



SENHORAS DOS SEUS DESTINOS: The Women Writing “The New Brazilian Literature”

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Dizem por aí que a persistência vence sempre. E... as mulheres possuem muito combustível...

Claribalte Passos, ‘A posição da mulher na literatura moderna’, *Vanguarda*, Fev. 1947, sp.

In 1994, in response to the publication of Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon*, the Brazilian magazine *Veja* conducted a survey of (male) Brazilian intellectuals to discover which gems constituted the Brazilian literary canon.² 150 titles were mentioned in the article but only four of them were by women writers and two of them by the same woman: Clarice Lispector. Regina Dalcastagnè’s research project at the University of Brasília confirmed that between 1990 and 2004, women made up 30% of the writers published by major Brazilian publishing companies, and that 40% of the characters were female; their occupations ranging between “dona de casa” (the most frequent, at 25%) and “escritora” (the least frequent, at 3.2%).³

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² Darlene Sadlier, ‘Theory and Pedagogy in the Brazilian Northeast’, in *Brazilian Feminisms*, eds. Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira and Judith Still, *The University of Nottingham Monographs in the Humanities* XII, 1999, pp. 163-72.

³ The results of this fascinating survey can be found in Regina Dalcastagnè, ‘A personagem do romance brasileiro contemporâneo (1990-2004)’, *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea* 26 (2005), pp. 13-71, and also online at <http://www.crimic.paris-sorbonne.fr/actes/vf/dalcastagne.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2009).

In an interview in 1979, Nélida Piñon showed her disappointment and awareness of the situation: “A mulher ganha credibilidade com mais dificuldades que o homem, seu texto precisa ser mais sério. Isto porque a sociedade literária divide o poder em quotas e as destinadas à mulher são bem mais reduzidas”.⁴ Women’s writing seems to have to fit within certain stereotypes because supposedly it appeals to a niche market and even by categorising it as “women’s writing” a kind of ghettoisation occurs.⁵

An example of the packaging of women’s writing in acceptable and manageable chunks is the publication of anthologies of short stories with no other organising theme than that of the authors’ gender. By selecting highlights from several writers’ works, a publisher can tempt readers to try larger portions, maybe a whole novel... The positive outcome of this sampling is precisely the delight of discovering a talented writer for the first time, enjoying other works, and supporting the writer’s career so that they produce more material.

Anthologies of new writing by women are a way to test the market, showcasing the skills of a variety of authors, but also to prove that there *are* female authors even if they have not managed to publish before. In 2004, São Paulo novelist Luiz Ruffato, indignant at the Brazilian press for making sweeping statements about a phenomenon they designated “a nova literatura brasileira” and which, like the canon established by *Veja* ten years beforehand, ignored women writers to a large extent.⁶ The fact that it was a man who selected the authors and

⁴ Quoted by M. Carmen Villarino Pardo, ‘Entre a via-crucis e o prazer: Representação da mulher transgressora na prosa brasileira recente (de autoria feminina)’, in *Mulheres Más: Percepções da Mulher Transgressora no Mundo Luso-Hispânico*, vol. I orgs. Ana María da Costa Toscano, Shelley Godsland (Porto: Universidade Fernando Pessoa, 2004), pp. 283-98.

⁵ The founder of Virago, Carmen Callil commented in 1998, in relation to the British publishing industry, that the majority of work published is by men; the boards of major publishing houses are almost entirely male-dominated; although many editors in the business are women (who “nurture” authors); that most literary editors on national newspapers are men; and that women tend to review female authors and men tend to review male authors, ‘Women, publishing and power: Judy Simons interviews Carmen Callil’, in *Writing: a woman’s business: Women, writing and the marketplace*, ed. Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 183-92.

⁶ ‘A idéia original da antologia (da primeira) partiu de uma indignação. Todas as matérias de jornal que faziam referência à “nova literatura brasileira” incluíam, de cada dez nomes, nove homens e

framed the volume with a preface, will be discussed later in this essay. The publication of *25 Mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira*⁷ and, a year later + *30 Mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira*⁸ provoked debates in the Brazilian press about the nature of women's writing and boosted the careers of the writers involved. It also raises questions about the composition and marketing of anthologies of Brazilian women's writing, the aims of such collections and whether or not they are counterproductive in securing publishing contracts and respect for female authors.

In historical terms, women writers were practically invisible (or unacknowledged) in Brazilian history unless their works and ideas were allied with political or social themes. Only then did they achieve fame and became part of the canon. The best-known are Nísia Floresta (1810-1885) who published works on domestic management and women's rights; Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825-1917), whose *Úrsula* (1859), was a harsh indictment of slavery; Carmen Dolores (1852-1911), a passionate campaigner for equal rights for women, educational reform and the legalisation of divorce; and Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862-1934), the first woman to gain a national reputation as a literary figure in Brazil. She was the only woman to be included in the first anthology of Brazilian short stories, along with 35 men (edited by Alberto V. Oliveira and Jorge Jobim) in 1922.⁹ In 1929, author Adalzira Bittencourt (1904-1976) published the novel *Sua Excelência* about a woman becoming President of Brazil in the year 2500.¹⁰ She also founded a Biblioteca Pública Feminina Brasileira in 1943, in 1946 organised an exhibition do Livro Feminino Brasileira, and set up an Academia

uma mulher. Eu [...] sabia que essa relação, uma para dez, era incorreta e deturpadora da realidade.' Personal correspondence with the author by email, 11/12/2005.

⁷ Luiz Ruffato (ed.), *25 Mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2004).

⁸ Luiz Ruffato (ed.), + *30 Mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005).

⁹ *Dicionário crítico de escritoras brasileiras* (São Paulo: Escrituras, 2002), pp. 517.

¹⁰ On the novel *Sua Excelência*, see Debora R.S. Ferreira's *Pilares Narrativos: A Construção do Eu na Prosa Contemporânea de Oito Romancistas Brasileiras* (Florianópolis: Mulheres, 2004), pp. 51-63.

Feminina de Letras in Rio.¹¹ To achieve visibility and a place in the canon, women had to prove themselves through a long and consistently successful volume of work, often spreading into different genres (journalism, writing for children, drama, translation, teaching, script-writing) as well as through fiction or poetry. Although maybe not identifying themselves as feminist, writers like Clarice Lispector, Lygia Fagundes Telles and Rachel de Queiroz have left a permanent mark on the literary scene. Brazilian academics and literary critics have also become more and more interested in the works of women writers, particularly the recovery of lost or neglected works. The Editora Mulheres, based in Florianópolis, has published new editions of forgotten writers, rescuing their work from obscurity for twenty-first critics to discover and appraise. And there is critical recognition (monographs, university courses, conferences) that women *are* writing literature.¹²

The fortunes (or, more aptly, misfortunes) of women writers in Brazil have run parallel to those of other female authors around the world since publishing became an important industry. In an overview of gender studies in Latin American literature, Catherine Davies identified the tasks necessary for critics in relation to women's writing: re-righting criticism, rereading texts, redressing selection, rethinking traditions.¹³ Another renowned critic of Latin American women's literature, Susan Bassnett, commented on the "exhilaration of opening doors" achieved by female authors from that region whose work, particularly witness/testimonial literature, political/protest literature and experiences of exile, has proved extremely important for the rest of the world to understand their

¹¹ Luiz Ruffato, 'Mulheres: Contribuição para a história literária', in *25 Mulheres que Estão Fazendo a Nova Literatura Brasileira*, org. Luiz Ruffato (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2004), pp. 7-17, p. 12.

¹² Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda suggests that the lack of critical interest in women's writing in the twentieth as opposed to the nineteenth century has to do with the silencing of women's voices by the Modernists: 'Parking in a Tow-Away Zone: Women's Literary Studies in Brazil', *Brasil/Brazil*, 6:4 (1991), pp. 5-19. In the recent volume of critical essays *Alguma Prosa: ensaios sobre literatura brasileira contemporânea*, ed. Giovanna Dealtry, Masé Lemos and Stefania Chiarelli (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2007), six out of sixteen essays deal with women writers.

¹³ Catherine Davies, 'Gender Studies', *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel*, ed. Efraín Kristal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 183-99.

society.¹⁴ Indeed, it is often the case that Latin American authors receive far more critical attention outside the continent.

With regard to Brazil, Nelly Novaes Coelho identifies the start of the serious critical appreciation of writing by Brazilian women as the 1970s. This may have been due to the translation of feminist theory and women's writing from abroad, to the fact that 1975 was International Women's Year, to the historical and political circumstances (the gradual easing of the military dictatorship), to a general shift away from patriarchal attitudes towards the recognition and appreciation women's skills and abilities; or to a mixture of all of these. Certainly, in the political and literary climate of the 1970s and 80s, publishing short stories in magazines and anthologies was one of the least difficult ways for young writers (women in particular) to start putting their work on the market.¹⁵ Novaes Coelho considers that the newfound respectability of women's writing ran parallel to a boom in writing for children and the publication of works by Afro-Brazilians and "racial others".¹⁶ She went so far as to claim (in 1993) that it was women who "vêm construindo [...] a nova literatura brasileira", heralding the proposal made in the title of Ruffato's twenty-first century anthologies.

Another Brazilian critic, Lucia Helena, characterised women's writing in the 1980s as following two clear strains: "O primeiro [...] nos apresenta um perfil de mulher possível de ser condensado na metáfora do exílio. São mulheres que obsessivamente acorrentadas à imagem recorrente de uma culpa cristã e quase atávica, que as conduz à obediência e cumprimento de um destino prévio, traçado à sua revelia. Seu universo jamais é a rua, mas o confinamento do lar vivido como exílio numa situação-limite, sempre ameaçada pelo eterno retorno à mesmice de sua condição reclusa, que se repete. [...] O segundo [...] trata de uma nova mulher, urbana, livre, protéica e contraditória, vincada pela solidão, que todavia

¹⁴ Susan Bassnett, 'Introduction', in *Knives and Angels: Women Writers in Latin America*, ed. Susan Bassnett (London: Zed Books, 1990).

¹⁵ Villarino Pardo, 'Entre a via-crucis e o prazer', p. 286.

¹⁶ Nelly Novaes Coelho, *A Literatura Feminina no Brasil Contemporâneo*, (São Paulo: Siciliano, 1993), pp. 11-12.

assume, e cujas raízes indaga”.¹⁷ She notices a tendency towards focusing on one character’s personal life, related almost autobiographically, and another that emphasises the multiplicity of women’s experiences: “um mosaico, de inúmeras faces”.¹⁸ These definitions show the transition towards literal (as well as literary) independence as women become more confident about their writing and move away from passivity and victimhood.

Cristina Ferreira Pinto has identified a progressive and specifically “counterideological discourse” that Brazilian women writers have developed”: “a feminist critique of the Brazilian ‘master narrative,’ particularly as it concerns the representation of the female body, sexuality and desire”.¹⁹ According to Ferreira Pinto, their strategies include portraying the female body, representing female sexuality and eroticism, and discussing social and cultural issues that, in one way or another, relate to a woman’s sense of her own body and sexuality, through various discourses: the erotic, gothic, fantastic, grotesque and lesbian. Among the issues they deal with most commonly are: the characterization of women based on racial features and class hierarchy, marriage, motherhood and ageing.²⁰ These often ‘shock’ tactics are, of course, common to women’s writing from other countries and communities. Ferreira Pinto, like Novaes Coelho ten years earlier, makes claims for a “new female discourse in Brazil”, written by and for the “New Woman” of the twenty-first century.²¹ But does this new discourse exist?

Many anthologies of Brazilian women’s writing have been published since the beginning of the twentieth century (although not as many as anthologies of men’s writing or thematic collections including a majority of male writers). The changing market, or the perceived readership and subsequent targeted marketing, reflects the publisher’s attitudes towards women’s writing and towards women in general. The choice of writers and each one’s representative text is also important,

¹⁷ Lucia Helena, ‘Perfis de Mulher na Ficção Brasileira dos Anos 80’, *O Estado de São Paulo* (Suplemento Cultura), 18 July 1987, pp. 1-2, p. 2.

¹⁸ Helena, ‘Perfis’, p. 2.

¹⁹ Cristina Ferreira Pinto, *Gender, Discourse and Desire in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Women’s Literature*, PSRL no. 29 (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2004), p. 3.

²⁰ Ferreira Pinto, *Gender, Discourse and Desire*, p. 4.

²¹ Ferreira Pinto, *Gender, Discourse and Desire*, p. 7.

as are the cover artwork, the paratextual elements (introduction, preface, postface, *orelhas*, back cover blurb), the organisation of the anthology (chronological, alphabetical) and the inclusion of biographical information. This essay will now proceed to analyse briefly the presentation of some anthologies of short stories by Brazilian women writers published between 1959 and 2005, and end up by focusing on Ruffato's anthologies. All in all, the collections include 163 writers, the majority of whom only appear once. The most commonly anthologised are, unsurprisingly, Nélida Piñon and Lygia Fagundes Telles, who have had long and prolific careers that are still flourishing, and who have achieved national and international recognition.²²

The earliest I have had access to is *O Conto Feminino*, edited in 1959 by distinguished journalist and critic R. Magalhães Júnior, which comes tenth in a series called 'Panorama do Conto Brasileiro' which also includes stories from different regions and cities of Brazil, as well as other thematic groupings ('O Conto Trágico' and 'O Conto da Vida Burocrática', for example). The front cover of the first edition shows a classic stereotypical symbol of femininity, the distaff and spinning wheel, although the readers of the book would probably not have had to spin their own wool. The volume collects together 32 texts by both established and new writers, including three members of the Lopes de Almeida family. In the introduction the editor explains that the writers appear in alphabetical order (the Brazilian way, by first name) "o que é uma forma de ser metódico sem chegar a ser indiscreto...".²³ His presentations of each writer are, likewise, very discreet, only giving the dates of birth of those who have already died and listing previous publications and birthplaces. He seems very interested in young talent and singles out Lygia Fagundes Telles for her literary vocation.

Edla van Steen's *O Conto da Mulher Brasileira* of 1978 begins with a brief note to the reader identifying the idea behind the collection: to testify to the growing presence and "fecundidade" of women writers in Brazil, though she

²² Piñon is currently President of the Academia Brasileira de Letras and in 2005 was awarded the prestigious Spanish 'Príncipe de Astúrias' prize for literature. Fagundes Telles has also won numerous literary prizes, including Portugal's greatest literary accolade, the Camões prize, in 2005.

²³ R. Magalhães Júnior, *O Conto Feminino*, ed. R. Magalhães Júnior (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira), p. 3.

makes it clear she thinks artists have no sex when they write.²⁴ Her sense of purpose is clear from her final words: “Missão cumprida. Aos leitores o julgamento”. A drawing (by Ricardo van Steen) extends across the front and back covers: a desk with a typewriter (on the front page) and on the back a stapler, lamp, sheets of paper, books, a cup and saucer and a vase with a sprig of dried flowers – the only element of this illustration that could be considered feminine.

Also from 1978, Rachel Jardim’s “excepcional” edited collection *Mulheres & Mulheres* alternates stories about women by men and women. She identifies various characteristics of women’s writing (“A delicada força feminina, sua intuição, seu cristal, seu *oriente*, são elementos de um mundo todo particular”) and puts a dramatic case for reading such fiction: “a mulher é um ser em ascensão. Suas potencialidades mal emergem do marasmo a que foi condenada durante séculos, sentenciada a ser o ventre do mundo, a parideira de homens que dominariam o mundo. As mulheres que escaparam a esse destino receberam a condenação do seu próprio sexo, acusadas de estarem ingressando no universo masculino, de quererem se comportar como homens...”.²⁵ She continues with special attention to the question of self-image and the visibility of women writers: “Vamos ver se falando cada vez mais nas mulheres elas encontram com maior rapidez a sua própria imagem [...] nem a da Rainha-Madrasta [...] nem a da própria Branca de Neve.” This issue of perspective – who is constructing the female characters, how and why – is echoed by the cover illustration: a reproduction of Magritte’s ‘La Grande Guerre’ in which the face of an elegant lady, with large brimmed hat, long dress, gloves and parasol, is obscured by a bunch of violets. This seems to indicate the same point as that the editor suggests the stories convey: that a portrait of a lady (by a man) may capture her appearance but not her essence.

In the 1980s, Márcia Denser published two collections of erotic literature by women, *Muito Prazer* and *O Prazer é Todo Meu*, that she felt provoked to write

²⁴ Edla Van Steen, editor’s prefatory note to *O Conto da Mulher Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Vertente, 1978), p. 5.

²⁵ Rachel Jardim, editor’s notes on the *orelhas* of *Mulheres & Mulheres* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1978).

because she felt that “o tema sexo parecia exclusividade masculina”.²⁶ The titles cheekily play on codes of polite address expected from well-brought-up ladies and the sexual innuendo that arises when the phrases are taken literally. Denser recognises biological differences between the sexes that are also expressed differently by men and women, quoting “certa autora americana” on *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*: “os orgasmos de Lady Chaterley [sic] *devem ser* de D.H. Lawrence, porque *eu* não sinto assim” (author’s emphasis).²⁷ The collection is intended to introduce a new phase in Brazilian letters, one that surpasses feminism: “agora é a vez do indivíduo”. The cover is a stylised, multicoloured portrait of a naked woman with hair made of flowers.

The second volume, *O Prazer é todo meu*, which has a similar ‘psychedelic’ design of a woman’s body on the cover, was organised as a response to the success of the first. Denser’s preface reiterates the triumph of the creative individual over the restrictions of sexual categorisation with some powerful metaphors: women’s eroticism as a powerful underground stream; men and women like fish in the same aquarium but unable to communicate because they were separated by the patriarchal system; the wall between the sexes being demolished. Most memorable is her final surreal metaphor emphasising the acknowledgement that people have to be brave and daring: “é um bocado perigoso. O mesmo que gritar a três metros de um *iceberg* fantasma: em seguida, a imensa montanha de gelo se pulveriza, porquanto toneladas de massa líquida se precipitem sobre nós, tumultuando e confundindo os marés”.²⁸ Bearing in mind the wider scope of the Brazilian political situation from the mid 1980s and the gradual easing of repressive measures, one can also identify here the voice of the rebellious intellectual taking a stand against a restrictive regime.

Darlene Sadlier’s collection of Brazilian texts translated into English, *One Hundred Years After Tomorrow* (1992), is an extremely useful reference work that celebrates a century of women writers, with particular emphasis on little known

²⁶ Márcia Denser, ‘Apresentação’ to *Muito Prazer: Contos Eróticos Femininos* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1982), p. 5. Interestingly enough, it was the same publishing house, Record, that was to publish Ruffato’s anthologies in 2004 and 2005.

²⁷ Denser, *Muito Prazer*, p. 5.

²⁸ Márcia Denser, ‘Apresentação’ to *O Prazer é todo meu* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1985), p. 5.

authors.²⁹ Sadlier organises the texts in chronological order, to encourage the reader to notice the thematic and stylistic changes that have taken place as literature developed in parallel with social and historical transformations. The cartoon-like cover was designed especially for the book and shows a woman with long flowing hair at a window, embracing herself and looking, presumably, into the future. She is surrounded by images of rural Brazil: birds, flowers and white colonial churches.

Lúcia Helena Vianna and Márcia Lígia Guidin's anthology of 32 women writers, *Contos de escritoras brasileiras* (2003), begins with the declaration that their intentions are threefold: to support initiatives to recover forgotten texts, to divulge women's literary production and to select works that reflect women's experience over the last century or so. Echoing Rachel Jardim's point about perspective and agenda, they quote Lygia Fagundes Telles's defence of women's right to express themselves: "Antes eram os homens que diziam como nós éramos. Agora somos nós que vamos dizer o que somos."³⁰ Their collection of stories includes some interesting choices of the new generation (Marilene Felinto, Ivana Arruda Leite, Heloisa Seixas) as well as the already established names (Clarice Lispector, Rachel de Queiroz, Nélide Piñon). Interestingly, this is the first collection to include Patrícia Galvão (aka Pagu), one of the few women writers involved in the Brazilian Modernist movement.

Ficções: Feminino, a collection of specially commissioned stories that appeared in *Revista E*, a magazine published by the SESC association, includes a list of well-known women writers who describe a world that is increasingly dark and violent. The debates around women's rights and the changing society in these pieces are distinctly postfeminist: Márcia Denser refers to her generation of

²⁹ Another collection of interviews with women writers and translations of excerpts from their works into English is *Fourteen Female Voices from Brazil*, interviews & works sel. & ed. by Elzbieta Szoka, intro. by Jean Franco (Austin, TX: Host, 2002). I have not included it in my analysis because many of the women interviewed are poets rather than authors of fiction.

³⁰ *Contos de Escritoras Brasileiras* (anthology), sel. & org. Lúcia Helena Vianna and Márcia Lígia Guidin (São Paulo: Martins Fonte, 2003).

women writers as having got lost, “Deram-nos a chave, mas esqueceram de construir a porta” (cited by Nelly Novães Coelho in the Introduction).³¹

Finally I would like to look at the two anthologies organised by Luiz Ruffato in 2004 and 2005 which claim that women are now writing “a nova literatura brasileira”. After a survey of women’s literary history, he explains in his introduction to *25 Mulheres que Estão Fazendo a Nova Literatura Brasileira* that his mission was to redress the balance, to show readers that as many women as men are writing fiction in Brazil.³² It was a political act intended to draw attention to “women’s writing”. However, feminist critics were suspicious that the anthologies were organised by an established (male) writer who was already part of the industry and Tânia Ramos suggests that they may be “mais uma estratégia mercadológica”, “respostas editoriais” to collections of mainly male authors published by rival publishing houses.³³

Well aware of the market forces involved in Ruffato’s venture, Virgínia Leal makes an interesting comparison between the implicit attempt to establish a “contra-cânone” of new Brazilian women writers and Antonio Candido’s classic essay on the formation of Brazilian literature: “Muitas foram as tentativas de criar uma literatura *essencialmente* brasileira, e nesse advérbio reside uma série de problemas que Candido ressalta em sua obra. Como o indianismo ingênuo, a transfiguração hipertrofiada da realidade física e geográfica do país, a busca de temas ‘originais’, entre outros. Sempre, ao fundo, a questão da ‘tensão insolúvel’ entre o local e o universal, entre a busca da ruptura ao modelo europeu e a sua inevitável continuidade”.³⁴ She goes on to analyse some of the unavoidable contradictions that such a project involves: the lists of nineteenth-century and twentieth century writers “grandes” and “menores” that appear in the introduction

³¹ *Ficções: Feminino*, intr. Nelly Novaes Coelho (São Paulo: SESC; Lazuli, 2003; coleção e, no. 6), p. 3.

³² Luiz Ruffato, ‘Mulheres: Contribuição’, op.cit.

³³ Tânia Regina Oliveira Ramos, ‘Talentos e *formosuras*’, *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea* 26 (2005), pp. 97-105, p. 99.

³⁴ Leal, Virgínia Maria Vasconcelos, ‘25 Mulheres: contradições na formação de um contra-cânone’, *Anais do XI Seminário Nacional Mulher e Literatura/II Seminário Internacional Mulher e Literatura – ANPOLL*, cd rom, pp. 2470-80, pp. 2471-72.

highlight the exclusion of women from the canon but also separates and isolates them from the literary scene. The one writer Ruffato describes using but not qualifying the adjective “indiscutível” (twice) is Rachel de Queiroz, who considered her own writing “masculina” and whose election to the Brazilian Academy of letters caused controversy among feminists. Leal is surprised that more emphasis is not given to Clarice Lispector, although as Adriana Lisboa explains in her essay ‘Escrever no Brasil depois de Clarice Lispector: Armadilhas Ficcionalis’, the critics tend to treat that author as a benchmark and compare all other women writers to her, causing considerable anxiety of influence: “A ficção de autoria feminina no Brasil pós-anos 70 tem em Clarice Lispector sua referência mais importante e mais recorrente. Se as experimentações de linguagem cheiram a puro maneirismo após Guimarães Rosa, todo texto ficcional de autoria feminina que se caracterize por uma dicção introspectiva se vê, nas últimas décadas, imediatamente debitário de Clarice. Por isso, as tais ‘armadilhas ficcionais’ do título deste ensaio: as armadilhas do *pós*-Clarice, do *anti*-Clarice, ou do meramente *assim-como*-Clarice. Nesse cenário, a tessitura da escrita, o magnetismo da autora canônica e a necessidade de situar as novas vozes formam uma espécie de tríade a apontar quase que irresistivelmente à categorização ‘literatura feminina’.”³⁵

Ruffato’s volumes present such a varied selection of women writers that it becomes, in fact, difficult to situate them in relation to Clarice. Instead, the reader gains a new set of parameters and is drawn to make comparisons between the texts presented in the two anthologies. The organiser’s selection criteria were only that the authors had begun publishing in the 1990s or were making their literary debut (as four of them were), and that as many as possible came from cities other than Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo – although these are still the cities of residence of the majority of the women. In the introduction to the second volume, +30 *Mulheres*, Ruffato concludes that there are more writers in the south east of the country because the educational facilities are better, although he does not consider

³⁵ Adriana Lisboa, ‘Escrever no Brasil depois de Clarice Lispector: armadilhas ficcionais’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 14: 2-3 (2008), pp. 141-45, p. 142. See also the comments of Fausto Cunha: “a vertente clariceana permitiu, sobretudo às escritoras, um novo caminho de assédio à criação. Foi Clarice Lispector quem pôs fim, de uma vez por todas, a essa pérfida instituição do ‘romance feminino’”, quoted by Villarino Pardo ‘Entre a via-crucis e o prazer’, p. 290.

alternatives: that women are writing but cannot get a publishing contract, or that they do not wish or need to publish.³⁶ The writers I contacted told me that Ruffato had contacted them in the first instance, rather than submitting their work to random review. Ruffato himself informed me that after the publication of the first volume, in which he had been unable to include all the writers he wanted, he was also approached by authors who wished to contribute stories.³⁷ Ramos comments that the majority of the women work in the humanities or the arts (ten journalists, eight teachers, four advertising executives, one shiatsu therapist, etc.) and notes that only ten of them profess to be writers, only one of these calling herself a “escritora profissional”.³⁸ Like Virginia Woolf before them, these women need to earn the money to pay for a room of their own and the luxury to be able to spend time writing. They do at least have the possibility of publicising themselves via the internet, Ramos adds, in contrast to the nineteenth century women writers who have been rescued from obscurity by contemporary researchers.

Ruffato’s choice of text professes to be truly politically correct: “Não houve limite de idade, tema, ideologia, estilo ou extensão do trabalho, apenas exigiu-se o ineditismo dos textos”.³⁹ Coupled with the alphabetical organisation, this avoids the creation of hierarchies and avoids any intentional grouping together of texts according to any point of contact. It also avoids reference to race, rejecting the need to include information in the short biographical blurb that introduces each writer and gives details of age, birthplace, residence and publications.

Clearly, variety is the order of the day and the texts range in quality and quantity, from streams of consciousness close to the colloquial indulgence of weblogs to impressionistic fragments, to carefully constructed mysteries or folktales. The longest text is 33 pages long, the shortest only two pages. The majority of the writers use a first person narrator, who is not, however, necessarily

³⁶ Luiz Ruffato, ‘Ainda Algumas Palavras’, in *+30 Mulheres que Estão Fazendo a Nova Literatura Brasileira*, org. Luiz Ruffato (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005), pp. 9-13.

³⁷ I am very grateful to Tatiana Salem Levy, Cláudia Lage and Daniela Versiani for their kindness in answering my questions and their prompt email replies.

³⁸ Ramos, ‘Talentos e formosuras’, p. 100.

³⁹ Luiz Ruffato, ‘Mulheres: Contribuição’, p. 15.

female but may be male, gay, bisexual or straight.⁴⁰ The setting is predominantly urban and contemporary and there is a tendency to refer (with slang) to elements of contemporary international popular culture such as John Travolta, Charlie Brown, Foucault or Portishead. The tone ranges from tragedy and trauma to the hyperreal, to the surreal, to the comic, to the banal. There are no inhibitions when it comes to describing sex, rape, torture, grief, fear, incest, betrayal and pain. Motherhood and daughterhood are popular themes, but so is fatherhood and sibling rivalry. In fact, there seem to be no unifying characteristics beyond Ruffato's criteria, other than the fact that the contributors are all female. One positive critical comment about the first volume is that some of the women included have managed to shed the adjective "feminina" and all the stereotypes it carries with it and have produced "apenas boa literatura".⁴¹

The first collection caused quite an impact when it was published, reigniting the debate about essentialism and whether women's writing is different from men's writing; the underlying implication being that it might, in fact, be *better!*⁴² The title of both collections, proclaiming that the authors of 'new Brazilian literature' are female, and using the gerund "estão fazendo" emphasises the actuality of the phenomenon (the women *are writing, now*), and deliberately provokes questions and reactions.⁴³ The psychedelic pop-art-style cover designs

⁴⁰ Marta Machado Rodrigues comments that male characters are few and far between in the first anthology, much more attention being paid to "o consciente e o inconsciente íntimo da mulher", 'Luiz Ruffato (org.): 25 mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira', *Terceira Margem: Revista do Centro de Estudos Brasileiras, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto*, 5 (2004), pp. 75-77, p. 76.

⁴¹ Cláudia Nina, 'Escritoras de bom caldo: Ruffato reúne 25 mulheres da literatura brasileira contemporânea', *Jornal do Brasil*, 27 November 2004, np.

⁴² See the virtual dialogue between Júlio Daio Borges ('Literatura Feminina Brasileira Hoje') and Christiane Tassis ('Literatura Feminina: Esta Conversa Infinita') in the online magazine *Paralelos*: <http://www.paralelos.org/out03/000596.html> and <http://www.paralelos.org/out03/000597.html> respectively.

⁴³ In her book review of the first anthology, Virgínia Leal notes the conflation of gender and the present day that mark the work from the title onwards: "Ler o que as mulheres 'estão fazendo' é sempre mais desafiante que, mais uma vez, buscar os nomes das 'mulheres que fizeram' ou que 'tentaram fazer' literatura", 'Luiz Ruffato (org.): 25 mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira', *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, 24 (2004), pp. 176-81, pp. 176-77.

are eye-catching, colourful and emphatically modern. The first superimposes a large 25 and a list of the names of the authors on multicoloured horizontal stripes. The list includes the organiser's name in correct alphabetical order in the list, in a slightly larger font than the others. The suspended, surprisingly retro, platform-heeled sandal on the cover of the second anthology is rather threatening, as if the sole (the heel forms a 3 and the rest of the sole a 0) is going to crush the obstacles that have held women writers back and as if many '30's are going to be imprinted in their wake. The alphabetical list of contributors appears on the back cover.

The second collection was launched at the Feira do Livro book fair in Rio de Janeiro in 2005 at an event where some of the contributors read their stories to the audience and talked about their feelings at being included in the volume. Twenty were interviewed for *O Globo* newspaper, and when asked "O que significa participar desta coletânea" felt it to be an honour, a chance to meet other women writers, the gratification of hard work being recognised, a door opening, and use words like "panorama", "vitrine" and "mosaico" to describe the collection.⁴⁴ The writers I corresponded with were pleased to be part of a collective volume and felt that inclusion had been beneficial to their literary careers.

Several of the stories in the two anthologies deal metafictionally with the process of writing fiction or of artistic creation. In '25 Mulheres', the youngest contributor, Simone Campos (born 1983), begins her text with a reflection on the becoming an author and needing inspiration: "Sempre quis escrever alguma coisa. Não precisava ser livro, conto estava bom. Mas só escrevo em primeira pessoa. Não sei nada se eu imaginar um personagem; ele não me diz coisa alguma. Também preciso me inspirar em fatos reais. E nada de interessante jamais aconteceu comigo. [...] Por um bom tempo, tentei escrever para falar mal da minha mãe. Afinal, tínhamos problemas de sobra. Mas descobri que falar mal de alguém não era um motivo bom para escrever; nunca saía bom. [...] Mas aí aconteceram muitas coisas de uma vez. Eu arrisquei. De repente, estava de posse de uma matéria-prima. Comecei a escrever para organizar minha cabeça naquele

⁴⁴ Cristina Zarur, 'O que elas acham de estar em "+30 Mulheres que Estão Fazendo a Nova Literatura Brasileira"', *O Globo Online*, 16 May 2005, <http://oglobo.globo.com/especiais/bienal2005/mat/168331296.asp> (accessed 20 May 2005).

terremoto – e nunca algo esteve tão claro dentro dela”.⁴⁵ There is no reference to the fact that the author is a woman, but rather a focus on this particular author’s need to write about herself and real things that have happened to her and to use the process as a kind of therapy.

‘A oitava onda’, by Rosângela Vieira Rocha, from + *30 Mulheres*, is one of the shortest texts of all, but it seems to sum up the importance of both volumes: the proof that in spite of the obstacles that beset them, women do sometimes manage to get their work published.⁴⁶ The story describes a woman’s disappointment at the hands of an editor “enorme, gordo, cachimbo na boca e suspensórios”⁴⁷ who had promised to publish her novel but changes his mind and dismisses her unceremoniously and without explanation. Juliana spends two hours on her appearance in preparation for a meeting she arranged a month beforehand and had to fly to the city to make. The preparation entails sacrifice, discomfort and stress: “Lutando contra o nervosismo, inspira e expira lentamente, repetidas vezes.”⁴⁸ The build up to the meeting is described in detail, including the difficulty she had in actually confirming a time and date, and her masochism and self-deprecation become more and more distinct: “Uma escritora que ninguém conhece, especialmente sendo jovem, deve ser capaz de agüentar ouvir quantas negativas sejam necessárias. Ofício estranho este, em que é preciso ter duas qualidades opostas, na mesma proporção: uma sensibilidade refinada e um couro muito grosso, a fim de se proteger dos golpes que se recebe. Dotada de grande persistência, é dessas que não dão o braço a torcer. Ao final, sente-se

⁴⁵ Simone Campos, ‘Bondade’, in *25 Mulheres*, pp. 29-51, p. 29. The previous story ‘Psycho’, by Clarah Averbuck, begins in a very similar way, in search of subject matter: “Eu era uma escritora bêbada, perdida em uma cidade enorme e sem nenhum lugar decente. [...] Um livro publicado, nenhum dinheiro no bolso. [...] Sem amor e com poucos amigos, me restaram as minhas droguinhas [...]. Então me apaixonei”, *25 Mulheres*, pp. 23-26, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Rosângela Vieira Rocha, ‘A Oitava Onda’, in +*30 Mulheres*, pp. 225-29. A recent novel that portrays a woman writer’s relationship with the publishing industry (literary prizes, travel grants) and the media (photoshoots), is Adriana Lisboa’s *Um Beijo de Columbina* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2003).

⁴⁷ Rosângela Vieira Rocha, ‘A Oitava Onda’, p. 227.

⁴⁸ Rosângela Vieira Rocha, ‘A Oitava Onda’, p. 225.

recompensada por seu estoicismo, pois conseguiu marcar a reunião”.⁴⁹ Her novel rejected, Juliana flees the office, to be swamped by a rainstorm. She is in shock, “uma espécie de anestesia toma conta de seus pensamentos, e raciocinar, nessas condições, é-lhe quase impossível”.⁵⁰ The experience is so traumatic that she needs to go through a cleansing ritual in the sea, letting seven waves wash over her. The eighth wave of the title will bring her “transformações e recomeços” but the reader is not sure whether this means success or another long and painful process. Hopefully, the very fact that we are reading the story, in a book full of stories by women, confirms a positive outcome.

This particular text narrates the fate of unlucky women writers at the mercy of publishers who are subject to market forces and cannot invest in risky propositions. It is ironically included in this anthology which aims to give new writers a chance, even if the writers do not see themselves as ‘woman’ writers or feminists. Ruffato’s anthologies, like the others I have described, each have their own agendas but all of them bring woman’s writing to the attention of the reading public, giving them a little more power over their careers and their writing destiny.⁵¹

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⁴⁹ Rosângela Vieira Rocha, ‘A Oitava Onda’, p. 226.

⁵⁰ Rosângela Vieira Rocha, ‘A Oitava Onda’, p. 229.

⁵¹ The title of my article is an adaptation of the title of soap opera ‘Senhora do seu Destino’, about assertive women in a man’s world, for which Suzana Vieira won the “Prêmio Extra de Televisão” in 2004, the year when Ruffato’s first anthology of “mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira” was published.

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