

## REPAIRING HISTORY AND THE WRONGS OF ITS AGENTS IN *O REGRESSO DE JÚLIA MANN A PARATY*

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I analyse Teolinda Gersão's most recent book, *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* (Júlia Mann's Return to Paraty, 2021), through the concept of Black psychology developed by Wade W. Nobles. I intend to further elaborate on one of the novel's central questions, posed by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, whom Gersão (2021) turns into a fictional character-narrator: "can it be that we are unable to evolve in the ethical realm, just as we seem unable to love and feel compassion after all?" (p. 14). At the same time, dissect the wrongs of two of history's most significant agents, both in the scientific and literary fields, the novel highlights. Intellectually influenced and influential, prominent figures in the history of literature, science, and thought in Gersão's book were exposed for the same wrong: not critically questioning a world rooted in White hegemony, which erased the difference and dignity of the "other". Drawing on Catherine Hall's and Corinna McLeod's work, among others, about writing history as a redressing process, I also demonstrate how *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* engages in a critical and redeeming dialogue with the past reflected in the present.

### KEYWORDS

Black psychology, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Júlia Mann, memory

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## A REPARAÇÃO DA HISTÓRIA E OS ERROS DOS SEUS AGENTES EM *O REGRESSO DE JÚLIA MANN A PARATY*

### RESUMO

É meu objetivo neste espaço analisar o mais recente livro de Teolinda Gersão, *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* (2021), à luz do conceito de psicologia negra desenvolvido por Wade W. Nobles. Pretendo, assim, complexificar uma das questões centrais do romance, proferida por Sigmund Freud, o pai da psicanálise, tornado por Gersão (2021) em personagem-narrador fictícia: "será possível que sejamos incapazes de progredir no plano ético, do mesmo modo que, afinal, parecemos incapazes de amor e compaixão?" (p. 14). Ao mesmo tempo, pretendo também desconstruir o que o romance nos aponta como os erros de dois dos mais significativos agentes da história, tanto no campo científico como no literário. Influenciados e influenciadores intelectualmente, as grandes figuras da história literária, científica e do pensamento presentes no livro de Gersão foram alvo do mesmo lapso: o não questionamento crítico de um mundo apoiado na hegemonia branca, em que a diferença e a dignidade do "outro" foram rasuradas. Basendo-me no trabalho de Catherine Hall e Corinna McLeod, entre outros, sobre o processo da escrita da história como um processo reparatório demonstro ainda como *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* efetua um diálogo crítico e reparador com o passado que se espelha no presente.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

psicologia negra, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Júlia Mann, memória

In a provocative article, Corinna McLeod (2009) analyses the museum's role, in this case, the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum, as a site of "contested identity". According to McLeod (2009), the museum is the ideal example where a nation actively negotiates its historicised identity (p. 157). Referring to British society and its postcolonial relationship with the imperial past, the museum emerges as the repository of the empire's fragments (McLeod, 2009, p. 157), where history is preserved, and simultaneously, reconstructed. As such, the museum becomes a "site of memory and memorialising", where "both concepts represent constructivist enterprises and are conducive to the formation of a public national identity" (McLeod, 2009, p. 158). I want to draw on the concept of the museum as a site and its contradictions and ambiguities dealing with the empire's history, where the nation negotiates its historicised identity, using an analogy with another site of memory, despite its different nature, the site of the book. As a museum, the book is also a site of memory and memorialising, preservation, and reconstruction of the past, where identities can be contested, affirmed, or denied, adding to the formation of national identity by removing silenced or erased voices from the rubble. A site of memory that we must not forget is always fragmented, a fragment of that past, which may add but not totalise.

Briefly revisiting McLeod (2009), she poses the pertinent question focusing on the dilemma of the celebration of an empire, the British, whose success depended on the exploitation of bodies and natural resources: "however, a central dilemma remains unresolved. Empire was designed around exclusion; how then can one celebrate the glory of empire while at the same time acknowledging that its success was premised on the successful exploitation of peoples and resources?" (p. 163). She concludes that the museum she analysed will "be a test of Britain's ability to accept a newly configured national identity and embrace alternative historical memories" (McLeod, 2009, p. 164). Hence, we can infer that "grand narratives" are systematically created to "diminish" or silence the voices of "others" and that both museums and books can serve as ideological tools for those in power. However, writing a book and the ideological vision that pervades it is a personal choice less constrained from the tethers of governmental authority.

Following the insights of this preamble, I will analyse Teolinda Gersão's<sup>1</sup> most recent book, *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* (2021), through the concept of Black psychology developed by Wade W. Nobles. I intend to further elaborate on one of the novel's

<sup>1</sup> Teolinda Gersão began her literary career in 1981 with the novel *O Silêncio* (The Silence). Today, the writer is one of the most distinctive voices in Portuguese fiction from the revolution of 4 April 25. Her writing is permeated by social, economic and mental oppression. *Paisagem Com Mulher e Mar ao Fundo* (Landscape With Woman and Sea, 1982), *O Cavalo de Sol* (The Sun Horse, 1989), *A Árvore das Palavras* (The Word Tree, 1997), *Os Teclados* (The Keyboards, 1999) and *A Mulher Que Prendeu a Chuva* (The Woman Who Stole the Rain, 2007) are among her most acclaimed works. She has been honoured with several distinctions, including the Grande Prémio de Conto Camilo Castelo Branco award, Prémio Fernando Namora award, the PEN Club Prize for fiction, Grande Prémio de Romance e Novela da APE (Portuguese Writers Association) award, the Prémio Máxima de Literatura award, and the Prémio da Fundação Inês de Castro award. Her books have been reprinted over the last decades, and some have been adapted to the theatre and staged in Portugal, Germany and Romania.

central questions, posed by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, whom Gersão (2021) turns into a fictional character-narrator: “can it be that we are unable to evolve in the ethical realm, just as we seem unable to love and feel compassion after all?” (p. 14). At the same time, dissect the wrongs of two of history’s most significant agents, both in the scientific and literary fields, the novel highlights. The question is included in the first chapter, “Freud Thinking of Thomas Mann in December 1938”, which, by the way, can be read as the first of three separate novels, even though they are related to each other. The philosophical question raised by Freud in an inner monologue near the end of his life in exile in London is posed to Thomas Mann, on whose psychic life the reflection is focused, but also to the reader. In other words, Freud thinks about Mann, and Gersão thinks about the reading audience through Freud. One must also consider that this novel is a psychological game of mirrors that reflect and show the reflection of the three central narrators — Sigmund Freud, Thomas and Júlia Mann — the author and the reader in a circle enclosed by the human condition.

Moreover, as Tercio Redondo (2012) states, “in the field of sciences which emerged in the early twentieth century none established such close ties with literature as Psychoanalysis did” (p. i). The critic refers exclusively to the literature produced in the western world since psychoanalysis’ influence is rare in Latin American, Asian or African literature of the same period. Redondo (2012) further states that

Freudian research has interacted with the arts in general and literature in particular since the first studies on hysteria. According to the Viennese physician, the literary text corroborated the clinic’s findings; moreover, it provided the research with models that fitted complex theoretical constructions, as seen in the formulation of the so-called Oedipal conflict. On the other hand, the literary texture itself became the target of the psychoanalytic investigation. There are countless examples of this exegetic activity, ranging from light commentary to the exhaustive discussion of prose fiction texts, such as the one Freud developed around the short story *The Sandman* by E.T.A. Hoffmann. (p. i)

Attempts to perform a “psychoanalysis of the text” have always been criticised by writers and literary critics annoyed by Freud’s overly content-driven concern over the analysis of the form, which would not concede to his method. However, this analysis still holds sway (Allen, 2020; Brooks, 1994; Ellmann, 2014; and others). The fascination for the Mann family is such an example, and it seems unaffected by such criticism. According to Richard Miskolci (2003), interest in Júlia Mann and her Brazilian origin has been “a-historically studied as an influence on the work of her descendants through psychoanalytic approaches” (p. 159). These include a biographical-family study by the German sociologist Marianne Krüll, *Na Rede dos Magos* (In the Net of the Magicians, 1997), and a novel inspired by her biography by João Silvério Trevisan, *Ana em Veneza* (Ana in Venice, 1998), among others. Gersão’s novel belongs, thus, to a literary tradition around Júlia Mann, the mother of Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann and the no less famous writer Heinrich Mann.

## 1. THE WRONG OF FREUD

Freud, the narrator-character in Gersão's (2021) book, states, questioning the discipline he created as a form of redemption of the human being:

I have always tended to be sceptical about our species. The human being is an impure clay. I believed it was possible to perfect and liberate it — but can psychoanalysis, in fact, lead us to the mastery of negative drives and the construction of a civilised society? (p. 14)

Decades earlier, the character states, “I had thought, ( ... ), that Psychoanalysis had all the answers, and would change the world” (Gersão, 2021, p. 11). The disappointment, at the end of his life, is obvious: “I have devoted my life to seeking the truth about being human. I believed that if we know who we are, we will see more clearly and make the right choices” (Gersão, 2021, p. 8).

Throughout the novel, the real events of Freud's life are interwoven with the fictional narrator of the 1938 monologue. The date is not accidentally chosen. 1938 was when the German troops occupied Austria, whose capital was estimated to have 200,000 Jews. The same year that Freud, the son of Jews, was exiled to the United Kingdom to escape Nazi persecution and died the following year. The price paid for being Jewish at the time was mass death, exile, the loss of life as it was known, besides the material and symbolic loss of work, as Freud states:

like those of so many others, the books I wrote were declared subversive and degenerate, thrown into the fire to the sound of insults and shouts or such a heavy silence that only the crackling of the flames could be heard. Almost all the great works turned to ashes, and the death of the spirit will follow the extermination of thousands, or millions, of lives. (Gersão, 2021, p. 9)

The World War II would affect the life of Freud and millions of Jews, and it added to the equally overwhelming act of the human condition, the exploitation of human bodies and natural resources in Africa. One of its greatest culprits, Portugal had promulgated, 8 years earlier, the Colonial Act that underlined the conception of the empire as a whole and the implicit idea that the physical, psychological, intellectual, economic and military domination over the African peoples was only beginning. As the *Bulletin of International News* states,

President [Óscar Carmona]'s visits to Angola in 1938 and Mozambique in 1939, proclaiming the “unbreakable and eternal unity of Portugal domestically and abroad” and the military mission to both countries in 1938, further underlined the true importance of the Empire to Portugal and his vital commitment to maintaining the unity of his Commonwealth. (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1942, p. 930)

The same form of domination over the “other” — racially, ethnically and religiously different — continued in other European empires until the end of the World War II, which

is today seen as one of the hallmarks of the most deplorable level that human beings can reach. Freud's questions about the human being's incivility, ability to progress ethically, love and compassion, to which I would add solidarity, are not misplaced considering the novel's historical context and the contemporaneity of its writing and publishing. After all, Freud's questions are as valid in 1938 as 2021.

Considering the work of Wade W. Nobles on Black psychology, we can see that Freud's wrong was, from a Eurocentric mindset, not to recognise that the psychoanalysis he developed did not allow all human beings to fit into the same mould. At the end of his monologue about Mann, he even doubts the usefulness of his work: "I try to believe that my work might, nonetheless, be of some use, but I am not sure that it is so" (Gersão, 2021, p. 38). Despite being Jewish, Freud had a place in the European Academy and produced an alienating narrative. In 1978, Nobles (2013) introduced the concept of "conceptual imprisonment", aiming to "caution about uncritically adopting European and American ideas to examine African and African American reality" (p. 233). In other words, placing European American conceptions and formulas as the universal standard can conceptually incarcerate the examination of peoples who are neither European nor American, such as Africans. Thus, Black psychology has exposed Eurocentric hegemony and traditional psychological theories. It has also directly begun to focus on creating new paradigms and methodologies rooted in an organic and authentically African epistemological and ontological basis (Nobles, 2013, p. 233). That does not exclude the notion of permeability through contact to which these peoples have historically been subjected. According to Nobles (2013), Black psychology is

more than the psychology of the so-called underprivileged peoples, more than the experience of living in ghettos or having been forced into the dehumanising condition of slavery or colonisation. It is more than the "darker dimension" of general psychology. Its unique status is derived not from the negative aspects of being "Black" people on the continent or anywhere in the diaspora but rather from the positive features of basic African philosophy that dictate the values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors of Africans in Africa and the New World. (p. 233)

Nobles (2013) states that the psychological effect that the ideology of White supremacy and European imperialism, like slavery and colonialism, has had on Africa and her people has never been fully addressed and understood. Probably the attempt to erase and silence a part of history that did not, and does not, favour the great former colonial empires. Black psychology, however, "has forced the overall field of psychology to recognise that there is no universal psychiatric reality and that, in terms of psychological knowledge and practice, the only valid perspective is one that reflects the culture of the people served" (Nobles, 2013, p. 233).

Meanwhile, other fields of study have progressively drawn attention to the question of historical reparation (Hall, 2018). For example, Lisa Lowe (2005a) studies the paradoxes that encapsulate such reparation. She demonstrates that research focused on reparation mobilises the different valences of the term: a sense of the retrieval of archival

evidence and the restoration of historical presence, on the one hand, and the ontological and political sense of reparation, on the other, that is, the possibility of recuperation, or the repossession of a full humanity and freedom, after its ultimate theft or obliteration. (p. 85). Throughout the 17th through the 19th, Lowe (2005a) states, “liberal colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered” (p. 92). We can thus link the emergence of liberties defined in the abstract terms of citizenship, rights, wage labour, free trade, and sovereignty with the attribution of racial difference to those subjects, regions, and populations that liberal doctrine describes as a unit for liberty or incapable of civilisation, placed at the margins of liberal humanity:

settlers represented indigenous peoples as violent threats to be eliminated in ways that rationalised white settlement and African slavery; they discounted native people as uncivilised or non-Christians, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past. Colonial administrators and traders cast captive Africans as inhuman chattel, as enslaveable property. (Lowe, 2005a, p. 92)

As she humanises Freud in the novel, who, at the end of life, recognises he was as imperfect as any other, a disillusioned character, but at the same time lucid, about the impracticability of what he had believed in, Gersão (2021) starts to alert us to the complexity of history and its agents:

like you, I am not, nor have I ever been, a man of action, I was a man of thought, and that seemed to be enough for me. I even believed that I could remain politically neutral and that Psychoanalysis could be practised in any regime or country. (p. 36)

As the character puts it, Freud’s wrong was one of action versus passivity. However, the latter can be read as intellectual passivity since political neutrality still implies blindness towards the “other” and its history of slavery, colonisation, and subjugation. In other words, Freud failed to recognise that “there is no universal psychiatric reality” (Nobles, 2013, p. 233), that is, “whether modern (professional) or traditional (folk), every aspect of psychological knowledge and practice is a reflection of the constructed world of a particular people” (p. 234). It also contributed, as Walter D. Mignolo (2007) puts it, to the building of modernity, although not exclusively European, that is, to “the rhetoric of modernity [which] has been predominantly put forward by European men of letters, philosophers, intellectuals, officers of the state” (p. 469). The thought of modernity involved a European claim to benevolence and brotherhood that translated into the dehumanisation, defrauding and exploitation of racialised bodies. The alienation and the inability to see the reality of the other, that is, the inability to empathise<sup>2</sup>, justify Freud’s words in the novel:

<sup>2</sup> Here we assume David D. Burns’ (2000) definition: “empathy is the ability to comprehend with accuracy the precise thoughts and motivations of other people” (p. 185).

I, too, had, in a way, tried to distance myself from the sick mentality that surrounded us, and I had focused too much on the inner world of the spirit.

Psychoanalysis was enough on its own, I believed, and I clung to my project as if it could, or would, in time mend the world.

He [Thomas Mann] clung just as tightly to his project: he believed that art in itself sufficed, and he was as wrong as I was. We both lived the obsession of transcribing a work that would be worth by itself and would overcome time. (Gersão, 2021, p. 16)

Both Freud and, in the quote above, Mann took part in the history of modernity. They contributed to shaping a modern interdisciplinary knowledge that, according to Lisa Lowe and Kris Manjapra (2019), is “a history of modern European forms monopolising the definition of the human and placing other variations at a distance from the human” (p. 24). That entails assuming the subject as the central agent of history, society and aesthetics. This way, it sediments a historical and continuous “coloniality of knowledge” that accompanies and naturalises settler-colonial and imperial projects in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992). Not even the fact that he was “received with scandal and repudiation” (Gersão, 2021, p. 16) made him realise that he was writing “for a privileged class, and that did not care about misery because they did not know it, and lived focused on their problems” (p. 37). Such “misery” was experienced on the African continent, subjugated by European imperialism and the American continent, where millions of bodies were forcibly taken as merchandise to fulfil the “civilisational dream” of European greed. Nobles (2013) notes that one constant imperative in Black psychology is the recognition of the damaging impact of colonialism and chattel slavery on the African mind and consciousness. This recognition is coupled with a profound understanding that the meaning of being African, for both continental and diasporic Africans, is prescribed in the visible and invisible realms of reality (Nobles, 2013, p. 234). However, our understanding of what it means to be African “depends only on conceptions of European material reality grounded in Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian thought” (Nobles, 2013, p. 234), such as the conceptions created by Freud and Mann in their books and essays.

Freud’s wrong, however, goes further and validates the psychological argument developed by Nobles decades later. Ernst Haeckel was responsible, like others before him, for spreading a theory (or belief) based on a hierarchical order of human races, which is part of the widespread racism supported by 18th and 19th-century scientism and evolutionary theory. Freud developed his own version of the organic memory theory in his psychoanalytic theory, which argued that all organic matter contains memory. According to critic L. Otis (1991), one of the problems with Freud’s adopting the physiological theories of the time was his conclusion that all people of both ancient and modern times had the same experiences (p. 193). Like biogenetic law, this premise was never questioned by Freud. Perhaps because without the assumption of a universal phylogenetic legacy, he could never use

psychoanalysis to examine social phenomena (Otis, 1991, p. 193). The wrong was, thus, to extend individual development to cultural development and, for this reason, he too was responsible, though Jewish, for a castrating narrative of the human being. Moreover, even belonging to a group stigmatised as inferior and persecuted and obliterated, he did not understand that the distinct, yet interconnected, colonial racial logics “emerged as part of what in the 19th century was an emerging imperial imaginary of Anglo-American settlers” (Lowe, 2015b, p. 92). The pernicious consequence is that the same kind of logic is still being elaborated today, “casting differentiated peoples around the world against liberal ideas of civilised personality and human freedom” (Lowe, 2015b, p. 92).

## 2. THE WRONG OF THOMAS MANN

The second part of the novel, “Thomas Mann Thinking of Freud in December 1930”, can be analysed as an anachronistic response by Mann to Freud’s 1938 monologue. Through the critical study of Mann’s work, we know of his contribution to the field of neurology (Caputi et al., 2018) and his relationship with Freud — although encounters were scarce — and his work<sup>3</sup> (Hummel, 2006). From the study of Mann’s diary, we learn that Mann visited Freud and that during the visit, he re-read in private the speech *Freud and the Future*, delivered on May 8, 1936, at a festive event to honour the psychoanalyst, two days after his 80th birthday, in the packed hall of the Wiener Konzertverein (Hummel, 2006, p. 76). According to Hummel (2006), this was one of the most delightful encounters of the 20th century. Both men played a key role in the cultural blossoming of the German-speaking region — until they were forced to leave their homeland when their culture sank into the morass of Nazi barbarism. The personal relationship between the two men was possibly more complex and complicated than the diaries suggest, but that afternoon surely has left a deep impression on the audience. A letter that Martha Freud sent to Thomas Mann in 1945 on his 70th birthday bears witness to this (Eigler, 2005, p. 114).

Scholars of Mann and his work speculate that although in his diaries of 1918-1921 psychoanalysis plays no role, he must have known more about it than what was discussed in the literary salons of Munich at the time. However, the address honouring Freud in 1936 is more than indisputable proof of the role of psychoanalysis in the writer’s work. In this tribute, Mann (1936) states at the outset, “when I began to engage with the literature of psychoanalysis, I recognised, by arranging the ideas and the language of scientific accuracy, much that had long been familiar to me through my youthful mental experiences” (p. 115). In fact, in this homage address, Mann dwells much more on himself and the analysis of his book *Joseph and His Brethren* — “perhaps my readers will be indulgent if I talk a little about my own work” (p. 118) — than on Freud, an aspect analysed by Gersão (2021) in Freud’s thoughts regarding the writer:

it was one of his contradictions. He emphasised reason, but emotion dragged him along unconsciously. He wanted to speak about my path, but, as he

<sup>3</sup> As an example, Caputi et al. (2018) report that “whatever the source of his inspiration to research and record these conditions, neurology and literature are certainly indebted to Thomas Mann’s writing” (p. 83).

recognised, it was to himself, his personal experience, and his books that he always returned. As he saw it, that was to my advantage. I couldn't help smiling on the inside. Yes, I thought, looking at him, it is the triumph of consciousness over the unconscious, but how can it be reached, to what extent, and in what way? What traps, retreats, relapses drive us ( ... ) forward? (p. 13)

At the end of his speech, Mann (1936) alludes to the analytic revelation as a revolutionary force stating that it brought a joyful scepticism into the world, a distrust that unmasked all the schemes and deceptions of our own souls. Once awake and on alert, they cannot be put to sleep again (pp. 122–123). He concludes his speech envisioning a future where hope reigns — “can we hope that this will be the fundamental temper of that more cheerfully objective and peaceful world which the science of the unconscious may be called upon to introduce?” (Mann, 1936, p. 123) — and Freud, the character, questions: “and what heroic future is this, for which he longs? What world of peace and without hate does he foresee, out of this year's 1936 troubled reality and the years of anguish and debacle that preceded it?” (Gersão, 2021, p. 13).

Gersão (2021) sets Mann's silent dialogue with Freud one year after the first received the Nobel Prize for Literature and 3 years before the latter moved to Switzerland, shortly after the Nazis came to power in 1933. In 1936, Mann was formally expatriated and obtained Czechoslovak citizenship. In 1938, he moved to the United States of America, where, in 1944, he was granted American citizenship. In 1952, he returned to Switzerland. Mann, the character, deconstructs Freud and the limitations of psychoanalysis, also revealing, himself, the wrong of his contemporary psychoanalyst:

yes, I understand and sympathise with you:

Jewish, poor, an intellectual against the tide, confronting a society that does not want to be unmasked or change and which you reduce to crumbs without illusions or complacency. ( ... ) But what you have to reveal to it, what you have to offer to it, is neither exciting nor even reassuring: A cruel society based on rivalry, incest and parricide, a world shattered by endless war, where civilisation causes unease and the sweeping happiness of fusion is illusory or even forbidden. Every individual is unique and different and will always be alone. (Gersão, 2021, p. 51)

Mann is not equally immune to his time, as his fictional portrait offered by Gersão (2021) unveils. Both monologues — or dialogues with an absent interlocutor — can be read as a power struggle between two of the greatest figures of late 19th and early 20th-century western thought. They try to vindicate themselves and each other by relating their incoherences, failed desires, ambiguities and contradictions, ultimately their human frailty and that of their thought. In fact, in this inescapable human condition that they resemble each other. Mann refers to this closeness between the two in several passages. “We speak the same language, Dr Freud” (Gersão, 2021, p. 52), says the writer,

referring not only to the German language but “to other ones, to the language of the intellect, of the spirit, which lead us to revelations and illuminations that collapse upon us and set us on fire. The language of discoveries, the divine language of epiphanies” (p. 52). Mann and Freud are equally close in the field of political ideas:

I also share your view: you have argued that psychoanalysis should be neutral and practised in all political regimes because it does not specifically have a ‘world view’. But that is not true, dear doctor. You have an undeniable patriarchal and conservative vision of the world. You accept the idea of democracy, but you don’t like the French republican model, for example, and you have always opposed communist or socially revolutionary ideas. I, too, am against them. (Gersão, 2021, p. 76)

In his monologue, Mann may reveal a tendency to see his art as superior — “my world of artistic creation is a search for the absolute, beyond words, a kind of loss of identity, where all antagonisms are balanced, and good and evil are confused” (Gersão, 2021, p. 76). However, two aspects contributed to his wrong. The first, like Freud, was his fascination with heredity, or rather, “his fascination with the way the individual contained, represented and transmitted his past” (Otis, 1991, p. 126), which permeates all his artistic creation. In his essay “Freud and the Future”, the influences of Haeckel (1914) and Lamarck (1809) are quite evident, as he has no problem in juxtaposing social and individual psychology. Gersão (2021) deconstructs his pulsating racism, in line with the scientific theories that seduced him, in the following passage where the writer talks about his marriage to Katia, daughter of Jews: “besides, the marriage was, in everything else, convenient: The Pringsteins were Jews, therefore ethnically inferior to me. Even if they tried to trick or humiliate me, I was in a stronger position. Marriage added to my social prestige” (Gersão, 2021, p. 59).

The second wrong was not to have valued his Brazilian descent on the part of his mother, Júlia, until a given moment. In the monologue where he thinks about Freud, Mann talks about his complex relationships with his wife, brother, and children, but never about his mother, which discloses an important narrative strategy here. Silencing Júlia in her son’s thoughts implies a double exclusion of the figure of the feminine, both in real life and in fiction, which Gersão (2021) will recover in the last part of the book by providing her not only with a voice but also with double the narrative space. According to Sibeles Paulino and Paulo Soethe (2009), Thomas Mann displayed in his lifetime an ambivalence towards his South American origin:

indifference, distancing, and even denial, especially in early public life, would alternate with statements of appreciation of this element of ethnic and cultural diversity in his person and with expressions of interest in the exotic country where his mother had been born and grew up. (p. 33)

The writer was exposed to books produced in Brazil and “also had personal meetings with Brazilian intellectuals such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Erico Verissimo”

(Paulino & Soethe, 2009, p. 36). However, he never travelled to Brazil, which would have offered him the opportunity to meet with Gilberto Freyre, the only Brazilian intellectual the German writer mentions in a letter (Paulino & Soethe, 2009, p. 36).

Freyre was known to have felt an extreme admiration for Mann, whom he called “the greatest personality of modern German literature”. In fact, he urged the Brazilian Academy of Letters to invite him to Brazil, more than once, to honour the greatest “son of a Brazilian woman” (Paulino & Soethe, 2009, p. 45). Although Freyre’s efforts succeeded, probably, just as the Brazilian intellectual was aware of the Nobel Prize winner’s work, the latter was also familiar with Freyrian theories. Perhaps those have also contributed to Mann’s reconciliation with his Brazilian origin in the 1940s. According to Paulino and Soethe (2009), in a letter of 1943 to Lustig-Prean, “one reads Thomas Mann’s most striking statement about the significance of his own Brazilian origin in his development as a person and artist” (p. 42). The connection, “the acquaintance of these intellectuals to each other through their works is not, by any means, absurd, if we also consider that in the English language editions of *Casa Grande & Senzala*, Freyre is compared to Picasso and Freud” (Dávila, 2019, p. 51). Like Freud and Mann, Freyre was also part of a racial and cultural thought tradition based on human differences. Intellectually influenced and influential, prominent figures in the history of literature, science, and thought in Gersão’s (2011) book were exposed for the same wrong: not critically questioning a world rooted in white hegemony, which erased the difference and dignity of the “other”. In fact, both Mann and Freud believed in a concept of worth, perpetuated by science, that distinguished human beings and placed them in organised boxes when we know today through cognitive science that value “is just an abstraction; it doesn’t exist. Hence, there is actually no such thing as human worth” (Burns, 2000, p. 341).

### 3. THE EPIPHANY OF JÚLIA MANN

The third text in Gersão’s (2021) book, which gives its title, focuses on Júlia Mann, completing a circle of lives and experiences that intersected in that mental whirlwind of the early 20th century. As Sara Figueiredo Costa (2021) states,

these three characters are remarkable at many levels. Although Júlia Mann, because she was a woman and did not abide by the behavioural codes of her time, never had the recognition she deserved. They were directly involved, though differently, in all these changes that launched last century, yet it is the intersection of their stories, especially at a deep and unconscious level, that makes a novel that is far from being a mere biographical exercise. (para. 9)

The narrative about Júlia Mann, born in Brazil and at the age of 7 “displaced to the bourgeois life of Lübeck, Germany, meanwhile married to a merchant with whom she would have several children and clearly lost between what she thought and felt and what others expected of her” (Costa, 2021, para. 6), opens with the boat trip back to her

childhood home. That place is a hymn to her freedom: “no house would ever lock her again, and so I laughed at her doors and windows, gardens, stairs, walls and balconies, plaster ceilings and shining floors, which were suddenly no longer there” (Gersão, 2021, p. 80). In this text, oscillating between Júlia Mann’s childhood and the end of her life, the wrongs of the thinking in the late 19th and early 20th centuries openly culminate: the racism inherent in hierarchical theories of the human being leading to the demeaning and domination of African peoples and South American indigenous people, equally ranking women on a scale of inferiority and subordination towards men; the Lusotropicalism developed in the tropics by Gilberto Freyre which justified Portuguese colonialism in Brazil and Africa, not to mention the racism naturalised in Brazil; the assumption arising from these supposedly scientific theories that western peoples are endowed with a more advanced level of civilisation and therefore predestined to bring others to the same level of culture and civilisation, thus legitimising acts of barbarism.

Despite having spent 63 years in Germany, Júlia was never seen as German because, as Richard Miskolci (2003)

at that time, national identity was given at the exclusionary extremes of some nationalities (implied as “race”). Politically, nationality perceived as citizenship remained a male privilege with restrictions of class and property like the right to vote. Being a German citizen — like being a citizen of all countries of the time — presupposed being male and bourgeois. Thus, Júlia shared a subordinate position in her society with the other German women, though her circumstances made her situation even more problematic. (p. 173)

That had to do with her Brazilian origin — the object of inner conflict in Thomas Mann, as mentioned —, setting her apart from the “normal” German women, making her an outsider in the bourgeois environment where she was born: “hence the repeated allusions of her contemporaries to her artistic aptitudes, her festive joy and scandalous laughter” (Miskolci, 2003, p. 173). In Júlia’s reflections, this “apparently rational” idea of being more German at the end of her life than Brazilian “did not seem to convince anyone”, “everyone regarded her as *exotic* ( ... ). There was thus something aberrant in Júlia for the German society, patriarchal, puritanical and bourgeois, where female sexuality should be hidden” (Gersão, 2021, p. 112).

Júlia, the character, ponders these aspects when she is already aware enough to realise her castration not only as a woman but a woman born in an “exotic” country from a mother with indigenous blood as well: “the language of her mother, Ana’s, her country and childhood had been forbidden, erased. Murdered. She could not say loneliness, absence and loss in any language now” (Gersão, 2021, p. 98). In a Europe in crisis, regarded by several German thinkers as a crisis of the centre of Europe, which for them was in Germany and the German people, “only the affirmation of the roots could withstand the power of nihilism and the rootless cosmopolitanism of the French Enlightenment” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 76). The erasure of the “other” and their culture, the systemic racism, sometimes under the guise of forgetfulness of condemnation

(Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 109), was disseminated, as Júlia's voice tells us. In addition to the erasure of language,

one could not run, jump, speak loudly, make noise, and disturb the adults' tranquillity. Uncle Theodor got angry with the noise of her playing in the garden when she visited her grandmother's home twice a month with her brothers and sisters; he saw them as little savages who needed to be civilised. (Gersão, 2021, p. 99)

Through Júlia and her inner world, Gersão (2021) deconstructs and lays bare the wrongs of this 19th-century thinking, pillars of western modernity, whose remnants are still mirrored in contemporary society in the 21st century. As Maria Paula Meneses (2021) states, "one of the characteristics of northern centric modernity lies in the creation and permanent reinforcement of an intellectual hierarchy, by which the cultural and intellectual traditions of the North are imposed as the canon, self-defined as superior because they are more developed" (p. 1069; see also Khan, 2021a, 2021c; Khan et al., 2021). The character also refers to the medical studies of her time, responsible for the perception of the "other" as a lesser being:

therefore, she was a danger to social order and families: She could slip into excess, bohemianism or debauchery at any moment. As medical studies pointed out, the natives of the South, especially women, tended towards moral and mental insanity, especially if they were miscegenated, of impure blood. (Gersão, 2021, p. 113)

Besides, "in the tropical countries, miasmas and deadly or incapacitating diseases raged, and the natives' own indolent temperament, averse to work and progress, was a degeneracy typical of biologically and intellectually inferior peoples" (Gersão, 2021, p. 112).

Gersão (2021) also uses Júlia, although anachronistically, to demystify, deconstruct, and subtly repair the wrongs, lapses, and certainties of the Luso-tropicalism tracts<sup>4</sup> and other imperialist narratives of exceptionalism. Júlia recognises that her German father was no more than a coloniser, "trained to exploit quick money, like, in fact, everyone: Portuguese, Italians, Germans, Dutch, French, English were all tarred with the same brush and wanted the biggest profit, and as fast as possible" (p. 123). As Cristiana Bastos (1998) states, this theory developed by Freyre would come to influence,

above all, the belief in the absence of racism, or in lenient handling of differences by those who express themselves in Portuguese, rooted in a hypothetical capacity of integration of the Portuguese colonisers with the tropical environments and peoples; such a belief garners the most diverse complicities. (p. 415)

<sup>4</sup> In the words of Cristiana Bastos (2019), "the term lusotropicalism was coined in the 1950s by Brazilian anthropologist and cultural historian Gilberto Freyre. In his early works on colonial Brazil, Freyre suggested that Portuguese colonisers had a special ability to adapt to the tropics, easily mixing, intermarrying and exchanging cultural elements with different peoples since they were the result of multiple mixtures themselves. Two decades later, he expanded the idea into a concept suitable for all societies with Portuguese influence, whether colonial plantations, settler societies or conquest territories" (p. 243).

They are still visible today, with repercussions beyond the borders of Brazil, including some African countries (Khan et al., 2020).

With Júlia, we also re-address the problem of slavery — the basis of Freyrian theory in *Casa Grande & Senzala* — during her journey back to Paraty:

much more painful was being transported on the slave ships, which had carried loads of slaves from Africa to Europe and America for centuries. Slavery was even crueller than she had suspected when she had tried to find out more. There were slaves in Brazil. She had seen them in her childhood, without really understanding a thing, not yet knowing the dark side of the world and life. (Gersão, 2021, pp. 134–135)

Let us go back to Nobles (2013), to his classified concept of “spirit damage” or the “suffering of the spirit”. He emphasises that one of the most profound lingering psychological effects of slavery and colonialism for African people has been a sense of human alienation “resulting from being infected with or assaulted by long-standing, ongoing sensorial information structures representing chattel enslavement and colonisation, that is, thing-a-fication and dehumanisation of African people” (Nobles, 2013, pp. 238–239). Hence, it is necessary to implement a new psychology that is able to “reveal or expose the truth of African reality” (Nobles, 2013, p. 239).

*O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* (Gersão, 2021) discloses some of the wrongs of the great thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, exploring the life of Sigmund Freud and Thomas Mann, in which the role of memory takes centre stage. I would even dare to consider memory as the novel’s main character. Teolinda Gersão exposes one of the great post-World War II truths: that time is not a straight line, nor can memory be only a repository of things left behind in the past. *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* serves as a place of memory, such as a museum, that allows us to look back at the past and reflect on it. This place that encompasses the wrongs of some of the agents of history, and includes Júlia, a fictional character, no less excluded, makes us think and envision a future whose alternative historical memories can also become main stories.

Going back to the question asked by Freud: “can it be that we are unable to evolve in the ethical realm, just as we seem unable to love and feel compassion after all?” (Gersão, 2021, p. 14); the answer will perhaps be melancholic. Although the end of Júlia’s narrative and her return to her home town can somehow contain some hope, since there is a reunion with the place of childhood freedom, it seems that the answer lies a few pages from the end. Júlia, also excluded, declares, in an anxious tone dominated by a certain despondency:

oh, God, how unbearable life could be for the weakest, there should never again be slaves, suffering or ill-treatment, it was urgent to put an end to prejudices of skin colour, customs or culture, of being from the North or the South, to abandon these crazy ideas of impure, mixed and mongrel blood.

The world was sick. It had to be saved from madness - everything was wrong and distorted, people were monsters, countries were destroying each other in endless wars. It was not possible to live in such a place. Gersão, 2021, p. 136)

Júlia's epiphany is, however, commonplace in the 21st century: the world is still as sick now as in her time. The wrongs of 19th and 20th-century thinking persist in contemporary times. As Lisa Lowe (2015b) states in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, liberal forms of political economy, culture, government and history propose a narrative of freedom that obliterates slavery. So, "the social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which 'the human' is 'liberated' by liberal forms while other subjects, practices and geographies are kept at a distance from the 'human'" (Lowe, 2015b, p. 3). Until humans are capable of empathy and solidarity, as long as there is insufficient education about "the other worlds" in schools, until racist and discriminatory views are overcome, this ethical and emotional progression, fictional Freud was referring to, seems doomed to remain a utopian vision. Catherine Hall (2018), on the process of history-writing as reparatory, states that "there remains much reparatory work to be done" (p. 19). Moreover, if "history writing can be one way in" (Hall, 2018, p. 19), art can be another medium, taking a key role in this process. As Sheila Khan (2012b) states,

the breadth of art's reach opens the door to places that the status of reality does not otherwise do. Among several of its dense and complex dimensions, such as the rhetoric of multiculturalism, which sometimes assumes a mask that tends to hide, manipulate and cloud human realities in constant disquiet, social insecurity, banishment and loneliness. (p. 128)

The words of Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (2020) take us in the same direction

thus, we are dealing with the transformative power of memory through art, with its capacity to tell us who we are, as people and as a community, with its ability to unsettle us, to question us, but also to make us dream. (p. 18)

That is what *O Regresso de Júlia Mann a Paraty* (2021) shows us, as it engages in a critical and reparatory dialogue with the past mirrored in the present.

**Translation: Anabela Delgado**

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