he is seventy years old. His voice continues to be disregarded and the struggle he undertakes proves fragile.

This moment of failure, far from reducing the elderly man to impotence, becomes a turning point in the story. Frustration makes room for provisional acceptance, which, at first glance, could be mistaken for conformism. However, this acceptance transforms into critical awareness from the moment when, isolated, he begins to observe his neighbourhood and engage in deep reflections. At that moment, he realizes he does not share the logic of ageism and, based on this recognition, affirms old age as a legitimate space of existence. Satoshi then comes to understand his aging process as a continuity of adult life, a time to create bonds and explore new tastes. One perceives that old age in the work is narrated as a plural and singularized stage, questioning the place given to the elderly person's memory. The plot, thus, does not follow a straight line, but organizes itself

in movements of comings and goings, until Satoshi finds and recovers his aged Self, revealing the complexity of the senescence experience. In the end, the work breaks away from the traditional conception that links aging to decline, reconstructing it as a vital force, a space of transformation and resignification of existence. Old age is not narrated as closure, but as openness to the hereafter, a time still permeated by desire, creation and reinvention of the self.

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