

FETISHISM AS STRUCTURE, IMAGE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE THEATER
OF NELSON RODRIGUES

BY

ISADORA GREVAN DE CARVALHO

B.A., UC BERKELEY, 2001

M.A. SF STATE UNIVERSITY, 2007

M.A. BROWN UNIVERSITY, 2010

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Date _____
Nelson H. Vieira

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date _____
Luiz Fernando Valente

Date _____
Patricia Sobral

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____
Peter M. Webber, Dean of the Graduate School

VITA

Isadora Grevan de Carvalho was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. As an undergraduate, she first attended the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, majoring in Philosophy for about 2 years. From her teens on, she studied at CAL (Casa de Artes de Laranjeiras) and with various prominent theater companies in the city. She has taken acting classes and performed with Augusto Boal, Moacyr Góes, Leon Góes, Daniel Herz, Suzanna Kruger, Ivan de Albuquerque, Rubens Corrêa, Floriano Peixoto and Antonio Nóbrega, among others. She then moved to San Francisco, graduating Cum Laude from UC Berkeley in 2001 with a major in Comparative Literature in English, French and Portuguese. At the same time, she continued to pursue her interests in both literature and the arts by becoming a member and student of Mary Sano and Her Duncan Dancers in San Francisco, which, over the course of about 10 years, involved performances in the USA, Hungary and Japan. She was subsequently awarded a M.A. from SFSU in Comparative Literature, whose final project consisted of a comprehensive examination on world literature and a final project and presentation on Emerson's dialectics, American romanticism and *Moby Dick*. She then continued her graduate education in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University, earning a M.A. in 2011 and a Ph.D. in 2013. She has taught Portuguese language and Brazilian literature and culture at Brown University and received four teaching certificates from the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning. At the moment, she has articles pending publication on Germano Almeida, Machado de Assis and Clarice Lispector. Beginning in the Fall of 2013, she will assume the position of Visiting Assistant Professor of Portuguese, Brazilian Culture and Society in the Hispanic Studies Department at Oberlin College.

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INTRODUCTION

Fetishism as Structure, Image and Performance in the Theatre of Nelson Rodrigues

In this dissertation, I examine the plays of the Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues by investigating the structure, image and performance of fetish present in a variety of elements throughout his plays. The structure, image and performance of fetish are to become a locus capable of revealing profound psychological aspects of Rodrigues' characters and body of work from which his commentary on Brazilian society and beyond are discussed.

Almost single-handedly, Nelson Rodrigues was responsible for catapulting Brazilian national theatre into the 20th century. Before him, most of the theatre being performed in the country consisted of boulevard comedies, European plays put on by foreign acting companies, and *chanchadas*¹. So much so that by writing and staging plays for the purpose of more than light-hearted entertainment, he literally reinvented Brazilian dramaturgy. Furthermore, he introduced novelties in stage-set design and the narrative style, in addition to deliberately incorporating colloquial language and characters representative of the different social classes, belonging to very specific but heretofore ignored milieus in Brazilian society. The changes he introduced into Brazilian theater can be compared in depth and scope to the modernist movement in literature and in the arts, which had started at least one decade earlier, spearheaded by writers and artists such as Oswald de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral and Manuel Bandeira².

As a result of the historic performance of *O Vestido de Noiva* [*The Wedding Dress*] in 1943 by the amateur acting group *Os Comediantes*, for example, the emphasis

on developing serious, well-trained, professional theatre companies and promoting new Brazilian playwrights who would focus on subjects of national concern, gained significant momentum. The staging of this play by the expressionist Polish-born director Zbigniew Marian Ziemiński significantly influenced the way future Brazilian theater projects were viewed and performed. As opposed to the other art forms flourishing at the time, most plays being written and performed were neither innovative nor socially relevant³. According to David George in *The Modern Brazilian Stage, O Comediantes* was an important “laboratory, where experiments in stagecraft took place, a school, as it were, of the dramatic arts” (8). The confluence of this group of actors so eager to elevate the art of theatre, together with Ziemiński’s introduction of new ideas then in vogue in Europe, the work of the stage designer Santa Rosa, and the play itself, marked the nearly perfect theatrical combination of artistry and experimentation with a distinctively Brazilian flair. In fact, Décio de Almeida Prado would later write about this performance in *Teatro em Progresso* that

the theatre, as spectacle, became universal in the manner of the other modern arts, and Nelson Rodrigues represented for the stage what Villa-Lobos brought to music, Portinari to painting, Niemeyer to architecture, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade to poetry. What is certain is that the opening of *Vestido* made Brazilian Theatre lose its inferiority complex. (21)

Rodrigues’ writings about himself, his theatre work, and Brazilian society (often found in widely-read newspaper columns) shed light on some of his broader themes as a playwright and subsequently help us understand his ideas more clearly. In fact, we can intuit that Nelson Rodrigues’ playwriting style was highly influenced by his experience as a newspaper columnist, sensationalist crime reporter and *folhetim*⁴ writer. After the performance of his first play *A Mulher Sem Pecado* [*Woman without Sin*] (1941), Nelson

Rodrigues claimed that he had written it for the sole purpose of making money, thus initially aiming to stage a comedy of manners' style of theatre. Ruy Castro, writer of Nelson Rodrigues' biography entitled *O Anjo Pornográfico* [*The Pornographic Angel*] claims that "Nelson gostava de contar que começara *A Mulher sem Pecado* como uma chanchada, mas que, em poucas páginas, a história daquele marido paralítico e ciumento adquirira uma tintura dramática que ele não previra" [Nelson liked to say that he started *Woman without Sin* as comedy, but that, in a few pages, the history of that paraplegic and jealous husband had acquired a dramatic quality that he had not anticipated] (87)⁵. Thus, he wants us to believe that he ended up not being able to control his dramatic tendencies, and wrote a psychological tragedy instead (with a few comedic twists), characteristics that Sábato Magaldi refers to as being close to the *folhetim* style of narrative⁶.

Because of the repetition of many different themes throughout Nelson Rodrigues' whole body of work, there is no better way to begin peaking through the keyhole of his plays than but by citing his own words regarding both himself and the society around him⁷. In Brazil, many of his more provocative statements have become hallmarks of his highly controversial persona, one that was always prone to exaggeration and controversy in his interviews whether as a journalist or playwright. During the right-wing military dictatorship (1964-1985)⁸, for example, he repeatedly accused the often-privileged leftist elite in its veiled alienation of the lower socioeconomic strata of Brazilian society of actually espousing the same reactionary viewpoints and ideas as the right. Suffice it to say, because of the widespread censorship that most artists suffered under the dictatorship, it was common practice for this elite to all side blindly with left-wing ideals⁹. On the other hand, Nelson Rodrigues often sided with the dictatorship and its

supporters, conferring upon himself the title “the reactionary”. He was essentially a cynic in his views stating that any left or right wing idealist (in Brazil at that time) would be only too willing to turn their backs on their lofty principles in defense of their own interests. In the collection of chronicles *O Reacionário: Memórias e Confissões* [*The Reactionary: Memories and Confessions*], Nelson Rodrigues tackles the issue of political affiliation, as seen in the quote below. Even though he often expresses his right-wing political bent, he also professes a distrust of ideologies. His characterizations of himself (titles which were repeatedly alluded to throughout his life) such as “the flower of obsession”, “the pornographic angel” and “the reactionary” contain a myriad of definitions and contradictions so that none of them can be easily defined.

Perguntaram, outro dia, a um amigo meu: “Você é de direita ou de esquerda?”. Ele calçou a brasa do cigarro no cinzeiro e respondeu: “Não sou canalha”. Ninguém entendeu. Houve aquele suspense irrespirável. Nova pergunta: “Como assim?”. E o meu amigo: “O canalha joga em qualquer posição”. E não disse nem mais uma palavra. Mas, se bem o entendi, ele insinuou o seguinte: “Só o canalha precisa de uma ideologia, que o justifique e o absolva”. (85)

[The other day, they asked a friend of mine: “Are you right-wing or a leftist?”. He put the cigarette down in the ashtray and answered: “I am not a scoundrel”. No one understood. There was that unbearable suspense. New question: “How come?” And my friend replied: “The scoundrel flip flops”. And he did not say anything else. But, as I well understood, he insinuated the following: “Only a scoundrel needs an ideology to justify his actions and ultimately give him repentance”.]

Thus, he believed that ideologies like those espoused by the so-called right or the so-called left were merely façades for a multiplicity of opinions and positions. In the previously mentioned chronicles and others, however, it is important to be aware that many of his expressed ideas were not always in agreement with the above opinion, which is actually a particularly clear demonstration of his profound distrust of all ideologies.

Looking back at his commentaries on the political left and right, it could be said that he was able to perceive the myriad contradictions inherent in all political movements and philosophies, considering them mostly blind to most of the major issues facing Brazilian society, including racial, social, and gender inequalities (again, despite his often self-proclaimed conservative sympathies), as is clear in the following quote:

Ah, os nossos libertários! Bem os conheço, bem os conheço. Querem a própria liberdade! A dos outros, não. Que se dane a liberdade alheia. Berram contra todos os regimes de força, mas cada qual tem no bolso a sua ditadura¹⁰.

[Oh, our libertarians! I know them very well. They want their own freedom! Not anyone else's and proclaim: "To hell with other people's freedom". They shout against any repressive regime, but each one of them carries within, their own form of dictatorship.]

In 1969, Nelson Rodrigues wrote an article in one of his newspaper chronicles in *O Globo* entitled "Um pesadelo com cem mil defuntos" [A nightmare of one hundred thousand corpses], cynically describing the social configuration behind one of the biggest organized marches against the dictatorship in 1968. He emphasized that the so-called leftist political movement was based on European models that in no way reflected the economic, social or political realities particular to Brazil.

...apanhei o número de *Manchete* referente à passeata dos Cem Mil. ... Cada qual levava no bolso a sua ideologia, que era a mesma em todos os bolsos. Na época, escrevi que não se encontrava, entre os Cem Mil, ou cinquenta, ou até 25, nenhum preto. Eu estive lá espiando. Fui testemunha auditiva e ocular da marcha. Como sou uma "flor de obsessão", não me saía da cabeça a ausência do negro. Se eu descobrisse um – não dois ou três, mas um, somente um –, já me daria por muito satisfeito.

[...I caught the newspaper headline referring to the Hundred Thousand march. ... Each carried in his pocket his own ideology, which was the same in all pockets. At the time, I wrote that we could not find among the one hundred thousand, or fifty, or even 25, any blacks. I stood there watching. I witnessed the march with my own eyes and ears. Since I am a

“flower of obsession”, it has never left my mind the absence of any black person. If I found one - not two or three but at least one, only one – it would have made me very happy.]

And he goes on to indicate that, besides not including any Afro-Brazilians, most of the participants seemed to belong to the higher echelons of society, since, using his typical ironic tone, they exhibited a perfect set of teeth while contradictorily exclaiming in favor of the “participation” of all members of society in politics and against the dictatorship:

E outra observação, que me deu o que pensar: – os Cem Mil tinham uma saúde dentária de anúncio dentifício. Objetará alguém que muitos estariam de boca fechada. Absolutamente. Estava todo mundo de boca aberta (como no dentista) e gritando: – “Participação! Participação! Participação!”. E a marcha de 100 mil sujeitos sem uma cárie, sem um desdentado (...) – “Nem um preto, Silveirinha! Nem um desdentado! Nem um favelado! Nem um torcedor do Flamengo! Nem um assaltante de chofer”. Por fim, arranquei das minhas entranhas este gemido final: – “E o povo? Onde está o povo?”. O povo era a ausência total. (...) Não havia um preto, ou um torcedor rubro-negro, ou um desdentado, porque aquilo era uma passeata das classes dominantes.¹¹

[And another observation, which gave me food for thought: the Hundred Thousand had a dental health comparable to a toothpaste ad. Someone will object that many had their mouth shut. Absolutely not. Everybody was open-mouthed (like at the dentist) and shouting – “Participation! Participation! Participation!” The march of 100,000 subjects without a cavity, without a toothless person ... “Not one black person, Silveirinha! Neither a toothless person! Neither a slum dweller! Not a fan of Flamengo! Not a chauffeur robber”. Finally, I pulled this final cry, right from my entrails: - “And the people? Where are the people?” The people were the total absence. ... There was neither a black man nor a fan of Flamengo, nor a toothless mouth, because it was a rally of the ruling classes.]

As I will discuss in more detail in the ensuing chapters, Nelson Rodrigues’ insights regarding the racial and social inequalities in Brazilian society expressed above are openly explored in some of his plays. Behind some of the most shocking depictions of perverse sexuality (such as the notoriously incestuous relationships/desires in *Album*

de Família [*Family Album*], which were shocking, especially when the play was first read and performed, i.e., in 1946, when it was banned by the censors and again in 1967, when it was reintroduced on stage), are explorations of relationships characterized by exploitation and violence of a racial, social, and gender-related nature. Sabato Magaldi affirms in the preface to *Teatro Completo* in acknowledgement of Nelson Rodrigues' complex public persona, his non-submission to any totalitarian regime:

Um dia, será necessário rever o epíteto de reacionário que o próprio Nelson se afixou. Na verdade, há muito de feroz ironia nesse qualificativo. Porque Nelson Rodrigues foi reacionário apenas na medida em que não aceitou a submissão do indivíduo a qualquer regime totalitário. Quando a pessoa humana for revalorizada, também desse ponto de vista ele será julgado revolucionário. (Magaldi, "Prefácio" in Rodrigues, 1993: 131)

[One day, it will be necessary to revise the epitome of reactionary that even Nelson himself espoused. Actually, there's plenty of fierce irony in this self-professed definition. Because Nelson Rodrigues was just reactionary in that he did not accept the submission of the individual to any totalitarian regime. When the human person is revalued, also from this point of view, he will be judged as mainly revolutionary instead.]

It could be conjectured that the persona and popularity of Nelson Rodrigues have often originated from a misguided or even erroneous interpretation of his writings and commentary, samples of which were often deliberately taken out of context in order to shock or cause laughter, however uncomfortable¹². But, a closer examination will reveal much more substance in Nelson Rodrigues' social commentary than any anecdotal reactionary or pornographic images (in connection with his often unabashed portrayal of sexuality). Sexuality, particularly in his plays, is never gratuitous. On the contrary, it is most frequently depicted as the expression of repressed desires in the lives of individuals and families as, for instance, a reflection of violence against women, for instance, or as a

manifestation of personal repressed desires for revenge. Not surprisingly, some of his plays have often been considered pornographic even though the author himself often publicly expounded on the value of chastity. He would at times contradict the most immediate shocking elements of his theater to justify and accentuate his use of sexual themes as a means of exposing other factors inherent to the human condition in general and the Brazilian man in particular.

In fact, Nelson Rodrigues' unique style may pose some knotty challenges for the reader/audience. The question remains on how to stage any of the author's plays or make one into a movie without falling into the trap of portraying sexuality as only pornographic or as expressing a rather animalistic side of humanity at its lowest instead of depicting sexuality in a more complex and controversial manner (perhaps playing around with these two starkly-contrasting manifestations). In order to successfully engage with Nelson Rodrigues's work as a reader or a stage or film director, it is essential to never downplay the contradictions, complexities, and often overly-condensed paradoxes that are portrayed in the themes, scenes and material realities, which are features also expressed in his persona as a journalist and author. Hence, an action or word often contains an opposite intention or desire, or a parallel unconscious wish that goes counter to what is dramatized on stage.

As I will develop further, the condensed aspect of the fetish as performance, structure and image contains within itself all the opposing forces mentioned above, which could ultimately help us decipher some of the major complexities in Nelson Rodrigues' plays. The unriddling of the fetish formation and manifestation can give us new insights

into his work as well as serve as an aid in opening up new possibilities for interpretation and performance.

On Stage

I will never forget one of the first times I saw the performance of two of Nelson Rodrigues' plays directed by Antunes Filho during a tour of his theater company in Rio de Janeiro (which, first staged in São Paulo in 1989, continued to be performed around the country and internationally for many years thereafter)¹³. The production was named "Paraíso Zona Norte" and it included the staging of both *Os 7 Gatinhos* [*The Seven Kittens*] and *A Falecida* [*The Deceased Woman*]. I was struck by the director's emphasis on certain body parts and objects, something I had not noticed when simply reading the plays. Antunes Filho's interpretation of these two plays was guided by Mircea Eliade's paradigms of religious experiences as well as by Jungian concepts regarding archetypes and the collective unconscious. Moreover, B. Campbell Britton, in her dissertation "Antunes Filho's Prismatic Theatre: Staging Nelson Rodrigues and Brazilian Identities", affirms that

Antunes had prepared the critics and the public for another interpretation of Rodrigues as a dramatic poet, telling the *Diário Popular* (April 28, 1989) that the content of the production spoke to "myths that express the anguish of Brazilian society, of we who are in insurmountable difficulty with no way out from a 500-year history of lies". (167)

Antunes Filho staged the plays to appear to be happening in another dimension, a non-idealized mythical image of Brazil, as Filho describes below:

The tragedy, the crisis that all Brazilian beings have, is reflected in the scream, in the *deboche* [debauchery/mockery] of Nelson Rodrigues. He is

beyond the quotidian. He's in the archetypes. He transcends. He arranges people in an extreme existential situation. They say that he is erotic. There is nothing erotic in Nelson Rodrigues. [...] It's the extreme situation of the Brazilian man with five-hundred years of servility. Nelson is the great tragedian of the Third World. [...] One creature eats the other or otherwise doesn't survive. (Antunes Filho, qtd. in Britton 126)

Even though my own reading of Nelson Rodrigues does not directly correspond to the one Antunes Filho has described in many interviews, his website, or in the programs accompanying the plays, the actual staging evoked a myriad of additional interpretations. In the production mentioned above, Antunes Filho chose two plays that could have had more affinities with the realities of suburban Rio de Janeiro, or perhaps even reflect a more realistic theatrical approach in comparison to some of Rodrigues' other plays. However, Antunes Filho deliberately transformed them into full-blown tragedies, brimming with artifice, strangeness, and symbolism. It could be said that he brought the psychological and expressionist qualities of *The Wedding Dress*, categorized by Sábato Magaldi as one of the "Psychological Tragedies", into the "Carioca Tragedies"¹⁴. Antunes Filho attempted to depict the essence of the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues by performances that went beyond superficial interpretations of those typified suburban characters towards a much more profound and controversial vision of Brazilian society as a whole. Foremost, according to Britton, up until Antunes Filho's first production of one of Nelson Rodrigues' plays in 1989, in most performances of his plays "directors prior to Antunes appear to have relied on the comedy-of-manners approach, with realistic acting on expressionistic sets" (108) due to the scarcity of actor training and confusion over how his theatre should be interpreted.

The images that particularly impressed me in the two plays referred to above were the ones that contrasted, for example, the elaborate and often carnivalesque costumes

worn by all the actors in juxtaposition to their bare, naked feet; or the exposed naked back of one of the main characters, Silene, who, when turning away from the audience, seemed to be artificially curved, her bones protruding from her emaciated frame in contrast to her image when facing the audience, in which her locked knees were covered over by the dress; and, ultimately, the enormously oversized wigs worn by the women of the family (rag doll wigs that seemed to have deteriorated over time). Antunes Filho was able to portray the many paradoxes, contradictions and ironies (with their corresponding distinctive meanings) in all the elements of the selected plays onto the material reality of the stage. The actors' bodies, the costumes, stage set designs, lighting, and the music all evoked opposing, complementary and, oftentimes, a multiplicity of interpretations. These startling initial images have become the earliest and most steadfast inspiration for my dissertation.

Upon closer readings of Nelson Rodrigues' plays, it is impossible not to notice virtually all of the characters' single-minded obsession with the human body, body parts, objects and related ideas. In *The Seven Kittens*, for example, while we might not immediately detect a literal obsession with Silene's back, but we definitely notice an obsession with her body as one of an idealized virgin body. By accentuating her sexy, apparently fragile but really weird-looking back, Antunes Filho was able to show her two sides (she is simultaneously herself - perhaps a combination of the two opposites - and a fetish; she has a virginal yet highly sensual body) of Silene's body that all the members of her family regard as a fetish.

To briefly introduce the concept of fetishism, the best way to begin is by citing the first three of Merriam-Webster's online dictionary definitions of the word fetish (the

religious, popular, and psychoanalytical definitions in that order). In turn, all also succinctly describe and frame the relationship of the members of the family to Silene's body as a fetish as well (briefly alluded to in the above paragraph):

a : an object (as, e.g., a small stone carving of an animal) believed to have magical power to protect or aid its owner; *broadly* : a material object regarded with superstitious or extravagant trust or reverence.
b : an object of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion.
c : an object or bodily part whose real or fantasized presence is psychologically necessary for sexual gratification and that is an object of fixation to the extent that it may interfere with complete sexual expression.

In the play, as we will investigate to a greater extent in the first chapter of this dissertation, Silene's body (and the implications of what has been done to and with "it") gains a magical or superstitious value. It is the father's belief that the body stopped being virginal due to a curse that has been cast upon the family. Her body is also adored as an object of devotion, since all the members of the family believe Silene's virgin body not only guarantees her an expensive church wedding, but also the salvation of the entire family. Silene's pure, virginal body also becomes an object of indirect sexual gratification, interfering with all the characters' sexual and love life (be it the complete irrational desire it inspires to comply with an existing moral code, be it the irrational actions of her father making all his daughters work as prostitutes or her mother scribbling pornographic words on the bathroom walls and so on).

Furthermore, there are other elements in Nelson Rodrigues' theater that structurally contribute to the formation of the fetish apart from the complex net of social and object relationships. As a playwright, he is continuously forcing the audience to pay special attention to the execution and process of the performance on stage. He is constantly reminding us of the artifices employed in a performance by revealing the

stagecraft and the mechanisms behind the performance of the play and never letting us completely forget that we are, indeed, watching a play.

Characters such as Aurora and Bibelot in *The Seven Kittens*, for example, ride in a cab and the author describes, in a stage direction parenthesis: “Bibelot estica as pernas. De vez em quando, os dois procuram sugerir o movimento do automóvel: carregam as cadeiras como se o táxi dobrasse esquinas, tirasse finos ou corresse em ziguezague” [Bibelot stretches his legs. Occasionally, the two seek to suggest the movement of the car: carrying chairs as if the cab was turning corners, barely hit another car or zigzagged] (793). In *A Falecida* [*The Deceased Woman*], the author emphasizes the imaginary quality of the setting: “Numa mesa imaginária, dão tacadas, também imaginárias. O único dado realístico do ambiente é o taco” [In an imaginary billiard table, give shots, also imaginary. The only realistic object in the environment is the cue] (935).

In addition, another aspect, which adds to the structure of the fetish in the plays, is the imaginary societal mask. Characters are often aware of the different roles they might have to play depending on where they are in a scene or act (if they are hiding some aspects of their lives while in certain environments, e.g.), thus frequently creating dualistic types of personas, such as the saint and/or the prostitute, the gay man and/or the straight one, the moral husband and/or the scoundrel and so on (emphasis on “and/or” since some of the personas or roles express both at the same time).

Thus, Rodrigues’ emphasis on artificiality (found in stage directions, the use of the media, the divided stage set denoting different reality planes, and the multitude of possible stories about a character such as in *Boca de Ouro* [*Golden Mouth*] or *Family Album*, the performativity of everyday life and the characters’ single-minded obsessions,

all mirror the fetishistic relationship (telling stories), which I will elaborate on later.

When entangled, the fetishistic relationship reveals countless stories about the characters and the environment in the plays.

Likewise, the characteristics cited above are features of the fetish as something more thoroughly explored in critical theory, describing a whole range of emotions, object relations, structures and motifs. As Robert J. Stoller states in his book *Observing the Erotic Imagination*, “a fetish is a story masquerading as an object” (155). Thus, the explorations of objects, structures and characters as fetishistic helps us shed light onto the performative aspects of the new Brazilian theater coming into being after Nelson Rodrigues in addition to the presence of these identical theatrical aspects within society itself.

The remainder of the Introduction is divided into two additional parts. The first is an overview of the dissertation, the second explores the reasons for delving so deeply into this topic; and the final aspect, embedded in both parts, describes the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Dissertation Overview

I will provide an overview of the different types of fetishism seen in his plays as revelations of important components of Brazilian society and explore this topic in more detail in “Chapter 1” and in the “Conclusion”. Racial, social, and gender associations are accentuated in this performative display of fetishistic relationships. In fact, these fetishistic obsessions delineate structural aspects of the society as well as behavior

patterns. One of the major underlying interpretations of Brazilian society, which I will be in conversation with throughout the dissertation is Roberto DaMatta's structural explanation. The silence and tripartite ethical-temporal-spatial configurations in which the characters are inscribed (in view of DaMatta's interpretation of Brazilian social structure in *A Casa & a Rua [The House & The Street]* and *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis [Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes]*) create a violent, complex silencing of certain female characters (in certain aspects of their lives), which also contribute to the feelings of unworthiness and inferiority often found within the lower socio-economic strata of society, depending on which position these individuals occupy, be it on the street, the house, or the world beyond.

According to DaMatta, each sphere of social interaction (in the street, home, or in the world of the beyond) follows its own ethics of conduct and parameters of hierarchical configuration. In Brazil, the system does not privilege one type of parameter over another, but considers all of equal footing. It is also a very complicated system in which different ethical parameters intermingle in a variety of actual physical and temporal dimensions of experience. Thus, what is important to realize when studying Brazil is that it is a society that privileges relationships of different kinds (personal, spatial and temporal). Nelson Rodrigues throws a spotlight on this complex interactive system. The behavioral ethics to be followed in the workplace, for example, are in sync with those expected in the market economy and in the realm of citizenship, which are in turn, all being influenced by the norms followed at home. The boss at work could be treated and seen as a father figure (following the ethics of the home), or an employee might find that the only means to be promoted in a company is to marry the daughter or son of its owner.

In *The Deceased Woman*, for example, Zulmira feels entitled to ask her husband to obtain the money to pay for her elaborate funeral from a former lover. In death (in the world of the beyond), all morality is done away with while the hierarchy of monetary power representing a status she could not attain while alive, remains. Zulmira then fetishizes her death, her funeral, her coffin, even her disease, giving her the illusion of having transcended her poor, lower-class status while overvaluing another class status (by way of the social respectability surrounding her funeral). Then and there she acts in accordance with a different code of ethics from that of the church and the street, even in the way death is viewed or dealt with in both areas of her life. However, when fetishizing her funeral, she also wants to create a saintly image of herself, which she does not see as incompatible with her adulterously purchased coffin. The complex net of different ethical values along with the spatial and time dimensions of a character such as Zulmira in view of DaMatta's exploration of the tripartite relationships in Brazilian society is deserving of a much more complex critical and detailed analysis, which I will provide in the first chapter.

Although for Roberto DaMatta in *The House & the Street*, Brazilians seem to move with ease within this fluid network of ethical, temporal and spatial relations, Nelson Rodrigues points to the anguish as well as the excitement involved in inhabiting such a system, manifest in the fetishistic structures found in his plays. The performative aspect of these fetishistic obsessions is representative of the constant performative existence of the Brazilians who have to participate in this system (which also require an unending process of masking and unmasking). There are statements that must be memorized (such as an actor in a play would) to conform to the norms and mores of the

many sections of society also reflecting the rigidity of this system. Commonplace phrases such as “Sabe com quem está falando?” (“Do you know who you are talking to?”) are often cited by DaMatta as examples of the street dynamics in Brazilian society in which the hierarchies of the social space take precedence (and are many times inserted into) over the impersonal and equal logic of equality in the capitalist driven street economy.

Moreover, in an effort to explore the theoretical notions related to fetishism, I have utilized psychoanalytical, Marxist and other theoretical interpretations of the concept. To examine the link between the possible psychological and behavioral impact of certain belief systems and attitudes on Brazilian society on the plays’ characters, I also explore Homi Bhaba’s concept of fetishism in relation to the African slave and the native-born, while focusing on the post-colonial attitude, Marjorie Garber’s notion of theatrical and female fetishism, and, lastly, the anthropologist William Pietz’s exploration of the linguistic evolution of the word itself. I also look at the Brazilian family structure as a colonial inheritance in “Chapter 1” in the works of authors such as Gilberto Freyre (together with some of his detractors) and Sergio Buarque de Hollanda¹⁵. Nelson Rodrigues explores this complex patriarchal family structure and mentality in addition to depicting the changing values of the society of his time.

As presented above, the silence and tripartite nature of Brazilian society described by Roberto DaMatta¹⁶ and exposed in Nelson Rodrigues’ plays lead to a complicated, violent silencing of characters who feel oppressed in certain positions they occupy in society. Their oppressive and repressive behavior (be they agents, victims or both) contributes to the development of the fetish. Because the society insistently perpetuates the internalization of values to which the characters are not completely faithful, they tend

to feel divided, repressed, and confused, often overcompensating at home, or in their religious rituals, for a power they cannot attain on the street, or manipulating this position in certain spheres with reference to the multiple assortment of ethical configurations available.

Silene, in *The Seven Kittens* for example, internalizes the value of both virginity and pure love imposed on her by her family while acting out in a way that contradicts those same values. Notice the juxtaposition of opposing, often dichotomous moral codes: ignoring the morality preached in her Catholic school, she beats a pregnant cat to death in front of the whole student body. Manipulating the idea of virginity imposed by religion, she has sex with her married lover while claiming to have actually found pure love. Characters such as Silene feel so much pressure from their families, their school, and society at large to behave in certain ways that they end up rebelling, while still clinging to those same values, albeit in a twisted manner. Silene's fetishistic relationship to both her lover Bibelot and the pregnant cat functions as a materialization of Silene's struggle, leading to the disturbing posture of having to function as a fetish herself for her whole family. Silene's own fetishes function as agents of power, a type of individual response regarding the use of her body and her image as a fetish to others.

Because Nelson Rodrigues' plays have obviously been written to be performed, the condensation of meaning is typically accentuated in referencing bodies, actions and words, which in my view, can be displayed as a theater of fetishes. In terms of the social and relational dynamics of a society according to the Marxist and Freudian definitions of the fetish, fetishization might start as a substitute of something one once believed in¹⁷. However, the belief itself previous to its substitution is already a tenuous phenomenon

since it has never been directly experienced. The fetish gains a power of its own, regardless of the fact that it strays farther and farther away from the original object or intent that gave rise to it. In terms of society or theater as manifestations of certain facets of society, the display of fetishes becomes an uncontrollable phenomenon with multiple and seemingly endless ramifications, revealing extreme tensions, many unresolved issues that often manifest as self-destructive behavior, characters and objects that are frequently grotesquely detached from reality.

When looking at fetishism in light of gender and race relations in Brazilian society, it is important to investigate the history of these discourses. Discourses about race and the definition of Brazil in terms of its ethnic background have been in the forefront of a debate regarding nationality and identity since independence in 1822. Rather than appropriating exclusionary discourses, however, Brazilians have adopted the so-called *fable of the three races* to define the ethnic make-up of the country, which, in turn, has gradually evolved into the *fable of Brazilian racial democracy*. Instead of revealing docile race relations, the fable has only served to perpetuate a perverse system of discrimination and inequality, which defies confronting reality and the truth. Furthermore, the establishment of a complicated network of social hierarchies and structuring so well described by DaMatta in a *The House & the Street* has thwarted the dismantling of this exclusionary system since it has created different gradations of domination and exclusion depending on the position the person finds him/herself in. Abdias do Nascimento, in an introductory article to *O Negro Revoltado* [*The Revolted Negro*], describes his view of the fetish as a belief, ironically mirroring the view espoused by many individuals, that African religions are all fetishistic:

O imperativo fisiológico, as condições sócio-econômicas levaram o português ao comércio sexual com a negra. Nada prova a favor de sua proclamada índole isenta de preconceitos. Os resultados desse processo biológico aí estão à face de quem quiser ver: um simulacro de democracia racial elevado à categoria de tabu, de fetiche. (64)

[The physiological imperative, the socio-economic conditions, both led the Portuguese to sexual commerce with the black woman. There is no evidence in favor of their proclaimed nature free of prejudices. The results of this biological process are there, right in the face of those who want to see: a simulacrum of racial democracy elevated to the category of taboo, a type of fetish.]

In *Mixture or Massacre*, Abdias also accentuates the Portuguese colonizers' ability to mystify and mask the violent nature of racial relationships, an important quality of the fetishistic relationship. Here it is important to look at the ways white colonizers interpreted the word fetish. Ironically, the word itself became a sort of fetish since it blinded the colonizers to the realities of their own views, without making them completely unaware of the process. Did the colonizers really understand the type of religions they encountered in Africa with their apparent adoration of mere material objects, which they first called as fetishism? Or did they project their own fascination of objects during their search for wealth of objects (especially gold) unto the Africans and at the same time transforming their bodies into objects of exchange in this system?

William Pietz explores this phenomenon of recognition and misrecognition of the colonizer in his articles on fetishism. Because the fetish often separates itself from the original object as substitute object or as substitute intent, the realities established by this fetishistic viewpoint are carried over throughout history in the colonizers' stance towards the African subject (in a pattern of repetition of the original encounter). Even after the abolition of slavery, the Afro-looking Brazilian is fetishized as object of exchange, as a

subject who fetishizes and as a sexual object. The sole emphasis on color also transforms him or her into a fetish. This ramification of meaning throughout history and time is reenacted many times over, since it takes the appearance of a material reality with no origin. At the same time, it fulfills a certain desire and paradox of existence so dear to Brazilian society and the individual. Thus, it is the ultimate embodiment of a structural paradox we briefly explored in DaMatta's concept of Brazilian society (such as a phrase DaMatta might use to describe the ways Brazilians might be perpetuating racial hierarchies as well as making excuses for it: "we know there is racial discrimination in the world of the street, but here at home we are all friends, we follow a different code of ethics, and in the world of Afro-Brazilian religions, which we all adhere to, Afro-Brazilians can hold the highest positions of power").

We will also explore how these ramifications are frequently carried over to other issues, since they can also be used as a strategy to deal with other types of paradoxes and tensions present in society. The popular contradictory belief goes follows: "He is Brazilian, but he is still African", "he is the same, but inferior", "we are all having intercourse, but the Afro-looking individual can be raped, beaten, subjugated", "we have all absorbed the African cultural heritage in our homes and society, but we still consider the European culture to be superior" etc.

The same ambiguity of discourse has been applied to issues of gender as well, creating a society in which hard questions surrounding race and gender relations, enveloped in an aura of docility or ambiguity, an emblematic type of fetish, have often been taboo topics. Nelson Rodrigues digs deeply into the effects of the apparently docile and cordial nature of Brazilian society within the psyche of each individual, particularly

relationships in which questions of consent, exclusion, violence, and internalization of the myth of racial (and gender) democracy are absorbed by the characters. Since the relationship with the fetish requires a certain level of make-believe and performance, it is also a starting point to reveal other forms of performativity.

Nelson Rodrigues and the focus on the body

The study of the theatre, and particularly of the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues, provides fertile ground for the exploration of performance, the body, and the image as a site of knowledge, especially in their fetishistic dimensions. As outlined by Marjorie Garber, in “Fetish Envy”

What I will be arguing is that fetishism is a kind of theater of display - and, indeed, that theater represents an enactment of the fetishistic scenario. Thus Freud's ‘penis’, the anatomical object, though understood through Lacan’s ‘phallus’, the structuring mark of desire, becomes re-literalized as a stage prop, a detachable object. No one has the phallus. (4)

We can therefore deduce that the theater may be the perfect scenario in which to explore fetishistic dynamics of the society, especially one in which these aspects are so clearly articulated as in Nelson Rodrigues’ plays. In his theater, the body (bodies, including material reality in general such as objects and parts) is a site of commentary and expression of a multitude of attitudes and ideas. On the other hand, apart from the gender dynamics mentioned by Garber, the study of race relations can also be an important fulcrum through which Brazilian society can be better understood because of its profound radiating effect on all aspects of Brazilian society, especially when looking at the attitudes towards the body. Due to the Brazilian silencing in relation to taboo

topics, the body becomes a privileged place of action. In fact, to explain what members of the elite did to maintain hierarchical divisions of power after the abolition of slavery,

Roberto DaMatta explains in *Carnavals, Rogues and Heroes* that:

Estabelecia toda uma corrente de contra-hábitos visando a demarcar as diferenças e assim retomar a hierarquização do mundo nos domínios onde isso era possível. É claro que a arena privilegiada dessas gradações veio a ser a *casa* e o *corpo*, esses domínios fundamentais do mundo das relações pessoais e dos elos de substância. E assim inventamos uma “teoria do corpo”, acompanhada de uma prática cujo aprendizado é, até hoje, extremamente cuidadoso. A teoria do corpo, especialmente a partir da Abolição, passou a ser o *racismo à brasileira*, dotado de duas fases distintas: uma, em que ele era tipicamente hierarquizador e rígido, logo após a Abolição, quando, de fato, o problema se apresenta (cf. Skidmore, 1976). E outra, que entra em vigor a partir da publicação da obra de Gilberto Freyre, orientada não mais para o ponto de partida ou de chegada do sistema (respectivamente, negro atrasado e débil e o branco civilizador), mas para os seus interstícios. Temos, como consequência, a glorificação da miscigenação, do mestiço e da mulataria. Mas não se pode esquecer que, em ambas, o corpo é o elemento central da elaboração ideológica, formando a unidade básica do plano hierarquizador. (199-200)

[It is clear that the privileged arena for these gradations became the home and the body, the key areas of the world of personal relationships and linkages of substance. And so we have invented a “theory of the body”, accompanied by a practice whose learning still requires extreme caution. The theory of the body, especially after Abolition, became racism à la Brazilian, having two distinct phases: one, when it was typically hierarchical and rigid, just after Abolition, when, in fact, the problem first presented itself (cf. Skidmore, 1976). And another, which comes into effect from the publication of the work of Gilberto Freyre, no longer oriented to the point of departure or arrival of the system (respectively, backward and weak black men and white civilizing men), but to its interstices. We have, as a consequence, the glorification of miscegenation, the mestizo and *mulataria*. But we cannot forget that, in both, the body is the central element of ideological elaboration, forming the basic unit of the hierarchizing plan.]

DaMatta recognizes the position the body holds as a focus of ideological attitudes in

Brazilian society. In fact, echoing DaMatta and citing Marilena Chauí, Matilde Ribeiro

states that

Chauí ressaltou que os mitos e a ideologia estão a serviço da dominação. Portanto, a construção da subalternidade dos negros alimenta-se e também se serve das crenças que fazem uso do corpo, do fetiche – são bons para o futebol, para o carnaval, para a música e para o trabalho, preferencialmente pesado. Assim, são geradas as exclusões e o distanciamento das esferas de poder. (8)

[Chauí stressed that myths and ideology are at the service of domination. Therefore, the construction of subordination of blacks feeds and also makes use of the beliefs that make use of the body, the fetish – they are good for soccer, for carnival, for music and for work, preferably hard manual labor. Thus, the exclusionary practices are generated as well as the distancing from the spheres of power.]

Thus, considering the many ways black and female bodies are fetishized, Nelson Rodrigues' theatre is able to provide us with a synthesis of many of the elements worth exploring in relation to the body and the performance of the body in Brazilian society. Homi Bhabha also gives us a detailed explanation about why the racial stereotype can be read as a fetish. In his book *The Location of Culture*, specifically the chapter entitled "The Other Question", Bhabha states that

There is both a structural and functional justification for reading the racial stereotype of colonial discourse in terms of fetishism. My re-reading of Said establishes the structural link. Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference—as the pre-condition for the circulation of the chain of absence and presence in the realm of the Symbolic—is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence. The functional link between the fixation of the fetish and the stereotype (or the stereotype as fetish) is even more relevant. For fetishism is always a 'play' or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud's terms: 'All men have penises'; in ours 'All men have the same skin/race/culture'—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference -- again, for Freud 'Some do not have penises'; for us 'Some do not have the same skin/race/culture'. Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack). (106-107)

So, for Bhabha, racial fetishism gives the fetishist a type of identity, which is based on both desire/pleasure and a defense mechanism/anxiety. The fetishistic relationship thus becomes a site where there is a repetition of the fantasy of pure origin (a fantasy of racial purity, for example, or a fantasy beyond gender boundaries), but which also functions as a reminder of its impossibility. It is a place where the fetish needs to be maintained as one so that the tenuous balance of power can be constantly reenacted. Again, broadly speaking, fetishism is an excessive attachment to an object, body or belief. The fetishist knows that the object cannot fulfill his/her expectations and does not inherently possess the power or quality he or she pretends it might possess.

Nelson Rodrigues' plays are indeed full of characters obsessed by body parts, each other, or ideas, often involving a patriarchal family structure about to fall apart, or a male character obsessed with maintaining or regaining a certain position of power. In *Senhora dos Afogados [Lady of the Drowned]*, the character of Moema is obsessed by both her own and her mother's hands. At the end of the play, the father goes so far as to cut off the mother's hands. In *The Deceased Woman*, there is a character that is obsessed with her own death but especially her coffin, which she demands be ornate and expensive. Fetishes, as we have seen so far, serve to compensate for repressed silence and oppression, or for power the characters feel will never be theirs. Fetishes also serve as emblems of racial and gender tensions, which cannot be dealt with directly. According to William Pietz,

This intense relation to the individual's experience of his or her own living self through an impassioned response to the fetish object is always incommensurable with (whether in a way that reinforces or undercuts) the social value codes within which the fetish holds the status of a material signifier. It is in those "disavowals" and "perspectives of flight" whose possibility is opened by the clash of this incommensurable difference that

the fetish might be identified as the site of both the formation and the revelation of ideology and value consciousness. (12-13)

It is the stories that these objects, parts and beliefs reveal about ideology and possibilities of flight that particularly interest me in the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues. For Pietz,

...the heterogeneous components appropriated into an identity by a fetish are not only material elements; desires and beliefs and narrative structures establishing a practice are also fixed (or fixated) by the fetish, whose power is precisely the power to repeat its originating act of forging an identity of articulated relations between certain otherwise heterogeneous things. (5)

Therefore, another important fact to consider when looking at fetishes (be it the body, its parts, objects, images, or belief systems) is that they have the capacity to unite and materialize way beyond such mere dualities like black/white, woman/man, master/slave, and oppressor/oppressed. They actually mirror the complicated and sometimes paradoxical positions (heterogeneous) of Brazilian society described by DaMatta in *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes*. Mixture and ambiguity are fundamental tropes of the Brazilian ideology of identity reflecting a cultural environment that resembles a “surgical room for conceptual and symbolic operations where everything is ‘out of place’ but enjoys a theoretical free voucher” (271).

My main objective in “Chapter 2” with respect to fetishism as image in the plays of Nelson Rodrigues is to elaborate upon the nature of female fetishism (the female character herself being an active fetishist, a phenomenon which both Freud and Lacan, notwithstanding their acknowledgement of a few exceptions, deemed to be extremely uncommon to the point of being almost inconceivable)¹⁸. Fetishism as is manifested in terms of the female body, its various parts, and their relationship to the capitalist

economic system in Brazil versus the fetishism of certain objects, the male body, and the racial “other”; and how fetishism as a performative¹⁹ object par excellence might be perceived.

The relation with the fetish can be a site of anxiety due to the awareness and feeling of not being able to change the dynamics of this relationship, despite the simultaneously limited level of control. A person elevates the value of the object imbuing it with an importance that the object is known a priori not to “naturally” possess. According to Gilberto W. Cole’s article on a particular fetishistic relationship, “*Femininity and masculinity* are terms that readily operate in the theatrical context of the fetish, an area of performance where absolute control is exerted by the subject” (144). Thus the fetishist exerts a certain level of control over this type of performativity, since it is a scenario that assumes an illusion of control as opposed to the other performative expressions of gender and ideology, which are learned. On the other hand, the fetishist can also use the fetish to repeat these learned acts (structures, hierarchical gender norms) while at the same time becoming aware of his own exploitative attitude towards the “object”.

To develop the basic definitions of the term “fetish”, which I will briefly delineate in the ensuing pages, I have for the most part relied on those ascribed to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan. Despite differences in their positions and interpretations, altogether they allow for a more wide-ranging and profound understanding of the term. Karl Marx, in the chapter “The Fetishism of Commodities and its Secrets”, in *Capital*, utilizes the term fetish to describe a faith in objects that are impregnated with values way beyond their use-value. For him, these commodities are

transformed into objects imbued with unlimited magical powers. In Freud's writings, the term fetish acquires a sexual connotation as a "substitute of the (maternal) penis which the boy once believed in" (152-153)²⁰, while alleviating the anxiety of castration. Lacan expands the term by relating it to the lack of the imaginary phallus.

Again, according to Marx, the value of commodities, realized only in the relationships between objects and objects separated from the people that produce them, acquires magical powers, which only serve to mask the real nature of social relationships, revealing, for Marx, profound social inequalities and an inherently perverse system of exploitation, not clearly manifest. Because people view the commodity in terms of its monetary value, which is superficially defined by its exchange value with money and in relation to other commodities, they cannot see the labor and social relationships that contributed to the production (and monetary value) of that object. On the contrary, people take the market value of a commodity as being the natural result of the free market economy, not taking into account the role of labor and social relations that went into making that object, independently of its market value. The term "fetish", originating from the word *feitiço* in Portuguese, initially solely denoted "an object regarded with awe as being the embodiment or habitation of a potent spirit or as having magical potency"²¹, often perceived to exist in certain religious practices. Marx, in developing his writings on commodity fetishism, uses the analogy of the religious world, as described in the following passage:

In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. (111)

And, further explaining the fetishism of commodities:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. This is the reason why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. (...) There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising there from. There it is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. This I call the Fetishism, which attaches itself to the products of labor so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin, as the foregoing analysis has already shown, in the peculiar social character of the labor that produces them. (133)

According to Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Marx's commodity fetishism in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, there is a distinction that became evident in the passage between "feudalism to capitalism" (20-21). In feudalism, relationships between people are fetishistic since there are strict rules to differentiate masters from servants. The king is a fetish to all his vassals and even to himself, for example, since the king's fetishism needs to be maintained in order to keep the strict hierarchical dimension of the society intact (according to the inherent logic of a fetish: even though the vassals know that the king does not inherently possess the quality of king in that it is an inherited and constructed social reality, they still believe in and fear the king's power). In capitalism, the hierarchical positions are not as clearly demarcated, since they are defined by many different parameters and often hidden from view by commodity fetishism (and masked in

relation to and among things). How does a society like Brazil, establish fetishistic relationships beyond the commodities and objects and create ones between people extensively explored and exaggerated in the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues? They might not be as clear as the king-type fetishism, but the social positions so perfectly exemplified by the “do you know who you are talking to?” expression in DaMatta’s *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes* certainly reinforces positions of power of the king-type, which I will explore further in my thesis. The hierarchical fetishistic scenario in Brazilian society needs to be constantly reenacted since it is not always so clearly marked.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, these same magical powers actually negate the condition of a void and the fear of death and castration by acting as substitutes for sexual repression, which, for Nelson Rodrigues, are clearly imposed by the patriarchal family structure vis-à-vis the sexual behavior of women. However, for Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan, the fetishist is certainly aware that the object cannot fully fill the void or completely mask the social labor that went into producing the object.

Octave Mannoni perfectly illustrates the mindset of the fetishist, who thinks: “I know this object is not my mother’s penis, but I still want to pretend it is”, for example. He put this paradoxical logic into words: “*Je sais bien, mais quand-même*” or “I know very well, but nevertheless...”²² Sexual fetishism is defined by Freud as a form of displacement of desire or fantasy into objects or body parts. Freud’s essay on “Fetishism”²³ describes how the fetishist is fully aware that his fantasy is indeed a fantasy, a fact, which in no way diminishes the ascendancy the object exercises over the individual fetishist. Julia Kristeva, influenced by the interpretations of Freud and Lacan, in turn, holds the belief that all language is but a form of fetishism, adding to the

structural definition of the term that:

It is perhaps unavoidable that, when a subject confronts the factitiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish? And language, precisely, is based on fetishist denial ('I know that, but just the same', 'the sign is not the thing, but just the same', etc.) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings. (37)²⁴

Thus, the fetish is an object whose very meaning contains two opposing forces within itself, i.e., that of recognition/acceptance and that of negation. Jacques Lacan expands the term to include a more structural explanation capable of representing all the objects and people able to substitute this paradoxically affirmative misrecognition of the original object. In summary, by combining all these definitions, it can be affirmed that the fetish is a structure that embodies the magical value and power of commodities with a sexual force – the female body being a particular focus – due to the male oriented gaze of the fetishist.

When looking at the fetishistic display as structure and performance, it is also important to examine the ways the plays develop and display dramatic events as material reality on stage, which I will explore further in “Chapter 3” by analyzing the following plays: *Otto Lara Resende ou Bonitinha, Mas Ordinária* [*Otto Lara Resende or Cute, but a Tramp*], *O Beijo no Asfalto* [*The Asphalt Kiss*], *Boca de Ouro* [*Golden Mouth*] and *Toda Nudez Será Castigada* [*All Nudity will be Punished*]. Angela Leite Lopes, in her book, *Nelson Rodrigues: Trágico, então Moderno* [*Nelson Rodrigues: Tragic, thus Modern*], delineates the tragic aspects of Rodrigues' plays, by way of classic Greek Tragedy analysis and its subsequent transformation. She describes his work as a manifestation of a multitude of structural and thematic tragic elements, but with a

particularly unexpected modern twist. She sees his texts as imbued with a “fresh force of becoming” (*por-fazer*) as the performance of the texts unfold, especially taking into account their power to above all surprise, shock, and disgust the typical conservative audience.

Following her lead, I would argue that the plays tragic impact is gradually enhanced throughout the performances by means of tension build up and crescendo of intensity of bottled up emotions. This occurs on all levels both in the dialogues and circumstances presented on stage via the maximum condensation of meanings stated or implied in a simple gesture or word, even when appearing to reflect mere clichés or commonplace trivia. As the plays proceed, what is generally considered to be ordinary slowly seems to acquire strange and often tragic qualities. According to Leite Lopes in her brief analysis of *Doroteia* and, specifically, the character Das Dores,

...encontraremos aqui o estilhaçamento do sentido do personagem – até que este se torne, literalmente, coisa. Nelson Rodrigues vai nos propor finalmente um jogo sobre a afirmação corrente de que tal objeto, tal elemento cênico, pelo fato de ter um papel importante no desenrolar da peça, torna-se assim um personagem. É toda a operação teatral que está compreendida aqui neste jogo. (208)

[...at this moment, we will find the shattering of the meaning of a character –until it becomes, literally, a thing. Nelson Rodrigues finally proposes to us a game on the current assertion that such an object, such scenic element, because it has an important role in the unfolding of the play, it can also become a character. It is the whole operation of the theater, which is inserted here in this game.]

According to this viewpoint, all the elements contained in the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues such as the multiple interpretations of the stories unfolding on stage, the characters as clichés or archetypes, the varying planes of reality, and the multitude of objects and body parts are transformed into character-things, thereby acquiring multiple

paradoxical meanings when imbued with tensions so that they are susceptible to innumerable interpretations. I propose that this reification structures itself as a fetish.

In fact, many of these complex characteristics in Nelson Rodrigues' theatre are often visually represented on stage, which initially may seem to simplify their meaning but, when (dis)entangled and analyzed, reveal themselves as fetishes. The dialogues are also choppy and, although often very concise or laconic, are packed with meaning. Analyzing some of the possible stage directions gives us new insights into how fetishes are reenacted on stage or, contrariwise, how they are sometimes ignored, blocking possibilities of interpretation of Rodrigues' theater and even oversimplifying it.

In the dissertation overall, the fetishistic relationship with the body of the other, whether with its parts or as an object, often appears as compensating for the power the characters are unable to obtain in the social sphere, that is, they find themselves unable to move beyond static positions of societal power. This phenomenon reveals the complicated power structures prevalent in Brazilian society in which an individual can assert power in certain spheres but not in others. When examining the role of the female body and its fetishization in *The Seven Kittens*, *Cute, but a Tramp*; *Perdoa-me por me Traíres* [*Forgive-me for Betraying Me*]; *The Deceased Woman*; and *Lady of the Drowned*, for example, I see all the female bodies and their parts being transformed into fetishized objects into which the male characters project their own fantasies and notions of power.

Moreover, the complete lack of any profound sexual or even superficial love/emotional connection between and among the different characters is obvious. Each character takes as his or her love object or object of desire as a projection of an egotistical

desire in total disconnect from the desire of the other. The “exchange value” of parts of the other are overvalued (not just monetarily, but ethically, religiously, socially, etc.), depending on their relational position in the world of the play. Silene’s body in *The Seven Kittens*, as an example, is valued religiously and socially for its virginal status. Das Dores’ illusionary body is valued as, among other things, an emblem of ignorance, having an exchange value for her mother as a description of the process of “nausea”, which is the only means by which the women in the family can be “liberated” from the male gaze and, consequently, their sexuality.

At first glance, the female characters seem to have been engendered within a system of commerce in which they are viewed as objects in a society based on patriarchal family values and Catholic mores. Parts of the female bodies are dissected and oversexualized for the overcompensating abuse and the spectacle of many of the characters, as is found in the scene in which Boca de Ouro (in *The Golden Mouth*) demands that the granfinas [socialites] show their breasts during his own privately-held “beauty contest”. For the females, however, the fetish can also serve to award them a type of agency, which, in the eyes of the male characters, is prone to represent an enormous personal threat. In *The Seven Kittens*, both Silene and Aurora have a fetishistic infatuation for the character, aptly named, Bibelot. This infatuation threatens the stability of the entire family since it undermines the father’s fetishistic compulsion for the trousseau and the body of Silene as representing virginity, which ultimately leads to the women’s final revolt against the patriarchal family structure²⁵.

Most characters appear anguished and in a desperate search for an overarching meaning in their lives beyond the ones either imposed by society or offered to them in the

form of their acceptance as recyclable, impermanent objects. All the characters aspire for something beyond themselves, for something that portends to perhaps complete them and provide them with power and agency. In a system in which moral and social elements are set by a largely immovable patriarchal structure and in which elements of an awkwardly developed capitalist society are also present, individuals cannot truly believe in the values imposed on them. In the plays, these imposed values can be put on and taken off as quickly and easily as pieces of clothing or masks that mirror the characters as they carry out their roles on stage. The fetish, the illusion of gain, together with the consciousness that even the illusion of gain has already been lost, may give the characters a modicum of hope in this life cycle of appearances, which, although fleeting, may be the only possible type of hope to be expected.

In addition to the sharp portrayal of the social realities found particularly on the North Side of Rio de Janeiro, but in Brazil as a whole, the depiction of these fetishes in the plays also reveals the struggle each individual undergoes within the constraints of the capitalist system in addition to the distinctive role played by anxiety in human relationships and object possession – but not without an alleviating dash of humor here and there. In one of his most famous quotes, Nelson Rodrigues paradoxically declares: “O homem só é feliz pelo supérfluo. No comunismo, só se tem o essencial. Que coisa abominável e ridícula!”²⁶ [Man is only happy through the superfluous. In communism, they only have the essential. What a ridiculous and abominal thing!]

We can conclude that Nelson Rodrigues was responsible for the introduction of a type of theatre in Brazil he himself called disagreeable: a type of theatre which would be uncomfortable for the audience to watch since it was meant to reveal what lurks behind

the curtain of society's masquerades. Live performances of Nelson Rodrigues' plays were intended to shake audiences out of their complacency by shocking them into viscerally reacting to what had been presented on stage. By directly presenting and magnifying what is most distasteful and reprehensible regarding sexual expression and repression, immorality, violence, and the pathetic as well as the tragic, the often conservative audience of the 40s, 50s and 60s would be prompted to emotionally react to the performances of his plays. Opening performances of certain plays would cause the audience to boo or even threaten to kill the author, whereas others incited standing ovations. Furthermore, Nelson Rodrigues himself, in an interview to the magazine *Dyonisus* in 1949, described his disagreeable theatre as morbid:

Passada a tempestade, vejo que muitas das opiniões, que se levantaram contra mim e meu drama, são procedentes. Com efeito, *Anjo negro* é mórbido; e eu, mórbido também. Aliás, jamais discuti ou relutei a minha morbidez. Dentro de minha obra, ela me parece incontestável e, sobretudo, necessária. Artisticamente falando, sou mórbido, sempre fui mórbido, e pergunto: 'será um defeito?'. Nem defeito, nem qualidade, mas uma marca de espírito, um tipo de criação dramática²⁷.

[After the storm, I see that many of the opinions that arose against me and my drama, are founded. Indeed, *Anjo Negro* is morbid, and I, too, am morbid. Incidentally, I've never discussed nor have been reluctant towards my morbidity. Within my work, it seems to me incontestable, and especially vital. Artistically speaking, I'm morbid, I have always been morbid, and I ask, "is it a defect?" Neither a defect, nor a quality, but a mark of spirit, a kind of dramatic creation.]

Moreover, Nelson Rodrigues goes beyond simply showing what is behind the duality of *outside* and *inside* to reveal what passes through and what is ingrained versus what can be perceived when viewed through critical eyes. Despite exploring familiar dualities such as how one is expected to behave versus how one actually does behave both outside and inside the home, or the mask representing the *good girl*

versus the *prostitute* existing side by side in the same woman, for example, Nelson Rodrigues never ends his plays with any clear revelations (such as “the truth of this character is revealed when we show her feelings behind closed doors, her ‘inner prostitute’ ” or “her unconscious desires are repressed and revealed in the plays in such a way” types of assertions). The characters’ struggles within society and at home are constantly intermingling in unexpected and unusual ways, proving to be more complex, ambivalent and multifaceted than could be resolved by the deciphering of simple dualities or by monitoring the shedding of a myriad of identities.

Rather than a duality, I believe that the repetitive patterns of unmasking in the plays turn into never-ending, never-resolved, truth-searching labyrinths, which are materialized and condensed in the fetishes. I hope to demonstrate that the fetish as image, structure and performance can ultimately insert Nelson Rodrigues into the lineage of such authors as Machado de Assis, Lima Barreto, and Clarice Lispector, to name just a few, who have deconstructed gender and racial discourses about Brazilian identity. I also hope to offer a new way of examining Nelson Rodrigues’ plays through the prism of fetishistic structures, which delineate structures of patriarchal discourse and performativity and open up new avenues for critiquing Brazilian society.

Notes to Introduction

¹ *Chanchada* is a Brazilian type of musical comedy very popular in the 1930s both in theater and film. The name is derived from the Spanish slang, which means “trash”, implying a culturally poor form of entertainment.

² In 1922, a group of Brazilian writers and artists organized the Modern Art Week, which is considered to have given rise to the modernist movement. Its main goal was to create works, which would incorporate folk art, oral traditions, colloquial, and regional vocabulary, all mixed in with European influences, to find a uniquely Brazilian type of literature and artistic expression. The main tenets of the first phase of the movement are delineated in the “Cannibalist Manifesto”, written by Oswald de Andrade (http://dmp.bard.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2011/11/Andrade_CannibalistManifesto.pdf).

³ A few exceptions would be the plays of Oswald de Andrade, which, while written in 1932, were not staged until the 1960s .

⁴ The term *Folhetim* refers to fictional writings originally published in a newspaper, serially. The chapters are usually short, ending with cliffhangers meant to spark the reader’s curiosity for the following installment. In English, it is often translated as the French equivalent *feuilleton*.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

⁶ Magaldi, Sábato. “Prefácio” in *Nelson Rodrigues Teatro Completo*, Editora Nova Aguilar: Rio de Janeiro, 2003.

⁷ When using the word “keyhole”, I allude here to one of Nelson Rodrigues’ famous quotes used as an epigraph in Ruy Castro’s biography of the author entitled *O Anjo Pornográfico* [*The Pornographic Angel*]: “Sou um menino que vê o amor pelo buraco da fechadura. Nunca fui outra coisa. Nasci menino, hei de morrer menino. E o buraco da fechadura é, realmente, a minha ótica de ficcionista. Sou (e sempre fui) um anjo pornográfico”. [I am a boy who observes love through the keyhole. I have never been anything else. I was born a boy and will die as one. And the keyhole represents my fictionist eye. I am (and have always been) a pornographic angel.]

⁸ The Brazilian military government was the authoritarian regime, which ruled Brazil from March 31, 1964 to March 15, 1985. It began with the 1964 coup d’état led by the Armed Forces against the democratically elected government of left-wing President João Goulart and ended when José Sarney took office as President. The military revolt was fomented by Magalhães Pinto, Adhemar de Barros, and Carlos Lacerda, Governors of Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, respectively.

⁹ Left-wing politicians and sympathizers are referred here broadly as the left, since during the dictatorship, most of the political or social movements against the dictatorship were considered part of the left. This generalization of the term left also reflects the lack of centrality or clarity of government opposition forces during that time.

¹⁰ Rodrigues, Nelson. *O Remador de Ben-Hur*. Companhia das Letras, Rio de Janeiro: 1996, p.67.

¹¹ Rodrigues, Nelson. *O Reacionário: Memórias e Confissões*. São Paulo: Cia. das Letras, 1995. p. 27-29.

¹² Ruy Castro, in Nelson Rodrigues' biography first published in 1992, claims that by then and after his death in 1980, he had attained a significant acclaim as a playwright, notwithstanding his innumerable detractors. Despite the considerable acclaim he has received over the years, Nelson Rodrigues' career as a journalist, fiction writer and playwright has always gone through ups and downs and has always sharply divided critics (8).

¹³ *Paraíso Zona Norte* (DVD). *Grupo de Teatro Macunaima*, directed by Antunes Filho, filmed in 1992. A copy was kindly given to me by Antunes Filho's theater company and school CPT (Center for Theater Research), Sesc Anchieta, SP, Brazil.

¹⁴ In an effort to classify Nelson Rodrigues' plays, the theater critic Sábato Magaldi established a thematic framework of classification for all of Rodrigues' plays. Although it received the approval of the author, it has remained controversial. His thematic framework consisted of three classifications: Mythical, Psychological and Carioca Tragedies (Tragedies about Rio de Janeiro).

¹⁵ I will also consider empirical evidence suggesting that, in certain parts of colonial Brazil, there was an abundance of small family units as opposed to the large family units typical of the Northeast run by wealthy landowners (or "patriarchs"), an interpretation which has dominated gender and power structures in Brazil, and has only recently started to be contested. The multiplicity of family models in colonial Brazil might have complicated attitudes towards the patriarch, allowing for different forms of gender and racial relations, at least within the spheres of both the home and the religious world.

¹⁶ The house represents the private, orderly, clean world whereas the street is the impersonal, disorderly, dirty world while the beyond is a world of rituals, obligations and relations. All three spheres are complementary and relational.

¹⁷ In reference to the phrase in Freud's article "Fetishism": "To put it plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego—we know why" (161). For Marx, commodity fetishism is a

belief in the “value” of the object through exchange. The process does not entail a difference between the original one once believed in and does not exist, but a distance between use-value and exchange value, as if the exchange-value actually mimicked use-value or an illusion of “real” value.

¹⁸ From the perspective of the theatre of Nelson Rodrigues, many female characters actively fetishize. This might reveal a certain ambiguity of gender relations in the society, where the women might have to hold a certain position of power (in families where a father is not present, or a father is not able to provide financially), or where they might have the illusion of agency in a complex system of relations and ethical dimensions, where even the patriarchal family structure is not clearly defined or preponderant. Also, feminist theorists have argued for the plausibility of female fetishism in psychoanalytic terms as well as for its privileged sphere of gender performativity.

¹⁹ Some of the uses of the word “performative” in this dissertation stem from Judith Butler’s use of it in a number of her works, but also to J.L. Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*. These theories delve into the manners that social reality is not “natural”, but is constantly being constructed by the use of language, bodily acts and social signs. Speech-acts can also act as political acts or social contracts, such as the phrase: “I name you husband and wife”. Even though there are other social conventions which are reenacted in the body, such as gender “performativity”, that does not hide a possibly “pure” core, such as Butler describes: “gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior ‘self’, whether that ‘self’ is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an ‘act’, broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority” (“Performative” 279).

²⁰ Freud, Sigmund. *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*. New York: A Touchstone Book, 2003.

²¹ “fetish”. *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*. Web. 29 Dec 2010
<<http://dictionary.infoplease.com/fetish>>.

²² Mannoni, Octave. “*Je sais bien, mais quand-même...*” *Clefs pour l’imaginaire ou l’autre scène*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969. 9-33.

²³ Freud, Sigmund. “Fetishism”(1927). *Miscellaneous Papers*, 1888-1938. Vol. 5 of *Collected Papers*. 5 vols. London: Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924-1950. 198-204.

²⁴ Felluga, Dino. “Modules on Kristeva: On Psychosexual Development”. *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Purdue U. 10 October 2010.
<<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/kristevadevelop.html>>.

²⁵Both Das Dores' emblematic experience of non-nausea as well as the revolt in *The Seven Kittens* don't necessarily lead to female empowerment or a reversal of patriarchal values. Female agency, albeit present, proves to be paradoxical and problematic in most of his plays.

²⁶Rodrigues, Nelson, and Ruy Castro. *Flor de Obsessão: As 1000 Melhores Frases de Nelson Rodrigues*. Vol. 12. São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 1997.

²⁷Rodrigues, Nelson. *Teatro completo: volume único*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1993, p.37.

CHAPTER 1

Fetishism as Structure

One of the big reproaches to psychoanalysis is that it's only a theory of individual pathological disturbances, and that applying psychoanalysis to other cultural or social phenomena is theoretically illegitimate. [On the contrary], it asks in what way you as an individual have to relate to a social field, not just in the sense of other people, but in the sense of the anonymous social as such to exist as a person. You are, under quotation marks, a normal individual person only in so far as being able to relate to some anonymous social field. What is to be interpreted and what is not is that everything is to be interpreted. That is to say when Freud says, *Unbehagen in der Kultur*... civilization and its discontent, or more literally, the uneasiness in culture... he means that it's not just that most of us, as normal, we socialize ourselves normally. Some idiots don't make it. They fall out. They have to be normalized. Culture as such, in order to establish itself as normal, or what appears as normal, involves a whole series of pathological cuts, distortions, and so on and so on. There is, again, a kind of a *Unbehagen*, uneasiness: we are out of joint, not at home in culture as such, which means, again, that there is no normal culture. Culture as such has to be interpreted.

–Slavoj Žižek in the documentary film *Žižek!*

At the time Nelson Rodrigues was writing his first plays (early 1940s), Brazil was undergoing major upheavals and changes in the political and social arenas²⁸. Gender and racial dynamics in particular were in continual flux, having been strongly influenced by the ideas and prominent social movements coming from the United States and Europe²⁹ while similar movements were being censored, repressed and disbanded in Brazil during the Vargas Era. Rodrigues' third play, *Album de Família* [*Family Album*], would be immediately banned from the stage, which was but the beginning of his many intense battles with official government censors during Brazil's dictatorial regimes despite his

repeated, self-professed alliances with those same regimes. This is important to remember since the autobiographical persona he created in newspaper articles and chronicles mirrors some of the same complicated and contradictory descriptions of his characters and ideas.

Thus, because of Rodrigues' ability to deal with as well as craft multifaceted definitions (often seemingly contradictory) of himself and his theater, he is able to provide us with an elaborate description of Brazilian mentalities and attitudes. He criticizes the leftist political theater of his time, calling Dias Gomes, Vianinha and Augusto Boal "revolucionários burros" [stupid revolutionaries] (cited in Facina, p. 78). To which Vianinha would counter attack: "

suas peças exaltam o indivíduo que abdicou de sua máxima aspiração de dominar o real e resolveu passar o resto da vida se desencontrando, fulgurante, urrando e batendo no peito como um animal, feliz por não ter de pensar. (cited in Facina, p. 79)

[his plays exalt the individual that has abdicated of its maximum aspiration to dominate the real and has decided to spend the rest of his life getting lost, blazing, roaring and beating his chest like an animal, happy not to have to think.]

Nelson Rodrigues would later reply:

Então, no seu ressentimento, o Vianinha nega, de alto a baixo o meu teatro. E por que nega? É simples: – porque eu não faço propaganda política, porque não engulo a arte sectária. Em suma: – o Vianinha queria que o "Boca de Ouro" parasse a peça e apresentasse um atestado de ideologia. (...) A minha vontade é perguntar ao Vianinha: "Ô rapaz! Você é revolucionário ou tira?" (cited in Facina, pg. 80-81)

[Then, in his resentment, Vianinha denies the value in all my plays. And why deny it? It's simple – because I do not do political propaganda, because I do not buy into sectarian art. In short: – Vianinha wanted the "Golden Mouth" to stop the play and present a certificate of ideology. (...) It is my will to ask Vianinha: "Oh boy! Are you a revolutionary or a cop?"]

To the contrary, Nelson Rodrigues did not need to deliberately present an easily accessible ideological viewpoint in order to comment on structures of power (including class, gender and race relations) in society. He often proclaimed how much he despised unanimity (perhaps indirectly criticizing univocal viewpoints in general) with these now famous words: “toda unanimidade é burra” [all unanimity is stupid].

In Chapter I, I am primarily concerned with examining the ways some of the ingrained values and practices related to social, economic, and political domination and exploitation have historically been kept alive in a society desperately trying to come to terms with modernity in the throes of political and economic turmoil. In this regard, fetishism is an important conceptual component, one that Rodrigues appeared to consider central to explaining much of Brazilian social behavior. Fetishism is also used in his theater to create fictional realities in which elements are condensed, performed and manifested as cultural and mnemonic images and repeated *ad infinitum* to appear like clichés but whose characteristics make them look and sound weird and ambiguous at the same time. Characters and audience alike are invited to be witness to a process of uneasiness with culture, deconstructing its many discourses and normalizations in order to reach the core of cultural constructions.

According to Navarro, when explaining cultural constructions by way of Bourdieu’s concept of structure and *habitus*:

A second foundational principle in his theory is the notion that culture is not only the very ground for human interaction, but is also an especial terrain of domination. He argues that all symbolic systems are anchored in culture and thus determine our understanding of reality. They both ensure communication and interaction, but also create and maintain social hierarchies. Culture, in the form of dispositions, objects, institutions,

language and so on, mediates social practices by connecting people and groups to institutionalized hierarchies. Thus it necessarily embodies power relations. Whenever a given society changes and develops through social differentiation and growing complexity, culture and symbolic systems may become relatively autonomous arenas of struggle for difference vis-à-vis other fields. This is encapsulated in the word ‘distinction’ which is a crucial concept (Bourdieu 1984). Thus, cultural capital in some specific concrete situations may be of immense value to perpetuate social differences and hierarchies. (15)

Thus, to understand the structures of fetishism as a commentary on society at large with its practices, cultures and habits, I borrow Bourdieu’s ideas of *habitus*, which:

is a mediating notion that revokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing ‘the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality’ [in the famous expression of Bourdieu], that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu. (Wacquant 2005: 316) (quoted in Navarro, 17)

Another important concept, which will add to our idea of structure, is Bourdieu’s “field”:

Fields, therefore, represent a certain distribution structure of some types of capital and they indicate arenas of struggle around production, accumulation, circulation and possession of goods, services, knowledge, or status and the competition among agents to monopolize distinct capitals. They may be thought of as structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital. Bourdieu discusses various fields, like the intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, and so on. (18)

Therefore, in his plays, fetishism viewed as structure (reproduced both in *habitus* and within fields) is delineated as a materialization of such ingrained social principles as racial and gender stereotypes and the hierarchical family structure, which were never allowed to be openly discussed in a negative light. The fetishistic dynamic helps us identify cultural *habitus* and *fields* in order to deconstruct them. Furthermore, these

materializations carry with them the weight of violent traumatic experiences expressed by all his characters and not just by those who might be called victims of violence (whether subtly or overtly), revealing some of the most deeply-rooted structural underpinnings of the society at large together with their manifested traumatic psychological impact.

Deborah M. Horvitz, in *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, describes the:

repressive sociopolitical ideology of empowerment and disempowerment and, in so doing, confronts the intensely destructive dynamic of sadomasochism. Sadism, as I define it, is a psychological mechanism in which the sadist enacts and gratifies unconscious erotic fantasies by inflicting pain and violence. Masochism, sometimes mistakenly understood to mean the enjoyment of pain, is, in fact, a complex psychodynamic in which powerlessness becomes eroticized, then entrenched within the victim's self-identity. (4)

In Rodrigues' plays, the same type of sadism and masochism described above is reenacted on stage through the fetishistic relationship. Some of the power structures are kept in place through this duality while some are reversed. The fetishism becomes even more crucial within this dynamic since violence is approached in a veiled, obscure manner through the fetishized object and the fetishistic relationship and is very rarely confronted directly (although overt violence is sometimes frequently depicted in Rodrigues' plays). Characters such as Virginia in *Black Angel* might, through the fetishistic relationship, appear to have a sadomasochistic desire for Ismael, her husband and rapist. However, this same masochism makes evident the erotic nature of "powerlessness" so aptly described by Horvitz. The intent of a fetish is three-fold: it conceals the problem of gender discrimination from view (since it is silenced by the object relationship); it affords sadomasochistic pleasure to both the victim and perpetrator (who, it could be argued, is the position of both Virginia and Ismael in *Black Angel*); and

functions as a strategy for dealing with silence via a type of agency (i.e., the power to “own” the fetish).

By continuing to analyze how discourses of race, gender, the patriarchal family and power structures have been framed, I aim to explain how these discourses have been apprehended and commented on in the plays by way of the fetish as structure (with its multifaceted, paradoxical qualities). In a country like Brazil in which ambiguity surrounding certain topics is pervasive, hard questions related to race and gender are rarely confronted head-on³⁰, further contributing to an overtly compensatory behavior towards *the other*. When alluding to ambiguity, I refer to the complex ways gender, racial and social configurations have developed in Brazil, creating a hodgepodge of categories to define race (in the color spectrum) that appear to emanate a carefree sense of fluidity and freedom together with one of complete paralysis and inability to react. It is also a country where opposing categories march hand in hand in apparent harmony with one another.

Cynthia A. Sarti states that in cities like São Paulo “the ambiguity of being both modern and traditional, individualist and hierarchical, has been stressed as the core of the ‘Brazilian dilemma’ (DaMatta 1991)” (114). On the subject of ambiguity, she goes on to say that:

the dynamics of this ‘changing continuity’ are an essential characteristic of social relations in Brazil: traditional patterns are slowly modified through adjustments and negotiations, an assertion that should hardly be surprising, given the fact that Brazilian history is not known for radical ruptures. (114)

Moreover, multiple configurations of belief systems and family structures co-exist side-by-side in tune to often very different spatial dynamics so that the juxtaposition of

paradoxical viewpoints is commonplace (i.e., in light of DaMatta's analysis of Brazilian society). The compensatory system of racial discrimination and inequality provided that, in the beginning of the 20th century, for example, Afro-Brazilians (the subject of women in the Brazilian context will be discussed in the next chapter) might have attained a certain level of power or status (albeit very limited) by working in the house of a wealthy landowner or for an affluent family in a big city, but if they ventured into the outside world, they would most likely suffer discrimination and be treated like a second- or third-class citizen. When these same individuals attended a religious ceremony at a local church of their faith or a *Camdomblé* ritual, for example, they might actually be highly regarded and even hold esteemed positions in that religious organization³¹. In this configuration, it is clear that the opportunities opened to them must have been extremely limited in terms of their ever being able to achieve any meaningful social or economic mobility. This reveals to what degree the juxtaposition of the innumerable gradations of domination and exclusion in the society complemented each other and was essentially compensatory, making social mobility almost impossible. With regard to any open conflict with and criticism of this system, DaMatta affirms that:

The study of our reality from this perspective has revealed not open conflict (which brings about transformative action) but growing political radicalism as well as “word proof” enthusiasm and political creativity that defy coherence in their cumulative adoption of all forms. The system is effectively cannibalistic (as Oswald de Andrade splendidly discovered) and has an incredible capacity to perform as did Dona Flor's second husband, Dr. Teodoro Madureira, whose motto was “a place for everything and everything in its place”. (*The Brazilian Puzzle* 276)

Furthermore, fetishism, according to the book *Cultures of Fetishism* by Louise Kaplan, provides the fetishist with a mere illusion of gain and certainty in the midst of ambiguity, chaos and uncertainty, as she describes below:

Fetishism transforms ambiguity and uncertainty into something knowable and certain and in doing so snuffs out any sparks of creativity that might ignite the fires of rebellion. The material object, the fetish, is employed to still and silence, bind and dominate, smother and squelch the frighteningly uncontrollable and unknowable energies of someone or something that might otherwise express its own ambiguous vitalities. The unknowable and the ambiguous are experienced as dangerous. The fetish reassures. (121)

The fetish, therefore, would appear to be the ideal object of devotion in a country like Brazil. It would provide the fetishist with a “modicum of clarity” amid the flurry of conflicting ideas and norms he/she might be experiencing while allowing for the perpetuation of that confusion (in the background) by virtue of the fact that the fetish is never really deciphered as such in its entirety, nor is it ever used as a final solution to the problems engendered by its inherent ambiguity. So, although for Kaplan, the fetish “reassures”, it also keeps the fetishist cognizant of its failings (following the fetishist logic: “I know very well, but...”).

To complement Kaplan and DaMatta’s arguments, I propose that the fetish functions as a form of cultural and psychological strategy in the minds of the individuals in the society. The fetish might also be the key to unlocking access to a deeper understanding of the politics of the racial and female body and sensuality and sexuality in Brazilian society and culture. Racial and gender dynamics are often viewed as “fluid” and contradictorily repressive, for example, while, at the same time, pointing to much more

complex and complicated social phenomena and perhaps the adoption of the uniquely Brazilian social strategies so widely explored in Rodrigues' plays.

Another aspect of Kaplan's argument, which complements the first, is that fetishism entails "transform[ing] something or someone with its own enigmatic energy and immaterial essence into something or someone that is material and tangibly real, a form of being that makes that something or someone controllable (33)". The strategy of the fetishist is to avert confusion about what the other actually desires while pretending it is the other's indirect consent that keeps the constructed ambiguity in movement, providing the fetishist with a kind of "carte blanche" to justify maintaining the relationship alive. In *Black Angel* and *The Seven Kittens*, for instance, the characters keep the relationships of exploitation going with the excuse that the other is consenting. Silene's whole family, for example, has her as their fetish in the belief that Silene actually enjoys being a symbol of purity for them whereas the real truth is at the opposite extreme of the spectrum. Ironically, for the same reasons behind her isolation from men and society, Silene creates her own individual ethics of conduct and her own fetishes, which end up clashing with her family's expectations.

To complement the idea of a fetishist strategy aimed at pretending to resolve all of the inherent ambiguities and insecurities in society, we will start by investigating how Roberto DaMatta describes both the veiled dichotomy (black vs. white, for example) underlying race relations in Brazil as well as the contradictory discourse about Brazil and its inhabitants as a people who take nothing seriously. He also explores the popular, and peculiarly Brazilian belief that Brazilians have a notoriously laid-back attitude towards life while revealing how they have, contradictorily, established strict barriers against the

accesses to power and the social hierarchy at home, in politics, and in the workplace. The discourses and myths that have become popularized are important to investigate since Rodrigues explores them as clichés or stereotypes in order to deconstruct them.

In a newspaper article published in *O Estado de São Paulo* on November 5, 2011, Roberto DaMatta delineates the invisibility of violence and the silencing of certain axiomatic convictions in Brazilian society, referencing the acquisition of a kind of social blindness as a cultural strategy aimed at denying certain harsh social realities:

Uma perspectiva superficial diz que nada é levado a sério no Brasil. Mas o fato é que temos axiomas sociais imbatíveis. Por exemplo: amigo de amigo é amigo. Inimigo de amigo é inimigo! Curioso como tais expectativas continuem operando mesmo quando sabemos que esses campos têm fronteiras tênues. Sobretudo quando consideramos que, entre nós, o trabalho era executado por não pessoas: os escravos – cujos fantasmas ainda puxam os nossos pés. Esses eram mortos – vivos e os elos entre eles e seus senhores eram demarcados por um sistema de etiquetas que permanece invisível até que algum gesto do inferior detone algum nervo do sistema, liberando sua esmagadora intolerância. Quando Florestan Fernandes diz que, no Brasil, temos “o preconceito de não ter preconceito”, ele fala de um paradoxo profundo. Somos como o cego que usa óculos escuros no cinema.

[A superficial perspective says that nothing is taken seriously in Brazil. But the fact is that we have social axioms that are unbeatable. For example: a friend of a friend is a friend. Enemy of a friend is an enemy! How curious that such expectations continue operating even when we know that these fields have porous borders. Especially when we consider that, between us, “persons” did not perform the work: but slaves – whose ghosts still pull our feet at night. These were undead and the links between them and their masters were marked by a system of labels that remained invisible until some gesture of the inferior detonated a nerve from the system, freeing its overwhelming intolerance. When Florestan Fernandes says that in Brazil, we have “the prejudice of having no prejudice”, he speaks of a profound paradox. We are like the blind man who wears sunglasses in the movies.]

Interestingly, the underlying hidden violence so prevalent in Brazilian society is an appropriate starting point for our initial reflections on what types of fetishism as structure would be open to analysis in the plays of Nelson Rodrigues. DaMatta's allegory of a blind man wearing sunglasses in a darkened movie theater aptly represents this almost "insane" compulsion to keep things as they are and maintain the status quo at all costs, as portrayed by almost all of Nelson Rodrigues' characters. It is as if the real fulcrum of what is most in need of sunlight and transparency is made confusing and incomprehensible by applying multi-layers of fetishistic theater (together with its most direct allusions to sexuality). While confusing at first, the characters and the playwright use fetishism as structure to materialize these dark and silent places.

The paradoxical qualities of the fetish are further explored in the confusing manner by which he explores such specific topics as sexuality. Nelson Rodrigues himself has often been accused of being pornographic and, at times, has frankly admitted to this logo of definition, once calling himself "the pornographic angel". However, what we as spectators/readers may casually perceive as overtly sexual or lascivious in his plays is more often than not a genuine manifestation of violence within personal relationships, almost always played out very ambiguously on the stage. So that it is actually quite difficult for the spectator/reader to gauge the strength of that violence since it is often attenuated by a discourse rendering it of lesser importance (e.g., the juxtaposition of comic and violent, exaggerated and subtle, overtly sexual and chaste) or is narrated by someone who seems detached or oblivious to what is going on (the reporter in *Album de Familia* [*Family Album*], for example, who narrates events in the family's life that completely contradict what is being enacted on stage). The "victim", in turn, may also

even seem deserving of the violence (especially when inflicted upon an individual who has committed or been accused of committing adultery, a crime, or an illicit act). Thus, the persona of the dramatist and the Brazilian “men” portrayed in his plays is fraught with ambiguities and generalizations, which, although easily dismantled, when reflected upon, continue to relentlessly challenge us to define these problematic identities or fetishes on stage. Magaldi, commenting on some of the difficulties encountered in interpreting Rodrigues’ plays, states that:

Nelson’s work has produced... the most contradictory stagings. No director approaches his plays with the aim of merely carrying out his stage directions. Nelson Rodrigues’ creativity stimulates the imagination of all those involved in the production. It is fortunate, I believe, that there is no fixed interpretative style for Shakespeare, Moliere, and other playwrights who can be read from multiple perspectives. In the case of Nelson, the possibilities of exploration seem to me even greater, because most of his texts are still immersed in controversy. (*Encenações* 166, quoted in George’s *The Invention of Brazilian Drama*, p. 1)

As with the fetishist structure, in demonstrating Nelson Rodrigues’ characters as not necessarily simply pornographic, for instance, we cannot completely dismiss their often “shocking” behavior when they act/perform overtly and purposefully outside the boundaries of prevalent and sometimes sacred social mores. In turn, what I am proposing is that the fetish, structurally analyzed as a strategy in the plays, mirrors some of these complicated definitions of identity frequently associated with Brazilians, while offering new ones.

I begin with the 1958 play *Os Sete Gatinhos* [*The Seven Kittens*] and investigate ways in which both violence and ambiguity contribute to fetishistic obsessions. I then examine *Anjo Negro* [*Black Angel*] from different angles of cultural fetishistic strategies. I will emphasize fetishism as a form of relationship and structure rather than defining the

meaning of certain objects when focusing on exclusively sexual or individual fetishes (as pertaining to the characters' individual psychological histories as opposed to having larger social implications). As Louise Kaplan stresses in referring to the anxiety that often accompanies ambiguity and sexuality:

Fetishism brings certain details into the foreground of experience in order to mask and disguise other features that are thus cast into the shadows and margins and background. For example, the fetishism strategy employs sexuality and sexual behaviors to mask an entire range of desires, motives, and defenses. The all-too-apparent, one could say glitteringly present, right before-our-eyes sexual behaviors command our attention, hampering our capacity to see anything that might lie beneath the surface. The powerful presence of the erotic surface disguises and covers over the absences that would otherwise remind us of something traumatic. The dramatic and vivid visibility of the fetish object serves to dazzle and confuse, blinding the viewer from other, potentially more troubling implications that are thus cast into the shadows. The surface layer, the images that captivate the visual field, the words that clamor to be heard, are masquerades. (21)

Another apparently paradoxical aspect of fetishism is that, on the one hand, it is itself an ambiguous object/structure that also functions as a response to ambiguity. Yet, on another level, the fetish may be a mask that is concealing more complex and often overwhelming traumatic experiences. As noted in the Introduction of this dissertation, Octave Mannoni's often-cited phrase ("Je sais bien, mais quand-même...") describing the fetishist stance allows for disavowal and affirmation of difference and/or ambiguity, all at the same time, without an individual having to choose one over another. The plays reveal the Brazilian ideological framework of the cultural "fetishism strategy" (expression cited by Louise Kaplan). However, the fetishistic structures in the plays may have the opposite effect from what might actually occur in the culture. They not only mask but also reveal – simultaneously.

Slavoj Zizek also uses the crux of this idea to describe ideological fetishisms that share the same inner contradictions, which goes in tangent with the type of fetishism present in the plays. Moreover, Zizek affirms that the fetishists (a term, in his view, encompassing all individuals inscribed in a society) represent certain ideologies (e.g., hierarchical, racial, political, religious) and implicitly “know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but are still doing it” (33). This observation is preceded by: “ ‘I know that money is a material object like others, but still . . . ’ ” (18). In fact, Zizek believes that we “do not know” or we “misrecognize” that in our “social reality itself, in [our] social activity – in the act of commodity exchange – [we] are guided by the fetishistic illusion” (31).

In his arguments concerning ideology, Zizek also emphasizes a number of crucial differences between Marx and Lacan:

In the predominant Marxist perspective, the ideological gaze is a partial gaze overlooking the totality of social relations whereas from the Lacanian perspective, ideology rather designates a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility. (49)

In the former (the Marxist view of fetishism) “a fetish conceals the positive network of social relations”, whereas, in the latter situation, “a fetish conceals the lack/void (‘castration’) around which the symbolic network is articulated” (49).

For our purposes, we will attempt to explore this symbolic Brazilian network of relationships and the lack (or absence, gap, void) mentioned by Zizek, which is covered over or hidden from view by the fetish. This *lack* could be interpreted as a more existential, generalized lack or void. But, in relation to the cast of characters and the Brazilian milieu of the plays, it probably refers to a few specific types of lack.

There is a lack that stems from an incapacity to move beyond blindness and the use of sunglasses and confusion to camouflage what needs to be resolved or untangled. So, instead of revealing or investigating this existential, solitary lack within their inner selves, the characters make up stories and create traumas and fetishes to fill up this “void”, or confusion, as to the origin of their feelings of emptiness (an overcompensation that comes from a combination of individual personal and social anxieties). I would further suggest that Sergio Buarque de Holanda, in his *Raízes do Brasil* calls this the phenomenon of the “homem cordial”, or, the cordial man, who, often perceived as being highly sociable and friendly, is actually mired in deep-rooted psychological insecurities (a mask of cordiality that reveals more than a superficial interpretation would) as opposed to the so-called “polite” man. In the plays, the masks as stereotypes (be they of a highly-sexualized female, a virgin, a patriarch, a black man, and so on) are slowly dismantled by a multiplicity of other masks and fetishistic relationships that end up engulfing the characters in anxiety. Many of them cannot identify what sort of habits and cultural practices they are perpetuating in their fetishistic behavior, which leads to even greater anxiety.

Another ambiguous aspect of Brazilian society is explored by Fitz and Payne, who affirm in their Introduction to *Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America*, that:

We also believe, in regard to the various binary oppositions used to sustain these borders (including the male/female opposition), that Brazil’s unique literary and cultural history has made it more receptive to new, more language-conscious kinds of ambiguity and new, less conventional approaches to gender and voice. (xi)

They go on to say, when comparing a few novels representative of the literary boom in Spanish America and novels in Brazil published in the same period, that:

the distinguishing factor, however, apart from the language and certain technical subtleties, is one of voice and gender representation, both of which are based (especially in the Brazilian texts) on a narrative self-consciousness about the fluid relationship between language, reality, truth, and being that can be directly traced back to Machado de Assis, to Brazil's surprisingly strong female tradition, and, finally, to a cultural milieu that has long viewed assimilation (itself an effacement of rigidly controlled boundaries) as both a valid and realistic aspect of human existence. The demarcation between masculine and feminine, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, will be challenged (for both men and women) in Brazilian texts but, conversely, maintained within the Spanish American works under discussion. (xiv)

Despite the naïve-sounding argument about assimilation so often associated with Freyre's Luso-tropicalist argument of Brazil's apparently unique form of race relations, Fitz and Payne seem to point to an interesting and important issue in Brazilian society regarding gender. Initially, in Brazilian society, we perceive (as described in the Introduction to this dissertation) an attraction to ambiguity when it comes to tackling ambiguous, multilayered racial and gender dynamics, which is referred to in much post-Independence Brazilian literature. This ambiguity is often associated with the violent, brutal silencing of oppressed groups of people, who are primarily voiceless due to their inability to deal with topics considered taboo, reflective of the pervasive assimilation myths surrounding these issues.

Nonetheless, the power of this ambiguity has mysteriously been kept alive, so that the very thought of openly contesting any of the most prevalent racial or gender myths in society remains very difficult. Abdias do Nascimento in *Mixture or Massacre* calls this ambiguity a type of fetishism of racial democracy, a precious token of society, an

ideological fetish. Others like DaMatta later explain that due to the complexities of the social networks in play, contestation in one repression site will not untangle the complicated knots of racial prejudice in another.

These convoluted ramifications of labyrinthine proportions can be applied to gender relations as well. Nevertheless, if we view ambiguity in the Brazilian context in terms of assimilation and lack of boundaries, we can also look at the complex and multiple configurations of a society that would very creatively embrace certain confusing definitions regarding binary oppositions. While it might not be liberating, it could provide a spatial dimension and opportunities for the advent of alternative voices and family structures, which could not have otherwise occurred in a patriarchal society pervaded by such stark social, racial and gender inequalities that many scholars believe have always existed in Brazilian society.

Thus, ambiguity (as well as the fetish), handled in myriad ways by different members of society, could even be seen as a tactic of domination used by the elites as well as, conversely, a reaction by the oppressed to the imposition of servitude. In this dimension, ambiguity might then be seen as a particularly creative, uniquely Brazilian response to certain apparently immovable structures and ideologies. As commented on by Fitz and Payne, ambiguity might also have stimulated the dissemination and propagation of writers familiar with the tactics of ambiguity and amorphous oppositions, perhaps providing a certain opening or safe passage for modern and later contemporary writers concerned with analyzing, among other topics, “the fluidity of time” and “questions of authorship” to create a special, forward-looking literature.

As explored in Nelson Rodrigues' plays such as *The Seven Kittens*, the repressive and often confusing, ambiguous, and violent relationships that exist and apparently thrive in Brazilian society have contributed to certain traumatic and repressed attitudes towards social relationships as a whole, especially within the dynamics of the family regarding its symbolism and ideological framework. Violence and the family dynamics of the Brazilian middle-class have also served to catapult Nelson Rodrigues' unique playwriting style, paving the way for the development of a new type of national theater. Even the idea explored by literary, sociological and historical criticism that Brazil is a country dominated by the traditional patriarchal family (in line with the sugar-cane plantation model of colonial times) could be contested and reworked by way of Rodrigues' fetishistic explorations.

Mariza Correa, in her article "Repensando a Família Patriarcal Brasileira", offers a novel perspective on the study of the Brazilian family, which could shed light on the complex family dynamic explored by Rodrigues in his plays. The following quote is part of a summary of her article on Brazilian family structures:

This paper attempts to question some of the empirical and theoretical bases until now acknowledged as the foundations for the emergence of two dominant lines in the literature about family in Brazil: one that sees the patriarchal family as the fundamental institution in rural Colonial Brazil, the other focusing on the modern conjugal family of urban times. The argument is that both may be better seen as part of a single theoretical vision that envisages only the ruling classes of society as agents of our history, therefore ruling out of our universe of research the possibility to investigate the alternative forms of family life that may have existed, and still exist, in Brazil. (5)

Without underestimating the importance of Gilberto Freyre's observations regarding the patriarchal family structure in the Brazilian Northeast and its impact on the mentality and development of family and society, Correa furnishes us with new

possibilities and perspectives on the variety of family structures present during colonial times. For her, the idea that, in colonial Brazil, only one type of family structure reflective of the agrarian-patriarchal model prevailed, which, under the impact of the gradual industrialization of the country, was transformed into the nuclear family unit of today, would be too limited a view. The author casts light on data referring to the presence of other types of family structures, more similar to contemporary urban families. She found that, in fact, apart from the Northeastern region, these units often co-existed in close proximity with the large, vastly more numerous patriarchal agrarian families.

This new vision describing a diverse scenario of family structures helps chip away at the myth that the patriarchal family was the only one present during colonial times as well as the idea that it was also the most important, influencing the modus operandi of Brazil as a whole. Sergio Buarque de Holanda in *Raizes do Brasil*, which, besides family structures, delves into the effects of Portuguese colonization and mentality, might lead us to conclude that the patriarchal family model was predominant in Brazilian culture on all levels of society as well. However, he also stresses the significance of the family unit as an important model for our social institutions overall (which were previously believed to be founded on “neutral and abstract principles” (146) as opposed to intimate personal contacts) together with the mentality of the emotionally sensitive “cordial man” (146), who is fearful of being alone. Thus, when examining Holanda’s take on the impact of family culture on this society, it is also possible to go beyond one type of family and look at ways other models might also have had a cultural impact on the society, especially in terms of the nuclear family. In his

words, there is an aversion to “social ritualism” (147) and, at the same time, a desire to be in society with others, which could lead us to believe in an openness to other types of family models and an “instinctive horror of hierarchies” (160), which the small family unit would provide a respite from.

In the following analysis of *The Seven Kittens* and *Black Angel* we will continue to investigate family dynamics and models, social structures and fetishistic structures as strategies.

Os Sete Gatinhos [The Seven Kittens]

The play *The Seven Kittens* revolves around a married Mr. Noronha, the father of five daughters. Mr. Noronha feels socially humiliated in his government job as a messenger boy in the Brazilian House of Representatives. To compensate for his feeling of inferiority at work, he embodies and acts out the role of an authoritarian patriarch at home. Furthermore, he exhibits psychic powers in subjugating his wife and daughters to his orders through fear and threats. He establishes a mediunic relationship with the spirit of D. Pedro II's³² doctor. This spiritual relationship is, interestingly, only manifest during family gatherings, questioning its authenticity since it appears to have been “invented” for this particular purpose by the father. Mr. Noronha's youngest daughter, Silene, is suddenly ferried away to a boarding school to escape what the father believes to be the inherently destructive nature of his family due not only to his lower-class condition but to a belief that someone has cast a spell on them to prevent his daughters from ever getting married. For example, at one point, he says: “Qualquer vagabunda casa?!” [Any

debauched woman can get married?!] (712), alluding to the fact that what is preventing his daughters from marrying is a curse.

We will later find out that what actually prevents them from marrying is the father himself, whose controlling and violent presence disturbs all the daughters' relationships with men. In fact, the father later affirms that, for him, the most important thing is the wedding ceremony and not the virginity or purity of his daughters before marriage (as he often claims throughout the play). Absurdly, four of his daughters are forced to become prostitutes to make money to buy Silene's (who is now his only virgin daughter) trousseau. Thus, the staging of the curse and the father's accompanying extreme religiosity serve as fetishes of compensation and excuses for the father's complicity in prostituting his daughters.

Meanwhile, the spirit of Dr. Barbosa Coutinho, D. Pedro II's deceased doctor, is said to appear to the father saying that a man who "chora de um olho só" [cries with one eye only] (768) is going to take his daughter's virginity, as Mr. Noronha pronounces to the whole family at the beginning of the play as an omen of what is to come. The possibility of his family's "salvation" by way of Silene's virginal purity and marriage is threatened by this prediction. However, as the play unfolds, Silene is expelled from school for killing a cat pregnant with seven kittens by beating her to death right in front of the whole student body, making her punishment less the result of an omen, and more a psychological response to what is going on at home.

The seven kittens represent the seven members of Silene's own family who have been abandoned to their fate to the extent that the kittens were conceived through violent means and under the threat of destruction. Silene's violent act stems from a combination

of guilt and an act of rebellion against her plight. When she returns home, she shamelessly announces that she has been impregnated by Bibelot, a prototype of the typical “malandro” [rogue], a married man, who is also her sister Aurora’s lover. As Ronaldo Lima Lins aptly describes, “notamos, por exemplo, que Bibelot tem qualquer coisa de malandro e de gigolo, sabe tirar partido das situações e mostra-se seguro e ousado” [noted, for example, that Bibelot has something roguish and gigolo-like, knows how to take advantage of situations and portrays himself as self-assured and daring] (165). Dr. Bordalo, the family doctor, examines Silene and confirms the pregnancy.

This revelation is so powerful that it triggers the downward spiral of the entire family. Mr. Noronha sees this event as marking the impossibility of familial redemption in any form. In his eyes, the solution to this problem (or, in other words, the path to total destruction) is evidently to kill the man with “one eye only” and turn the household into a brothel, at which time the whole neighborhood will learn that, at the father’s instigation, his four other daughters have become prostitutes. He has tired of hiding behind masks and hypocrisies since to do and say things solely for “appearance’s sake” (767) is but a useless veil and a projection of himself and his family on the body and life of his daughter, Silene, an object now beyond his control. He himself declares “my daughters’ day jobs are all a masquerade!”(759). The father ends up killing Bibelot believing he is that one-eyed man in the flesh. However, right before Bibelot dies, two tears drop from both of the murdered man’s eyes, proving that he is not the man whose tears fall from only one eye. At the end of the play, the women stage a rebellion against their husband/father and mercilessly stab him to death.

Since the central focus of many of Rodrigues' plays is the tenor of family dynamics among its members, it is important to look at the variety of perspectives he was dealing with. We could assume that in a play like *The Seven Kittens*, the presence of the father, Seu Noronha, as a decadent paternal figure trying to maintain control by projecting overwhelming power over his family, is due to his low social-class status in society. He is also a caricature of the gradually declining importance of this type of patriarchal family structure in view of the new gender dynamics coming into play, reflective of the changing times. This is important since it denotes contrary forces and movements, exemplified by the rigidly-controlled energy attributed to all the characters on stage that often act as if they are about to explode whether emotionally or physically at any moment. However, it can be assumed that among the lower socio-economic strata of urban families, the patriarchal family was not, in fact, predominant. That is perhaps why Nelson Rodrigues makes a point of transforming the patriarch into a pathetically tragic and disrespected figure anxiously clinging to a power he has never actually possessed, manifesting what could be called self-fetishistic anxiety.

So, it could be said that Seu Noronha is attempting to "restore" the relationship-type fetish of a patriarch through violence and masquerade. He has established a fetishistic relationship with his persona as the patriarch of the house, trying to transform himself into a patriarchal fetish to the other family members to ensure that all will unquestionably obey his orders.

Considering the multitude of possibilities that present themselves in a society like the Brazilian, a well-defined power structure might be present in the higher socio-economic strata of society in addition to the lower echelons of street politics, but not

necessarily in the home, as is very clearly delineated in the play. Once again, applying DaMatta's configuration of Brazilian society, these two types of co-existing power structures create anxiety-riddled, confusing gender roles and dynamics whenever individuals pass from one sphere to another as from the home to the school to the street to the workplace and place of worship, to the world of the beyond. The wife and daughters in the play are certainly not afraid to confront the father on occasion on behalf of their stated moral beliefs, and, contrariwise, seem to have an intense urge to free themselves from his overpowering need to control.

This phenomenon takes DaMatta's articulation of the multiple relational nature of Brazilian society one step further because Rodrigues' argument would also include gender roles and racial dynamics in this tripartite configuration, which should presumably be more sharply delineated in a patriarchal family structure but, on the contrary, is dealt with in an even more ambiguous manner in this particular home. As Mariza Correa asserts in her study of the history of family structures in Brazil, and referring to the belief that the patriarchal agrarian family structure was the only viable model in colonial Brazil might be an oversimplification:

É possível reduzir a imensa gama de possibilidades inscritas num espaço natural e social aberto, muito lentamente ocupado e organizado, a uma história a qual, mudando os personagens, permanece uma fala central idêntica a si mesma, preenchida a cada geração por novas palavras, sempre com o mesmo sentido? É possível ignorar a soma de personagens, funções e a mobilidade envolvidos na mais simples operação social no Brasil em seus primeiros anos de existência, e aprisionar todos estes elementos num lugar privilegiado como modelo de interação social: o engenho? É possível esquecer as redes de relações, as ramificações interior e exteriores ao país, necessárias a sobrevivência do mais simples estabelecimento colonial e incorporá-las todas na figura de um senhor, o dono do engenho-que muitas vezes não passava de um agente dos donos reais-, moderno Abraão conduzindo um dócil rebanho?

[Is it possible to reduce the immense range of possibilities inscribed in an open natural and social space, very gradually being organized and occupied, to a story which, by solely changing the characters, which remains the same central one, identical to itself, filled by every generation with new words, but always carrying the same meaning? Is it possible to ignore the sum of characters, professions and movements involved in the simplest social operation in Brazil in its first years of existence, and imprison all these elements into one sole privileged place as a model of social interaction: the sugar cane plantation? Can you forget the multiple networks of relationships, that branches inward and outward the country, necessary for the survival of any colonial settlement and incorporate them all into the figure of one man, the owner of the mill, which often was no more than an agent of the owners-real, a modern Abraham conducting a docile flock?]

Highlighting this controversial view of the Brazilian family is relevant here since Nelson Rodrigues' characters are always contesting traditional family values, or belong to families that are on the verge of exploding under the pressures of their lives, or, as women on the brink of emancipation. Like Walter Benjamin's historical materialist, Nelson Rodrigues is accentuating the destruction and decadence of a system that has since become immovable, as well as bringing to light the possibility that different forms of family life have already been in existence. He is also in fact underscoring the characters' confusion vis-à-vis a system that accepts all these configurations without giving preference to any one of them in particular. As Nelson Rodrigues unveils and Benjamin describes in his portrayal of this social and theatrical reality:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast to a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject. The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes. In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism, which is on the point of overwhelming it. (112)

Nelson Rodrigues is indeed bringing to light the “memory” and the tradition of viewing the patriarch as an immovable cultural figure while at the same time squashing it. The moment of danger lies in the plays themselves so full of disturbing sexual and seemingly gratuitous violence. At the same time, through fictional means he is also exploring in what ways this patriarchal voice could also be a catalyst for destruction, oppression, and chaos, as opposed to being a bearer of peace and order.

The female characters are involved in a system of commerce, which portrays them as sexual objects (and fetishes) whose value is defined by the male gaze in a society at least superficially imbued with patriarchal family values and Catholic mores. Silene’s body, for example, is a clear example of an object marked by the imprint of virginity as an ideal, which is then fetishized by the rest of the family. The male protagonists objectify the female bodies, elevating them to a state of adoration, particularly whenever the female body is associated with virginity and purity. After deciding to quit his job, Mr. Noronha proclaims: “Whoever has beautiful daughters doesn’t need to work as a messenger boy (765)!” Nonetheless, it is not the male, patriarchal gazes alone that fetishize female bodies. The female characters themselves, as desirous objects, also actively perform fetishistically.

The principle of commodification of many social elements in this economic system (in practice, literally everything seems to have an exchange value, e.g., the daughters’ sexuality, Aurora’s boyfriend, Silene, the trousseau, etc.) varies according to which particular principles are taken into account. Silene’s body is valued as the embodiment of the state of virginity. The wedding dress and trousseau are representations of an illusory sanctity and, at the same time, the hypocrisy of marriage as a social

institution. In contrast, the mother's body is seen by the patriarch as grotesquely overweight and undesirable but, nevertheless, is violently manipulated. Seu Noronha uses his body spatially on the stage as a messenger and/or martyr. From this perspective, the body is extirpated of any meaning beyond its exchange value as a commodity (i.e., a commodity in exchange for certain "values", which in turn, end up debasing all ethical considerations to the same level playing field). The prostitution of the four sisters likewise has an exchange value within the social sphere. So much so that the father believes their prostitution can be equitably exchanged for the Christian moral approval acquired through the marriage of the virgin sister.

However, using illicit monetary gain to attain social mobility is illusory at the outset in accordance with the logic that makes the fetish possible, i.e., the fetish contains contradictory meanings and values within itself. Even though the sisters do have normal day jobs, their *real work* is prostitution, as exemplified by the fact that the father uses all his contacts to find them clients. This would mean that even though the sisters "know that" the money they will save through prostitution to pay for Silene's wedding will not ultimately give them access to a higher social class; "... even so", they are willing to keep on fetishizing this unattainable goal. Thus, in that economic system, the daughters would always be stigmatized by the exchange and sale of their bodies and would never effectively benefit morally or socially from Silene's marriage.

As an addendum of Silene's virgin body, the trousseau has more paradoxical characteristics, being seen as a very powerful fetish disguised as representing a desire for a sort of religious salvation. The trousseau represents the hope harbored by the entire family that they will be spared having to pay the price for all the sins they might have

committed over their lifetimes. But, contrary to true religious or spiritual salvation, this family's must be purchased and paid for in cash. These characters are so severely disconnected from honest human relationships with which the hierarchical structures could be more seriously contested or analyzed (and perhaps help them find other ways to free themselves from their condition as victims) that the trousseau ends up becoming one more object among many in their theatre of fetishistic commodities. It slowly gains a mystical fetishistic significance in that it is imbued with a value agreed upon by the whole family. The value of marriage, virginity, and the trousseau is tied to the value of social appearances to a much greater extent than they would be if the marriage had been contracted solely on religious convictions. Mr. Noronha affirms: "You became prostitutes to give a marriage of an angel to Silene ..."(768). "Teofilismo", a religion invented by the author with characteristics similar to Spiritism, is inserted as one more element serving to demystify and poke fun at the religious attitudes of the family, thereby functioning as another type of fetish.

For Freud, female fetishism is quite rare. In taking Bibelot as their fetishized object, both Aurora and Silene reveal their defiance of their formerly passive position as mere mirrors of male desire. Besides the objects that are valued by virtue of the male gaze in addition to what I have called the patriarchal economy prevalent in Brazilian society at the time, it is clear that the female characters are also seeking their own agency and power through the fetishization of the *Other*. According to Freud, and, in part, to Lacan, fetishists are almost all male since the anxiety of castration (even in the material imaginary of the penis-phallus) establishes itself much more intensely in men.

In this context, the fetishization of objects by the female characters in the play would mark an important contestation against the then current gender norms, to be discussed in the next chapter. Silene loves Bibelot, fetishizing “the man dressed in white”, even after learning he is married (but before learning of Aurora’s love for him). Bibelot is imbued with a religious value despite fitting the “malandro” stereotype perfectly. Silene is less aware of his deceitful behavior since she is convinced he has devoted his life to his sick wife. She knows he is married and has had no scruples about robbing her of her virginity. In turn, Aurora desires him even more now due to his “bad boy” behavior and to the fact that he does not shell out money to “finish the complete service”(736), to cite Bibelot’s own words to describe his sexual conduct. Aurora says to Bibelot: “I’m not sure if I was attracted to you or your white suit. I’m not sure” (745) at the opening of the play, thus revealing the strange relationship she has established with Bibelot and his suit. The word “bibelot” itself signifies an object without true value, being merely decorative, in other words, a perfect fetish.

It occurs that the other five female figures also regard Silene’s virgin body as the ultimate fetish. Mr. Noronha fetishizes the members of his family to compensate for his submissive role in society. The women, in turn, create fetishes to protest their submissive positions in all spheres of their lives. Furthermore, the ambiguous character of the fetish and the fetishist is revealed by the psychic sister who reincarnates her dead cousin. The instant the women of the family murder the patriarch, Aurora internalizes two simultaneous voices: a male voice of hate representing a dead male cousin’s and another of a daughter-object rebelling against her father’s power. The male voice exclaims: “dirty old man!” (798). In Aurora’s case, fetishism as an embodiment is unexpectedly turned

into a tool for the women of the family. In turn, the body as object must embody a male figure to be able to destroy the overbearing, destructive patriarch, making it impossible for the women to obliterate the patriarchal family structure without feeling forced to embody the patriarchal figure themselves.

It is also important to emphasize the plethora of unique roles Aurora's body as incarnation plays in relation to the different members of her family, even with respect to her father, who in the end becomes a victim of his own fetishistic obsessions. Aurora's body as fetish turns on him since it ultimately cannot be controlled. Although the father tries to spread his own fetishism to the other family members by constantly reenacting the fetishistic scenario, there is no constancy or sameness in the way the reenactments occur so the women continue to be beyond his control.

The Seven Kittens is primarily a play about a family structure and most of the scenes take place within the confines of the family home with apparently no reverberations in the society at large. We can conclude that, in this play, the patriarch has been destroyed and the women are able to assert limited power in the family after his demise. However, the ending is neither optimistic nor does it offer the family any possibility of redemption. Although "powerful" in the home, Nelson Rodrigues may be arguing that the women will not ultimately command the same authority in society. The fetishistic relationships are destined to be maintained since once one of the objects is mutilated and eliminated. Others seem to be chosen to replace them, creating a vicious cycle of fetishistic embodiments.

Anjo Negro [Black Angel]

Following the analysis of the *The Seven Kittens* and looking at the ways fetishism is represented and performed as structure, it is beneficial to continue the dialogue with Louise Kaplan and her book on the cultural strategies of fetishism. The author ascertains that fetishism is a strategy invented by society, which, in an endless vicious cycle, propagates fetishistic cultures to maintain its longevity. She emphasizes the disadvantages and the controlling nature of this type of strategy whether manifested or disguised as “cultures”. Kaplan also affirms that fetishism is usually (popularly) interpreted as being a disruptor of norms but emphasizes the importance of the opposite strategies and their effects, as follows:

Since the strategy (or discourse) of fetishism has eluded many of the investigators who tackled the subject, the basic notion underlying these attempts has been to propose the several ways in which the perversion of fetishism could be enlisted to disrupt and challenge cultural norms. In contrast, I am arguing that the fetishism strategy aims to keep human beings enslaved to cultural norms. Fetishism, as a strategy or item of cultural discourse, is a servant of authoritarianism. The fetishism strategy works to insure that the law is upheld. A central principle of the fetishism strategy is to guarantee that creative energies and vitalities are stifled, perhaps even murdered if necessary. (29)

For the purposes of studying fetishism as manifested in the plays, examining fetishism as a strategy and form of cultural domination can indeed be worthwhile. Moreover, I plan to go beyond the idea of fetishism solely as a form of control, or as something that could be overcome, and more as a type of structure, which can be reflected upon, specifically when looking at this phenomenon in *Black Angel*. In Rodrigues’ theater, in fact, fetishism seems to serve different purposes depending on the particular culture, the play, and the characters. In the theatre, because of its performatic

quality, fetishism can be used, viewed and interpreted in other creative ways instead of just acting in control modes that ultimately need to be destroyed.

I would, then, like to continue by analyzing the play but not necessarily attributing a value judgment to this type of strategy in *Black Angel* (the strategy itself is a form of survival or a manifestation of specific belief systems). For some characters, the fetishism strategy helps perpetuate a perverse system of racial inequality and social violence and humiliation. By the same token, it also works to compensate and free individuals from further agony. It is, nonetheless, almost like a pact with the devil since there does not seem to be any way out of this vicious cycle of fetishizing and being fetishized, as was seen in *The Seven Kittens*.

In addition, *Black Angel* reenacts the stereotypical fetishistic scenario described by Homi Bhabha in “The Other Question”. By doing so, it also accentuates other aspects of the society implicated in this circular mechanism involving anxiety, disavowal, and stereotyping. Analyzing this play in light of these factors may enable us to better understand the corporal positions and their implications in the process of racial fetishism (which, internalized by all the members of this society, affects everything). Thus, to summarize these general arguments about possible types of fetishism in this drama, we will consider: fetishism as a cultural strategy (as both repressive and somewhat liberating, depending on the fetishist), which, in turn, gives rise to racial stereotyping as a type of fetishism.

Derek Hook, in his article “The Racial Stereotype, Colonial Discourse, Fetishism, and Racism”, affirms, when quoting Homi Bhabha:

Thus, “fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is the repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference...is

disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks difference and restores an original presence” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 74). It is on this basis that Bhabha justifies his use of fetishism as an analogue for stereotyping actions. Two fundamental components then: an initial disturbing encounter with difference repetitively denied and then assimilated into the frame of what one already knows, and the fantasy attempt to normalize this difference with recourse to an additional component. In the first case, claims Bhabha, we have a structural link between fetishism and stereotyping, in the second case, a functional link. (720)

For discussion purposes, we would like to rest on the terms to describe the fetish as a stereotype of assimilation and a type of possession or power. So, it could be said that, for Bhabha, the European colonizer would have to first establish a relationship with the African descendant in a way that they would all appear to be of equal standing in society or, at the very least, be easily recognizable to each other. In Brazil after abolition, we would have had to create a discourse of assimilation and hybridism in order to come to terms with the immense problematic of transforming a huge number of former slaves into a paid labor force capable of being absorbed into the new economy. To make these former slave laborers feel as much a part of Brazil as other nationals, politicians and writers started looking for ways to describe Brazil through the prism of the “fable of the three races”. These same writers and politicians would then have to establish hierarchical differences in accordance with certain racial stereotypes so that the established social, political and cultural hierarchies would be constantly reinforced and not threatened. In the case of Brazil, these stereotypes conferred on the black body certain attributes, which could easily become stereotypical (e.g., good at soccer, Carnival celebrations, and sexual prowess). Throughout, this process would function as a reenactment of a fetishistic racial scenario.

Prior to discussing the play itself and its corresponding fetishistic manifestations, it is important to start by accentuating some of the cultural, social, and psychological issues at play regarding racism in Brazilian society. Without completely discrediting Gilberto Freyre's analysis of the patriarchal family and some of what he considered to be favorable aspects of race relations between the Portuguese and African descendants that his writings brought to light, it must be said that his book has been seminal in influencing attitudes towards race both in Brazil and abroad. Some of his assertions that tend to accentuate a certain docility in race relations were clearly taken out of context and are not in agreement with what other critics of the Freyrian view have written about. This critical attitude might even have started before the advent of Freyre's writings in an effort to define Brazil in terms of its ethnic formation in reality or as an ideal.

As was pointed out in the "Introduction", the violent nature of relations between white landowners and their slaves as well as the pyramidal structure of European, African, and Indian interrelationships, in which the white European holds the top position are also clearly mapped out in Freyre's book *The Masters and the Slaves*. We cannot, however, simply dismiss the made-in-Brazil myth of "racial democracy" based on Freyre's arguments and beyond. Cesar Braga-Pinto, in Chapter 2 of the book *Masters and the Slaves : Plantation Relations and Mestizaje in American Imaginaries*, succinctly describes this complex and often violent portrait of race relations presented by Freyre and its ultimately positive after effects:

Thus, even if Freyre writes in terms of black and white "fraternal relations," the colonial interracial penetration he imagines can hardly be called a form of brotherly love. In fact, Freyre explicitly discusses the social and sexual exchanges between blacks and whites in terms of sadomasochism inherent to the history of the colonial encounter— that which Freyre calls "master sadism" ('sadismo de senhor') and the

corresponding “slave masochism” (“masoquismo de escravo”) (CGS, 51). Yet in spite of this apparent violence, the interracial encounter turns out to be complementary rather than antagonistic. Ultimately, the “balance of antagonisms” which Freyre repeatedly defines as the essence of the *formação brasileira* (Brazilian upbringing) consists of a harmonious balance between the sadism of the elites and the masochism of the masses, the latter of whom rarely revolt and even then only in sacrificial, messianic movements (51).

By the same token, Freyre, in his book *The Masters and the Slaves*, also claims that the Portuguese colonizers were inclined toward “racial crossing” because they had “a tendency that appears to have been due to their greater social plasticity” (185). Freyre goes on to affirm that the Portuguese were “less conscious of race than were the Spaniards”, and emphasizes the religious aspects of the colonial wars in the Americas. He adds that “in the absence of a feeling or consciousness of racial superiority so prominent in the English colonizers, the Brazilian fell back upon the criterion of faith”(193). As is clear, even though Freyre ascertains a lack of race consciousness or prejudice on the part of the Portuguese, he also makes clear the high level of violence occurring in encounters between the races as a form of masochism. Even what we have been calling the “myth” of racial democracy has begun to resemble a fetishistic totem, considering its defining aspects of recognition and disavowal (recognizing the violent, hierarchical relationships based on race, the dialects of sadomasochism and masochism together with the affirmation of the absence of race consciousness). Elisa Larkin do Nascimento refers to the racial myths propagated after Freyre as “the sorcery of color” since they most resemble a magic spell and an invisible veil of dominance (reflective of the views of white supremacists throughout the world), which cannot be easily dismissed due to the

immense power this myth has shown to mystify and be disguised as something more socially positive.

The few authors who steer away from looking at the ways Nelson Rodrigues very straightforwardly describes race relations in the play *Black Angel* (despite its so-called “mythic” qualities, as defined by Magaldi’s formal classification of the plays), manifest the fetishism regarding the myth of racial democracy themselves (an inability to discuss or see the issues associated with blatant racial discrimination, as described by Abdias do Nascimento). Some critics of the play such as Sabato Magaldi assume that, for the most part, it reveals irrational, unconscious, ancestral, and archetypal urges while viewing prejudice as a means to disclose other more primitive complexes. On the contrary, whereas Nelson Rodrigues might use a mythical, unrealistic format, he does portray the rawest emotions associated with racial prejudice and relationships to facilitate tackling this issue head-on. In actuality, both black and white fetishistic stereotypes are grotesquely delineated and manifested in this play.

Because of misreadings like the one above, Sábato Magaldi’s classification of Nelson Rodrigues’s play is not carved in stone. In *Nelson Rodrigues Expressionista*, for example, Eudynir Fraga, another theater critic, affirms that

Insistir no preconceito racial, no choque de raças na interpretação de *Anjo Negro* seria mais ou menos a mesma coisa que admitir que a problemática incestuosa de *Album de Família* é algo que fundamenta nossa organização social e que alguém, pela primeira vez, tentou por o dedo na ferida.... (95)

[To insist on racial prejudice, in the clash of races in interpreting *Black Angel* would be more or less the same thing to admit that the problem of incest in *Album de Família* is something that underlies our social organization and someone for the first time, tried to put a finger in the wound]

The author goes on to claim that racial prejudice is not the main theme of the play because the characters are “alienados da normalidade da existência” [alienated from the normality of existence] (95). Fraga here shows a complete lack of understanding of Nelson Rodrigues’ plays in not perceiving the irony he establishes by making the play seem mythical and above the social plane while at the same time firmly rooting it in reality. Nelson Rodrigues does not play around with literal stereotypical images and relationships through imagery and language to simply make the audience take a leap in another direction (“to infinity”) but, rather, to create a contrast and a dialogue between the mundane and the other-worldly. When we read Elias’s (Ismael’s adopted white brother) words about his black brother Ismael, the racial dimensions of the play cannot be denied. In addition to the lamentable description of a black man’s hatred of his own skin color and the ensuing tragic implications, the playwright also highlights other Brazilian stereotypes about Afro-Brazilians such as sensuality:

Quando ele era rapaz, não bebia cachaça porque achava cachaça bebida de negro. Nunca se embriagou. E destruiu em si o desejo que sentia por mulatas e negras – ele que é tao sensual. A mim, nunca perdoou que eu fosse filho de brancos e não de negros como ele. (585)

[When he was a boy, he did not drink cachaça because he thought cachaça was black men’s drink of choice. He never even got drunk. And he destroyed in himself the desire he felt for mulatto and black women – even him who is so sexual. He never forgave me for being the son of whites and not of blacks like him.]

This dismissive remark about sensuality gives Elias’s words an ironic and angry tone. Elias is showing pity for his brother’s self-hatred (making it sound like he is wrong to feel that way) while being sarcastic about his own racism by inserting yet another form of racial stereotyping.

To continue this argument about the main themes of the play, it is useful to cite Nelson Rodrigues' own words on the issue of racial discrimination in *Black Angel*. Published in his newspaper column in "Última Hora", he conjectures about racial discrimination in Brazil:

E só a obtusidade pétrea ou a má-fé cínica poderão negá-lo. Não caçamos pretos, no meio da rua, a pauladas, como nos Estados Unidos. Mas fazemos o que talvez seja pior. A vida do preto Brasileiro é toda tecida de humilhações. Nós o tratamos com uma cordialidade que é o disfarce pusilânime de um desprezo que fermenta em nós, dia e noite. Acho o branco brasileiro um dos mais racistas do mundo.

[And only the stony dullness or bad faith cynicism might deny it. We do not hunt blacks, in the middle of the street with a stick, as they do in the United States. But we do what is perhaps worse. The life of a Brazilian black man is woven with humiliations. We deal with them with a cordiality that is the cowardly guise of a contempt that ferments in us, day and night. I think the white Brazilian is one of the most racists in the world.]

And when writing about the play in *Menina sem Estrela*,

Quase posso dizer que *Anjo Negro* nasceu comigo. Eu não sabia ler, nem escrever e já percebera uma verdade que até hoje escapa a Gilberto Freyre: - não gostamos de negro. Nada mais límpido, nítido, inequívoco, do que o nosso racismo. E como é humilhante a relação entre brancos e negros. ... A "democracia racial" que nós fingimos é a mais cínica, a mais cruel das mistificações. (225)

[I can almost say that *Black Angel* was born with me. I still could not read or write and had already realized a truth that until today escapes the mind of Gilberto Freyre: - we do not like black people in Brazil. Nothing more clear, crisp, clear, than our racism. And how humiliating is the relationship between whites and blacks. The ... "racial democracy" that we pretend exists is the most cynical, the cruelest of hoaxes.]

Further information about his inspiration for the main character Ismael follows:

E essa paixão negra do Abdias, esse potencial de ira - deram quase toda a substancia do heroi Ismael. Confesso que há muito de Abdias no meu texto. Abdias é doutor e meu personagem também. Mas a grande semelhança está no ódio, o grande, puro, luminoso ódio. (226)

[And that dark passion of Abdias, this potential wrath - gave rise to almost the entire substance of the hero Ishmael. I confess that there is a lot of Abdias in my text. Abdias is a doctor and my character is too. But the big similarity is the hatred, the great, pure, bright hatred.]

We cannot always rely on the author's own words about his plays to explain their thematic and meaning. However, in this case, the fetishism of belief (believing that even in this play so overtly about racial relations in Brazil, it might be about something "beyond", something else) is so strong that his words provide a more aberrant counterpoint and affirmation of otherwise obvious delineations. In fact, Nelson Rodrigues has a peculiar manner of describing the staging of his plays. He often uses mythical references to reveal the mundane and/or the mundane to reveal the abstract. He exaggerates to emphasize subtleties and often makes the overtly dramatic, highly comical.

Because of the difficulties involved in reading a play by Rodrigues while constantly trying to guess opposite meanings, critics and directors often prefer to interpret his plays in a more overt and serious manner by taking Magaldi's classification to heart. Despite the obvious affirmations and literal stage representations of racial violence, critics like Fraga affirm that the play goes far beyond race per se. Sabato Magaldi refers to the love of the protagonists as ambiguous: "a ambiguidade dos sentimentos se mantém até o desfecho" [ambiguity of feelings is preserved until the end] (28), not ever really denying the structural aspect of the fetishism strategy, which is ambiguity. Rodrigues

actually transforms the obvious problem (by making it sound ordinary, popular, down to earth) into an archetype.

Since questions about race as we have seen have always been difficult topics in Brazilian society, especially considering the overwhelming effect of the “color sortilege” together with Abdias do Nascimento’s reference to the ability of the Portuguese colonizer to “mask, mystify....” (in *Mixture and Massacre*), Fraga also buys into this argument. Even Magaldi, considered one of the most important Rodrigues critics, when affirming the play’s obvious theme of racial prejudice and race relations, tends to adhere to predominantly archetypal interpretations, which possibly marks another type of fetishism, that of the audience.

Nelson Rodrigues cleverly confuses the audience/reader by providing a double vision, double meanings, double *mise-en-scene* characteristics. We either fetishize Ismael’s problem on stage as archetypal or mythical or fetishize the subjects while at times disavowing the obvious themes. Silence is also a form of fetishism. In this particular play, “race conflict” is the “elephant in the room”. However, the silence on stage soon turns into words, emotions, and fetishized elements; and what is not at times said out loud is clearly shown visually.

In this play, different types of fetishism are reenacted to highlight the structural fetishistic strategy of racial stereotyping. The fetishism of skin color, for example, is established from the beginning. We start with the clear fetishism of skin color itself when Rodrigues boldly stresses contrasting black and white colors on stage. The skin color assigned to each character holds a special significance. Black represents death and mourning, African descendancy and culture whereas white stands for purity, virginity,

and European descendancy. Ironically, Ismael is wearing white and Virginia, black. Both fetishize the other's color scheme through the fetish of their own choice of clothing; Virginia's clothes remind us of death yet also denote her desire to possess the black man and control him as well as kill his (and her) sons. Death is one of her fetishisms we will investigate later as it solidifies her position of power within the existing power structure.

On the other hand, Ismael's clothes represent the fetishism of social status. His desire to secure his whiteness in the social sphere is exemplified by his wearing a well-cut white suit. When fetishizing, both characters, in accordance with fetishistic logic, are always aware of the menacing nature of the fetish towards order in conjunction with their emptiness and embodiment of the opposing forces at play during the fetishistic performance. The impeccable white outfit worn by Ismael, for instance, will never grant him access to an elevated social position. We know that, in the play, he will always be literally and figuratively black. His hatred of his black skin and black children as he watches Virginia kill them and his embodiment of the virile black man stereotype who is sexually attracted to a white woman, all perpetuate the status quo of the colonial discourse in Brazilian society, which goes against his attempt to counteract the status quo of his position in society.

For her part, Virginia has to keep on killing all her black children in a relentless effort to obliterate the black man, end their cursed heredity, and whiten her family. So, as in Brazilian society as a whole, she also fetishizes the mulatto as black and needs to repeat the act of killing, just as the fetish is always a repetition of its origin. The entire killing sequence and death are witnessed by Ismael. The rubrics seem to have a poetic quality, which would be hard to stage; but the color of nighttime must be accentuated in

the stage set design: “A casa não tem teto, para que a noite possa entrar e possuir os moradores. Ao fundo, grandes muros que crescem à medida que aumenta a solidão do negro” [The house has no roof, so the night can go in and possess the residents. The bottom, large walls that grow as you increase the loneliness of black] (p.125).

Every time we notice the color of skin, clothing, and the set designs, and so on, we immediately associate these colors with certain objects and become strongly attached to them. They are pre-loaded with meaning. When the play starts, the stark contrast between the only two colors worn (black and white) becomes evident, as we see in the stage directions below:

De pé, rígido, velando, está Ismael, O Grande Negro. Durante toda a representação, ele usará um terno branco, de panamá, engomadíssimo, sapatos de verniz. Em cima, de costas para a platéia, Virgínia, a esposa branca, muito alva; veste luto fechado. (573)

[Standing, rigid, mourning, is Ismael, The Great Negro. Throughout the performance, he wears a white suit, of panama, pressed to perfection, patent leather shoes. Above, with his back to the audience, Virginia, the white wife, very white; wears clothes of mourning.]

The first scene opens to the sound of a heated argument taking place among the ten black women in the chorus as they argue over the skin color of the murdered boy (we will eventually learn that Virgínia, the white woman, kills all three children she had with her black husband, Ismael). The dialogue points to the fact that these women are expressing in words the prevalent racist mentality towards black men as well as their own self-hatred as black women. The dialogues are sarcastic and, at the same time, self-revelatory:

MADAM. (sweet) With brown skin, so brown!
MADAM. Not brown. He was not brown.
MADAM. Little mulatto, disguised.

MADAM. (polemic expression) Black!
MADAM. (polemic expression) Brown!
MADAM. (polemic expression) Mulatto!
MADAM. (panic) My god, I am afraid of black people! I am afraid, I am
scared! (573)

It is unacceptable to even mention the word “black” to describe a person’s skin color because that would denote an admission of racial consciousness. Nelson Rodrigues brings this discussion to the fore by emphasizing the absurdity of this situation in the color contrast presented in the first scene. The “black” color of their child cannot be denied, so that is why they call him “brown”. This dialogue shows how difficult it is to talk honestly about racial issues, especially when describing skin color. Calling someone black is practically taboo in Brazil; but saying “mulatto” also denotes African ancestry. So, the first madam calls him “moreninho”, the diminutive form of “brown”, to avoid even uttering the word “black”. Another interesting aspect of this first scene is that the women are all black. When one of them confesses that she, too, is afraid of black men, confusion and discomfort immediately set in.

The fetishism of mysticism, fatality, and superstition in mainstream culture is also accentuated. Ana Maria’s love for her father is represented by a fetishistic theatrical scenario. It is Ismael who directs the scene, painting a picture of himself as a white man although Ana Maria vaguely remembers seeing colors before she was blinded. Thus, he constructs the fetishism stereotype by narrating it to her. It is the love of an image, a fetishistic image of her father that is constructed to mirror Brazilian racial fetishism in reverse, disguised as a form of mysticism. Moreover, Rodrigues illustrates the fetishism of belief systems and religion so prevalent in Brazilian society by the absence of any realistic characteristics on stage, as he states in the rubrics. At first, we think he is

referring to a mythical, unexplored issue in society. As we watch the play unfold, however, we realize that the whole mythical, unrealistic scenario on stage represents the fetishism of mysticism. By mystifying the question of race, Brazilians can pretend they do not see it when it is right before their eyes. The mystification process is part of a fetishistic strategy. Through mystification, we transform racial prejudice into a superficial archetypal color dynamic. We transform it into an abstract problem between opposites. We have also transformed the problem into the fetish of racial democracy.

The scene of a Catholic funeral ritual is also a type of fetish of mysticism in the play since it disguises many contradictory elements. The black women in the chorus know the children are being killed and while continuing to ritually mourn their deaths, they at no point ever attempt to stop the killings. Thus, they simultaneously commit a morally good and morally bad act. In the stage directions for the first scene, the author writes: “Rezam muito, rezam sempre, sobretudo ‘Ave-Marias’, ‘Padre-nossos’” [They pray a lot, they always pray, most of all ‘Ave-Maria’, ‘Blessed-Father’](573).

Fetishism of a belief system in the form of a constantly-reenacted ritual is maintained by the juxtapositions of knowing why and how the children are dying but disavowing that knowledge from concrete reality in order to construct a more bearable scene of devout prayer in an attempt to redeem themselves and others. The women might not be able to change this fetishism due to their feelings of powerlessness in front of Virginia, a white woman. Thus, for the black female chorus, religion also becomes a type of fetishism as an escape and façade (while Catholic morality is constraining, it sometimes makes them feel like free agents).

The chorus contributes to this fetishistic stereotypical dynamic since it serves the purpose of voicing cultural stereotypes besides adding a level of comic relief to a predominantly tragic play. As opposed to traditional Greek tragedies, however, the chorus in this play, as in other of Rodrigues' plays, does not always appear to predict the sequence of events, nor does it really serve to deepen our understanding of events. However, the chorus often serves to cast light on the absurdity of racial dynamics as well as the crassness of popular beliefs on the subject. As stated above, the "madams" or "black women" are both characters and distant members of the chorus in the play (Not just commentators, other characters interact with them as they sometimes actively participate in the scenes.). They seem to reflect the "Brazilian mentality" to help the audience understand the popular beliefs, expressed in a very colloquial style, sometimes in almost a whisper, sometimes in a gossipy fashion, or in exaggerated and contradictory behavior.

There are other racial and social stereotypes of a fetishistic nature in the play. Ismael wears a white suit, one that resembles Bibelot's in *The Seven Kittens*, playing again with the idea of the "malandro" (the rogue), who, rarely represented by or as a black man, is stereotypically represented wearing a white suit. The contrast between the (snow) white suit and his dark skin color is meant to visually shock and thus reveal the apparent contrast between a stereotypical Brazilian "figure" of the black man. The little boy's (referred to as an "angel") tomb is also white in contrast to his real-life black skin color (although we never actually see the little dead boy, we assume he resembles his father from a number of allusions in the play). In this case, the white tomb represents the stereotypical image of an angel having white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes.

Virginia and Ismael fetishize one another. There is a mixture of repulsion and attraction between the two while they both act out the typical fetishistic racial stereotyping described by Bhabha. Despite the power Ismael holds over her, she continues to play the part of a white European woman and he, the black African. The performance of this stereotypical behavior is repeatedly and consciously reenacted in that both are highly aware of the mechanisms involved in racial fetishism. Even though Ismael objectifies reversing some of his stereotypical positions in society by becoming a rich doctor, he continually needs to reenact this scenario at home, proving to himself that even after attaining wealth, power and a higher social status, he cannot get rid of the stigma conferred on him by his skin color. In this sense, it can be seen that fetishism has become a theatrical tool, which is also poked fun at, especially by Ismael and the author, who admits to have created this perfectly isolated space for the fetishistic racial relationship to be reenacted in the belief that isolation would not provoke a different paradigm: “...criei todos esses muros, para que ninguém entrasse” [I have built all these wall so that no one would be able to come in] (579).

Virginia’s admission of her fetishistic obsession towards Ismael comes when she affirms that “eu me esqueci dos outros homens, já sinto como se no mundo só existisse uma fisionomia – a sua – todos os homens só tivessem um rosto – o seu” [I have forgotten all the other men, I feel like there was only one body – yours – all men only had one face – yours] (579). Her highly-charged attachment to the faces of both her husband and Jesus also denotes a racial stereotypical dynamic. She describes her children with Ismael as having his face (579). She can only think of one other face, that of Jesus, who, in turn, is often stereotypically portrayed as having accentuated Caucasian features. She herself

admits that “Jesus não tem o teu rosto – não tem, Ismael!” [Jesus does not have your face – he does not, Ismael!] (580). The recognition of similarity in the fetishistic dynamic is signaled when she sees Ismael in her sons’ faces. Her way of covering over the threat of difference is through her fixation both on him and an imaginary Jesus.

The other form of fetishistic disavowal she espouses is reenacted in the murder of her three sons, one by one, in an effort to erase the semblance of difference and, at the same time, maintain her position of power. She even claims that the paradoxical position of her sons is the fetishistic embodiment of the recognition/disavowal dynamic: “São NOSSOS! (muda de tom, para si mesma) Também são MEUS (excitada, para o marido) Ismael, também são MEUS! (acaricia o próprio ventre) Aqui eles viveram!” [They are OURS! (excited, to her husband) Ismael, they also MINE! (caresses her own belly) They lived right here!] (579) Then, Ismael, when explaining why he imprisons her, says: “é porque estou fugindo. Fugindo do desejo dos outros homens” [It is because I am running. Running from the desire of other men] (580). The above sentence is ambiguous because it literally explains why Ismael isolates Virginia but indirectly implies why he isolates himself from others.

Virginia gives money to Hortencia (the black maid) so that she will let Elias go into her bedroom. Virginia bribes the maid by telling her she (Virginia) did something good for her in the past when she tried giving money to Hortencia’s daughter for having become a prostitute, so that she would leave the profession. Virginia says “Eu achava – ouviu? – que uma preta devia sofrer mais que as outras, devia ser mais humilhada” [I thought – do you hear me? – that a black woman should suffer more than others, should be humiliated] (583). The fact that the girl is black becomes the main reason for helping

Hortencia, but Hortencia also has to be paid to do what she has been asked to do. This scene highlights the fetishism of virginity, also seen in the other play. Virginity/sexual purity is so fetishized that it no longer matters if these words are based on reality or not. The fact that Hortencia's daughter could possibly have been paid to pretend she had never been a prostitute is an extension of this type of fetishism. However, the fact that she is black also denies her the power to fetishize her own purity. In this scenario, the black girl becomes the fetish of the former African slave woman, who sells her sexuality for money and so can never escape this stereotype (a reenactment of colonial rape).

The chorus offers yet another enactment of the black/white dynamic after it moves from the living room into Virginia's bedroom: "Malditas as brancas que desprezam pretos!" [Bad omen to the white women that despise black men!] (582) After this change of events and right before Virginia commits adultery with Ismael's blind white brother, the tone of the Madams in relation to the discourse of racial stereotype changes. In this instance, they are critical of her racist tone and take Ismael's side. They go on to confirm the fetishism of virginity: "Nunca a mulher devia deixar de ser virgem" [Never should a woman stop being a virgin] (587), an example of the hypocritical feminine mentality in Brazil forever pretending to be virgin-like and asexual.

Death is also fetishized in the play as something concrete. Like the other types of fetishism, there is a mixture of attraction, desire and repulsion towards death, which is burdened with a combination of sensuality and nausea. The little boy's tomb is prominently placed on stage at the beginning of the play and towards the end. Ana Maria's mausoleum is built and prominently highlighted on stage as well. The stage becomes a space in which the house of death is located within the house of the living,

creating a feeling of nostalgia for life and adulation of death. Death is a place where it is possible to eradicate race but it turns out to be an area of voracious racial stereotyping as well. Eradication of racial stereotyping exists, but not without constant reminders of racial violence and examples of dizzying hypocritical events surrounding it.

Fetishism of the gaze is actually accentuated by the blindness of Elias and Ana Maria. Ismael blinds both his brother and his own white daughter. What he does not want to see, considering Oedipus Rex as an obvious reference, is not his own symbolic blind acts, but his skin color, the “clothes” he cannot get rid of. No unsavory acts are carried out in ignorance by the pressures of an unavoidable destiny. The character is fully aware of the nature of his acts. He then blinds his two closest relatives so that they cannot see what he himself sees so clearly, their hatred of his skin color. Not seeing that damn color, however, only underscores the color contrast, turning these colors into fetishes since the double vision of seeing-not-seeing and seeing white vs. seeing black, while being aware of the white and black dichotomy in the case of Ana Maria, is maintained.

The aunt and cousins also manifest the fetishism of virginity, which is somehow transferred to Virginia, whose sexuality has been given high marks for having “robbed” one of her cousin’s former fiancée. The death of this female cousin is due to her having been abandoned by her former fiancée as a result of his encounter with Virginia (the cousins are nameless). This type of virginity fetishism is a mark of an obsession with someone or something (in this case, either virginity or Virginia herself, whose sexuality is highlighted by her beauty and marriage to a black man) as a form of compensation for repressed sexuality. It also offers an interesting perspective on a certain Brazilian cultural fetishism, which determines that women can never be as sexy as they would like without

losing social status and respect. They must ascribe to an almost unattainable level of sexual morality. They must never allow themselves to act out their sexual desires or fantasies since that would mean becoming like Virginia and perhaps having sex with a black man, thus ultimately becoming unmarriageable (their actual repressed desire). Ismael is both the attraction and punishment for such behavior - the typical fetishistic stereotype. Women's sometimes self-inflicted imprisonment within the family in their mother's house and in their virginity is perpetuated by the fetish. Marrying would not necessarily free them either, so the fetish maintains the desire while creating an artificial, self-regulating mechanism guiding repressive behavior.

While, for Virginia and Ismael, their fetishism for one another gives them enough wiggle room to determine their own destinies and a certain degree of agency in their imprisonment. In the case of their aunt and cousins, the fetish propagates gender stereotypes, which can never be reversed. It is clear that Virginia is not entirely a prisoner of Ismael. She can manipulate Hortencia by using the logic of race and feel empowered enough to give birth to a white child because of her inner feelings of superiority as a white person. Even so, as a fetish-fetishizing woman, she can never escape from her family home nor ever run away from the racial fetishism embedded in society. And she will forever be attracted and repulsed by Ismael while imprisoned in her gendered body.

Other stereotypes that are brought to life in this play are those having to do with the four black men who appear shirtless on stage, the typical representation of black men in theaters of the day. One of the female cousins is "raped" by one black man and killed by another who lives near the river and has six fingers to configure one more stereotypical description of the feared black men who are able to kill and rape white

women at will. However, we end up finding out that the aunt had sent her own daughter to the forest where the black man would be found so she could have sex before dying. Again, the typical fetishistic encounter between a white woman and a black man is one of violence and attraction purposefully being enacted and created by the aunt.

Ismael is intelligent, well dressed, well educated, and financially successful yet continues to carry hatred in his heart due to the racial prejudice inherent in the society around him and the prejudice he feels toward himself as a black man. The stereotypical black men smoking a “pipe” are also alluded to, in contrast to Ismael, who is portrayed as audacious. We might say that Ismael assumes a white supremacy stance by becoming authoritarian and repressive towards the only white person in his life, his wife. Within this space, Ismael exercises total control over who comes in and out of his house. He wields a type of power at home that he cannot outside its walls. However, this reversal of social logic requires a more overt form of violence to be maintained since it has to be continuously reaffirmed and reinforced. Yet Ismael still suffers from the deep-rooted opposite logic of prejudice. The space itself becomes a fetish since all the individuals in the family desperately cling to the materiality of the scenery and architecture. The house without ceilings, the walls, the transparent mausoleum, the tomb, the stairs, the bedrooms, the beds, are all in one way or another important reference points for each character. They serve as reminders and they confuse us.

Despite Ismael’s attempt to reverse the social logic according to which “white people are dominant and always in control”, he and his family are controlled by their own fetishes, the only objects they can hold on to, in a house with few superficial objects from the outside world. Being rich, for Ismael, means not having to hold on to objects, but

being in control of a structural aspect of society. Virginia requests a painting of Jesus for her bedroom, which Ismael agrees to but then refuses to grant her wish to go out with another man, a white man. Thus, his need to dominate makes whatever is in the stage set design a stronger fetish since they are the only things he can actually secure.

Like in other plays by Nelson Rodrigues, the characters are in constant conflict with one another, provoked mainly by jealousy and prejudice. Female beauty and sensuality are again displayed as fetishized in the body of Virginia. She is envied by her aunt and cousins, prompting the author to refer to the color of her coffin as snow white. Again, he points out the dichotomies in Brazilian society between beauty and sex, ugliness and chastity, and how hard it is for the characters to live within the confines of this system while trying to figure out exactly where they might fit in.

“Ugly” people (usually portrayed wearing masks, as white faced, hiding their sexuality or hidden from view) long to be sexy and vice-versa. But because of the hierarchical nature of society, those at the top pretend not to be sensual and have to appear pious while the “nobodys”, the women without a husband or family, for example, are *relegated* to being sensual and beautiful. Social hypocrisy is thus emphasized in the fetishism of the sensual/sexy, the adulteress, and the impoverished. This same fetishism is applied to the black man - the stereotypical fetish being the virile black man. His sexuality undermines any advanced level of education or social status he might actually have achieved. Ismael, for example, continues to feel and be despised, even by his wife, who nags him that his social status is still too low and that he will never get anywhere in life. He feels almost obliged to lock himself up behind closed doors for shame of his body.

Through the structure of the analysis of classic tragedies, Ismael and Virginia's *hamartia* is the ignorance that the separation between whites and blacks is ingrained in the society and not something they are obliged to imitate on a personal level. However, in Greek tragedy, catharsis or a reversal of fortune takes place, at which time characters are made aware of what is behind their fatal flaw or ignorance. Both Virginia and Ismael are so firmly molded by their belief system as a fetish that it has the force of an uncontrollable passion driving them unrelentlessly to the bitter end. Then, to love, hate, desire, and kill is but the fetish of continuation.

The state of ambivalence in the relationship between whites and blacks is pervasive in *Black Angel* despite the fact that everyone around Ismael is black, including the women in the chorus and the male pallbearers. Virginia's family and Ismael's brother appear only sporadically and carry with them certain elements that will activate changes in the order of things, whereas the blacks will maintain the status quo. Ismael assumes that without the threat of desiring whiteness through Virginia's eyes, she will continue her obsessive attraction towards him so he needs to keep her firmly behind closed doors. Her imagination, however, becomes just as strong or perhaps even stronger after his explicit prohibition.

Elias claims that Ismael's mother cast a spell on him to rid him of his self-hatred. Or, is it that we, the spectators/readers, have realized that this yearning to act like a white man and become a rich doctor represent a menace? Or, better yet, his realization of the construction of a racial hierarchy is viewed as a negative curse. Could he have really become a doctor, climbed to the top of the social ladder, and married a white woman without "assuming" his hatred of "his skin color"? In his mind, he had to be driven by

this burning hatred, not just of his skin color but also of the whole system engendering racial discrimination and prejudice to be able to achieve these objectives. He had to go against layers and layers of the status quo and obliterate all the barriers to success he encountered along the way to, finally, become visible. If he accepted his color, as his mother and Elias allude to, his motivation would not have been strong enough to succeed and, instead, he would have been content with the limitations imposed upon him by society.

Here, race is purposely not shown as either a “natural” or “personal” characteristic, but a necessarily social/cultural construct: a fetish in this sense. Ismael, in fact, does not negate his blackness but insists on affirming it by making clear it is a construct, a site of violence. Even though he often refers to his skin color as being an unbearably heavy cross to carry, it is also and ultimately treated as a fetish in the sense of exerting attraction and repulsion while being intensified as a site of fantasy.

Ismael deliberately blinds both Ana Maria and Elias, not so that they will no longer have to see his own skin color nor the cruelty of discrimination around them, but so the violence, the sorcery of color, will be further intensified (Ismael pointedly reminds Ana Maria not to forget the color black before blinding her). Elias will never forget the violence he experienced at the hands of his black brother, his brother with the color of hatred, which Ismael wants to make sure Elias will never forget, i.e., Ismael’s own process of self-stereotyping. Elias’s blindness will keep reminding him of that hatred and become a lifelong handicap. Ismael helps throw back the curtain of silence and the sorcery of color.

The incest theme, exemplified by the father-daughter relationship, and the theme of hatred, expressed in the mother-daughter twosome, are explored in this play. Ana Maria has been forcibly trained to love one man alone after being blinded in infancy by Ismael. In the same vein, he also does not let Virginia have a good relationship with Ana Maria either. Her view and experience of the world is warped because it is primarily based on Ismael's descriptions of a war outside between blacks and whites. He continues the racist story line but lies to her by saying he is actually white. The irony is that this is of no consequence to the blind Ana Maria who has had no worldly experience beyond the closed doors of her home. Her stepfather is her fetish and her precious and only token; and she clings to him as an image, an ideal (perhaps ideal-ego). Conversely, Ismael's sad, lonely fetish is Ana Maria, who, however, cannot completely control him because she is a mere sub-fetish of his principal fetish, his wife. Ana Maria in reality manipulates Virginia while causing her to envy and hate her own daughter.

The end of the play is puzzling. Instead of opting for the illusion of racial domination, Ismael decides to reenact the racist scenario once again with his wife Virginia. Ana Maria would never know the degree of self-hatred Ismael is forced to endure as a black man, the yes/no ambivalence reenacted everyday by his wife in bed, the fetishistic stereotype. Ismael can never distance himself from these sources of suffering, which are constantly being rekindled due to his acute awareness of their existence at all times.

The play ends ambivalently in a spatial dimension involving life and death, love and hate, and violent black-white encounters. Quoting Bhabha, Derek Hook adds fuel to

the play's ambivalent ending, which is a reflection of what actually transpires in society, by alerting us to the ultimately destructive effect of ambivalence:

The paradoxical nature of this functioning alerts Bhabha to the usefulness of a psychoanalytic notion of ambivalence. Ambivalence of course refers to the coexistence and interdependence of two contrary impulses or affects. More than this, as Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) warn, ambivalence must be grasped within the terms of heightened states of conflict "in which the positive and negative components of an emotional attitude are simultaneously in evidence and inseparable, and where they constitute a non-dialectical opposition which the subject, saying 'yes' and 'no' at the same time, is incapable of transcending" (p. 28). Ambivalence, claims Bhabha (1994), has for too long been overlooked as "one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power" (p. 66) (Derek Hook)

We can argue that the fluidity and heightened sexuality of the female and Afro-Brazilian bodies of both sexes denote a mixture of attraction and repulsion, creating an ambivalence of affect to the spectator/reader. In this tragic play there is no resolution, change of fortune or catharsis since the main characters return to the same darkness and repetition of violence they find themselves in at the beginning, replicating structures of power while falling victims to them again and again.

The two plays discussed above both replicate and expand our vision of the politics of the body, sexuality, gender, race, and family dynamics in Brazilian society. Nelson Rodrigues was able to question the fetishism of belief systems by exposing a variety of family dynamics, the pathetic nature of the patriarch, the myth of racial democracy as well as the prevalent underlying attitudes towards female and black bodies in Brazilian society. His work has made contributions in defining and examining the ways fetishism condenses much of what is connected to national narratives and discourses of identity to a variety of fields. Most importantly, he showed how discourses on hybridism and the myth of racial democracy are closely

linked to the roles attributed to women in society, especially when looking at the politics of the body and the impact of certain foundational myths in the lives of all individuals inscribed in that society. These discourses have been transformed into what are wrongly considered “natural” manifestations of the culture, especially in the myths and discourses surrounding gender and racial discrimination, all serving to mask and more tightly tie the complicated knot of social structures that have become stagnant. In these plays, Nelson Rodrigues unties that knot by exaggerating the differences, exposing the structures of power, intensifying the underlying social tensions as well as exposing the relational structures of fetishistic contracts which serve to perpetuate, mask, confuse, expose and give agency, all at the same time.

Notes to Chapter 1

²⁹One of the major Afro-Brazilian movements of the time was the “Frente Negra”, created in 1931 in the city of São Paulo. It gained popularity and members all over Brazil, including Abdias do Nascimento (who would become one of the most prominent Afro-Brazilian scholars and politicians of his generation). It was an organization that proposed to discuss racism, promote better living conditions, and spearhead a movement that would unify Afro-Brazilians in defense of their common interests in politics and society. They even created a political party, which was later dissolved in 1937 by then president Getúlio Vargas (<http://www.palmares.gov.br/2011/09/frente-negra-brasileira-completa-hoje-80-anos/>). Another major cultural and social movement was the TEN (Experimental Black Theater), which was founded in 1944. Its mission was to perform plays whose main actors would be Afro-Brazilian as well as foster the creation of plays and other cultural forms about Afro-Brazilians and their particular issues. Brazilian women were able to gradually fight for and conquer a few important civil rights; in 1917, women were first hired for federal jobs. Two years later, they won the right to equal pay spearheaded by the International Labor Organization for Women. In 1930, they were granted the right to vote (with a few restrictions). But it was only in 1946 that they succeeded in being able to vote without restrictions. In 1937, after the “Estado Novo”, the feminist movement lost its vigor and only ten years later regained its momentum with the creation of the Federation of Brazilian Women and the consolidation of the female presence in the political arena (<http://www.brasil.gov.br/secoes/mulher/atuacao-feminina/feminismo-pela-igualdade-dos-direitos>).

³⁰According to Telles in his paper “Racial Ambiguity in Brazil”, the level of ambiguity in the discourses surrounding race relations come directly from racial classifications and their relational variables. As we will see later in the chapter, writers such as Nascimento criticize this ambiguous classification of “race”, which in Brazil is classified as “cor” [color] with the variety of spectrums that it can assume, confusing the problem of race relations and discrimination.

more fluid and ambiguous in Brazil; and this evidence supports the more general assertion that Brazilian race relations are “exceptional” (Hasenbalg 1978, Hanchard 1994, Marx 1998). However, the bulk of comparative research on race and ethnicity suggests that black-white relations in the US and South Africa may be the exception to the more typical worldwide pattern of race relations that are more similar to Barth’s (1959) idea of ethnicity as situational, contextual, or relational (Wade 1997, Banton 1998, Jenkins 1997). (14)

³¹On another level, but also related to the idea of compensation and gradations of domination and exclusion, DaMatta affirms that:

in a discontinuous medium, contradictory ideas can be hierarchically arranged on different planes, such that for some things I am a liberal and for others I am paternalist or patronal. The system allows me to use my right hand or my left hand to do different things and to give different meanings to the experiences of life. (*The Brazilian Puzzle* 275)

³²Dom Pedro II (2 December 1825 – 5 December 1891) was the last emperor of Brazil, staying in office after his father, Dom Pedro I, fled to Portugal when he was only five years old.

CHAPTER 2

Fetishism as Image

There is something quite amazing and monstrous about the education of upper-class women. What could be more paradoxical? All the world is agreed that they are to be brought up as ignorant as possible of erotic matters, and that one has to imbue their souls with a profound sense of shame in such matters until the merest suggestion of such things triggers the most extreme impatience and flight. The “honor” of women really comes into play only here: what else would one not forgive them? But here they are supposed to remain ignorant even in their hearts: they are supposed to have neither eyes nor ears, nor words, nor thoughts for this - their “evil”; and mere knowledge is considered evil. And then to be hurled as by a gruesome lightning bolt, into reality and knowledge, by marriage - precisely by the man they love and esteem most! To catch love and shame in a contradiction and to be forced to experience at the same time delight, surrender, duty, pity, terror, and who knows what else, in the face of the unexpected neighborliness of god and beast! Thus a psychic knot has been tied that may have no equal. Even the compassionate curiosity of the wisest student of humanity is inadequate for guessing how this or that woman manages to accommodate herself to this solution of the riddle, and to the riddle of a solution, and what dreadful, far-reaching suspicions must stir in her poor, unhinged soul -- and how the ultimate philosophy and skepticism of woman casts anchor at this point! Afterward, the same deep silence as before. Often a silence directed at herself, too. She closes her eyes to herself.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*

Whereas in the previous chapter we focused on the patriarchal family and race relations in Brazilian society as a source of the fetishism strategy as structure present in two of Nelson Rodrigues’ plays, in the ensuing chapter we will focus on the fetishism of a multiplicity of objects, human bodies, and parts of bodies, as images revealed and performed in his theater, with particular emphasis on the gender dynamics they insinuate.

In the same vein as Nietzsche's above quote, Rodrigues also explores the paradoxes involved in the position women hold in Brazilian society. While women were supposed to remain virgins before marriage and appear asexual, they were also expected to procreate, love their spouses, be sensual as well as a model of femininity at social events. Upper-class women were ahead in terms of being able to pay for the preservation of their sexual honor, if need be. And as we will explore later, Brazilian society espoused the sexual morality of the Catholic Church, but with a freer view of sexuality when practiced behind closed doors, further complicating the dichotomous view of women, who often found themselves torn between the whore-or-saint binary. This specific binary will permeate all of Nelson Rodrigues' plays as well as the contrasting honor privileges between the classes. According to Caulfield, "most working women continued to perform low-paid domestic labor throughout the twentieth century, and it was these women who were most likely to go to the police with deflowering complaints" (81).

Because we are dealing with the concept of fetishism in the plays, we will continue delineating the ambiguous, contradictory, and dichotomous aspects related to both women in Brazilian society and the fetish itself as a means to perceive its uncanny ability to bring all these disparate discourses to the fore. The conceptual framework of the fetish made it possible for Rodrigues to condense all these contradictory elements into images and display them on stage.

The repetition compulsion³³ of the fetishist stance, categorized, for example, in fetishism as stereotype, clarifies that what happens in racial fetishism also occurs in the gendered forms³⁴. That is, there is a type of relationship established between men and women, for instance, that immediately creates a clear distinction between the two in such

as way that one of them ends up becoming a fetish to the other in the process. Thus, fetishism as stereotype is a discovery that goes hand in hand with the creation of difference. Besides, the fetishism of stereotype is inherently contradictory in that it is able to absorb both the discovery and the differentiation of the other as other and as also being equal to many others, thereby acquiring a stereotypical quality³⁵.

Furthermore, a type of female fetishism, one that reflects female agency (albeit limited and distorted), also points to the problematic position of women in Brazilian society at the beginning of the 20th century and beyond as their position relates to honor and the sexual code ascribed to them. Thus, the fetish images in Rodrigues' plays are able to expose a variety of elements related to Bourdieu's habitus³⁶ of a society with its inherent contradictions and possibilities of flight. The habitus is maintained by what Bourdieu calls misrecognition and a type of "embodied politics", which Rodrigues explores very succinctly in his plays:

Misrecognition is the key to what Bourdieu calls the function of 'symbolic violence', which he defines as 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (1992d: 167). In other words, agents are subjected to forms of violence (treated as inferior, denied resources, limited in their social mobility and aspirations), but they do not perceive it that way; rather, their situation seems to them to be 'the natural order of things'. One of the more obvious examples of the relation between misrecognition and symbolic violence can be seen in the way gender relations have, historically, been defined in terms of male domination. Every aspect of women's bodies and activities was 'imprisoned', to some extent, by the workings of the habitus. Female bodies were both read as having significance which demonstrated their inferiority (they were weak, soft, unfit for hard work, unable to take pressure), and were inculcated (at home, school, church) with a 'bodily hexis that constitutes a veritable embodied politics' (1992d: 172). (*Understanding Bourdieu* 25)

On the other hand, as Naomi Schor delineates in her article "Female Fetishism",

the fetish is also able to articulate this embodied politics as well as defy it:

But there is more to fetishism than the splitting of the ego, more to female fetishism than the masculinity complex, more to Sand than the male impersonation, which has garnered such a disproportionate share of attention. Sarah Kofman, who is the leading - not to say the only - theoretician of female fetishism, has recently argued that what is pertinent to women in fetishism is the paradigm of undecidability that it offers. By appropriating the fetishist's oscillation between denial and recognition of castration, women can effectively counter any move to reduce their bisexuality to a single one of its poles. In Kofman's Derridean reading of Freud, female fetishism is not so much, if at all, a perversion, rather a strategy designed to turn the so-called "riddle of femininity" to women's account. (307)

In Brazil at the outset of the 20th century, women are positioned in an in-between place in which they enjoy a new type of agency but continue to be largely confined to the home and obliged to follow a series of contradictory honor codes according to their race and class. In Rodrigues' plays, women choose fetishes as a means to possess and take possession of their desires since they are not allowed to completely show their power outside the walls of their homes. Schor, when referring to Kofman's well-known *L'Enigme de la Femme* (in which Schor explores Freud's depiction of women as a riddle), states that female fetishism indeed exists as a means for women to take possession of their own ambivalent, often fetishized, image. It is in the "oscillation of denial and recognition of castration" itself, that women can combat the stereotypical position applied to them (as the stereotypical castrated one, or the woman who supposedly *belongs* to someone). As we will see in more detail later, in the play *Dorotéia*, the protagonist fetishizes nausea as a visible deformation of her face. By turning her beautiful face into a distorted mask on stage to represent ugliness, she is able to take hold of her own body as something other than an object of female sexuality for

the sole voyeuristic pleasure of the male gaze.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the mentality surrounding gender discrimination at the beginning of the 20th century. The political ramifications of gender inequality were clearly spelled out in the Brazilian Civil Code of 1916³⁷, which strictly regulated marriage and the familial and legal prerogatives of both women and men. Men were to exert complete legal authority over the family and its members. It was not until 1976 that divorce became legal while other major changes in the civil rights of women only started being effectively implemented in 1988³⁸. Thus, once a woman was married (these laws were in effect during the time most of the plays herein discussed were written and staged), she lost any type of legal authority she could hope to have as an adult to the point that her husband was required to give her permission to work outside the home.

Besides, there seems to be a direct association between a woman's honor, class and legal status due to the ability men had to buy back a woman's honor through medical procedures or cover-ups to restore their virginity. It is important to remember this detail, since Nelson Rodrigues profusely explores money as a medium of exchange for honor in addition to other types of exchanges through the fetishized object, functioning as a commentary to this type of monetarily-bought honor. It is also a commentary on the frenetic fetishizing and monetizing of all aspects of society in an effort to cover over a multitude of anxieties.

In the plays that have already been investigated such as *Os Sete Gatinhos* [*The Seven Kittens*], the writing on the bathroom wall that Seu Noronha's wife (Dona Aracy) repeats over and over represents a "repetition compulsion"³⁹ in the manner of fetishism. Her desire is to own the "word", the language (in this case, "palavrões" [dirty words]).

By owning and writing the language that she is forbidden to use (as a respectable married woman), she acquires a limited form of power in the home while repeating her own traumatic experience of being the victim of name calling herself. Seu Noronha criticizes the woman that has written those offensive words in the bathroom even though he himself feels entitled to call his wife and daughters all sorts of bad names and insults. Thus, his wife wants to ascertain a form of power in the fetishism of those words by doing exactly what the patriarch of the family is entitled to do and she is not. In turn, the keeping of a secret by not telling it to anyone also creates a type of pleasure for her. The bathroom is the most private space in the house yet the most exposed in that it is used by the whole household. The fetishism of this type of action, which is often constantly repeated and denied (such as what happens to some female characters that “want” to be raped but pretend they have been sexually assaulted without their consent), reveals aspects of female fetishism that are prevalent in many of Rodrigues’ plays. Concurrently, there are always signs of guilt feelings being expressed in their body language, facial expressions, and actions, or in attempting to hide something in their bodies, especially when women are fetishizing something that might, a priori, be a male prerogative.

Sueann Caulfield, in *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil*, in which she investigates the history of female sexual honor codes in Brazil, reveals that, even after the Promulgation of the Republic (1889) and for decades to come, jurists attempted to rewrite the laws concerning “deflowering”, “the honest woman”, and “seduction” (10) but found it difficult to conciliate the new liberal mentality of gender equality before the law with the old protectionism of women’s sexual honor:

Moreover, even without knowing it, jurists who interpreted Brazil's legal code continued to imbue honor with its older racial and class components. Honor thus frequently obscured contradictions between official principles of universal citizenship, equal rights, and democracy, and the realities of gender, class, and racially-based discrimination. (9)

The dialectics of sexual honor and the (sexual) female body in Brazilian society have been explored by writers such as Machado de Assis⁴⁰ since the beginning of the 20th century. A sexualized woman's body before marriage or (even within marriage, when viewing sexual morality through the prism of church teachings) could compromise family honor and be a disruptor of patriarchal norms. Therefore, being (or at least appearing to be) a virgin before marriage is extremely important in preserving the patriarchal code of honor. Besides, the mere threat of sexuality or sensuality could present a problem since it was not always easy to prove whether a woman had had sexual relations with someone or not.

Nevertheless, the new liberal ideas emanating from Europe and the United States reflecting changes in the world's perspective on the traditional patriarchal family could not help but exert a strong influence on cosmopolitan cities like Rio de Janeiro, the then capital of Brazil. With the development of the city and its cultural manifestations and soirees together with a rapidly-emerging bourgeoisie, married women could more easily leave the confinement of their homes and participate in urban life. This new reality made protecting a woman from any sexual contact with men other than their husbands and male relatives much more difficult to control along with the accompanying rumors and speculations that arose in this matter, creating an anxiety-ridden reality for women. Caulfield describes the position of jurists and reformers of laws related to sexual crimes, honor and morality in Brazil of the 1920s as believing that:

A postwar crisis of morality threatened women's honesty and, hence, the family. The danger, they insisted, did not arise from modernity itself, but rather from the Brazilian masses' unpreparedness for the new liberties of modern society (82).

Because the images of fetishism are not just a form of agency, but also a perverted form of compensation for a threat of lack (lack of honor, lack of virginity), we can clearly see how the anxiety of being or not being a virgin is something that circumvents most of Rodrigues' female characters.

To complicate matters even further, according to the *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* in the Chapter "Brazil", Brazilians have a different type of attitude towards sexuality and eroticism from that of other societies that follow predominantly patriarchal and Roman Catholic values:

In this respect, Brazilians tend to allow expressions of sexuality and eroticism that are quite unacceptable in other areas of the Latino world, especially in public. This disparity can be traced to a unique blend of Roman Catholic and native Indian values with a strong African influence. Like other Latinos, Brazilians have taboos and restrictions on public sexual behavior. However, Brazilians draw an important distinction between public and private behaviors that preserves traditional Indian and African values. "Within four walls, beneath the sheets, and behind the mask of *carnaval*, everything can happen!" "Everything," or *tudo*, refers to the world of erotic experiences and pleasure. The phrase *fazendo tudo*, "doing everything," means Brazilian men and women have an obligation to experience and enjoy every form of sexual pleasure and excitement, or more precisely those practices that the public world most strictly prohibits. This, however, must all be done in private, behind the mask, between four walls, or under the sheets⁴¹.

This division between the four walls of the home and the street complicates the sexuality of women since it creates contradictory expectations. On the one hand, women are encouraged to experience and expect sexual pleasure. On the other, they are

encouraged to ascribe to an appearance of purity in the outside world. Furthermore, living under the authority and protection of a husband or father, women are also encouraged to maintain a chaste demeanor at home. In turn, we could always conjecture whether this permission to “do everything” in the bedroom applied more specifically to men to guarantee that women dispose of their bodies to, first and foremost, serve the sexual pleasure of men.

Therefore, despite the rapid changes taking place in relation to the patriarchal family structure when Nelson Rodrigues begins writing his first plays (1940s), many of the traditional honor codes ascribed to women are still in place. Petra Ramalho Souto, for example, describes the dichotomous dimensions ascribed to women in Brazilian society and how the female characters in Rodrigues’ plays follow their own ethics of conduct, at times contradicting the moral expectations of society and family, making the fetish stand out as this mysterious object (often seemingly perverse, such as Zulmira’s search for the perfect coffin).

...retoma a discussão sobre a visão dicotômica da mulher na sociedade brasileira (puta/santa) e conclui ... que a mulher rodriguiana ao ser classificada como santa ou puta, não é necessariamente boa ou má, segundo julgamentos morais, mas um ser que segue, a fim de satisfazer seus desejos, uma ética própria que por vezes contraria a moral sexual vigente na sociedade que se reflete no texto rodriguiano. (29)

[...resumes the discussion about the dichotomic view of women in Brazilian society (whore / saint) and concludes ... that the Rodriguean woman, when classified as a saint or whore, is not necessarily good or bad, according to moral judgments, but a being that follows, in order to satisfy their desires, their own ethics which sometimes contradicts the prevailing sexual morality in society, which is reflected in the Rodriguean text.]

Although written decades later, plays such as *Woman without Sin* and *The Wedding Dress* also deal with the conflicting images of married women and the effects of disparate attitudes towards women's sexual honor, marriage, female sexuality, and their bodies. In the bigger cities, women have the freedom to go out, maybe work outside the home, and socialize. But, however, there is the looming threat of family dishonor since this new woman has become objectified and sexualized by the constant demands of the "woman as masquerade" on the city streets and is no longer considered that confined, lackluster, and dependent creature she once was. Judith Butler, with regard to the concept of masquerade (also regularly associated with the concept of the fetish and fetish as veil), explains:

Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, it is in order to be the phallus, that is, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one to whom she addresses her demand for love. Certainly we should not forget that the organ invested with this signifying function takes on the value of a fetish. (*Gender Trouble*, 61)

What is important to take away from this assertion within the context of Nelson Rodrigues' plays is the interplay of masquerade and the fetishistic object in the body of the other (be it in body parts, objects or images), especially in the female characters' performative actions. It is not only the male organ that will be invested with the value of a fetish, but also the female body and its parts from the perspectives of multiple characters and their ascribed gender roles. The female body as masquerade (whether the over-sexualized body, the overtly beautiful, sensual body, or the innocent, pale body) will also leave the "essential part of herself" (as Butler stated above) to become this invested

fetish for some of the characters and perhaps herself. This is something of what the female characters go through when becoming aware of the process of fetishization of their own bodies as images. As a result, they give up any attempt at truthfulness and authenticity to achieve an active performative role. Like Dorotéia, some will exaggerate their sensuality and become a model of femininity. While others will do the opposite and make themselves sexually unattractive. The sincere, moral self is also usually lost along the way as soon as the female characters perceive that even that self is a type of construct. The process of constant constructions and deconstructions of fetishes as images throughout both *Dorotéia* and *The Deceased Woman* is a process of recognition of misrecognition of gender domination. As Danaher, Schirato and Webb affirm with respect to Bourdieu's idea of gender power mechanisms in *Understanding Bourdieu*:

Rather, we can say that gender domination took (and takes) place precisely because women misrecognised the symbolic violence to which they were subjected as something that was natural, simply 'the way of the world'. Consequently they were complicit in the production of those things (bodily performances, for instance), which worked to reinscribe their domination. (27)

Furthermore, the two consistently opposing demands on women seem impossible to reconcile (the display of sexuality, sensuality and beauty together with a virgin-like image). Nelson Rodrigues explores this phenomenon by showing women's bodies as fetishes in response to anxieties surrounding society's tenuous hierarchical positions of power while, at the same time, supporting them, especially when women function as receptors of the male gaze. By containing female bodies within the fetishism of stereotyping as defined by Bhabha, they can be controlled and become a source of power or a signifier of the desire of the characters, helping to set the plots further into motion. In plays such as *Doroteia* and *The Deceased Woman*, the revelation of sexual purity,

sexual expiation (death as expiation), and disease as expiation of sexual sins are a priori the main themes and/or plots of both.

Moreover, Nelson Rodrigues explores the meaning of honor by revealing the hypocrisy behind the honor code and deciphering in what ways it is manipulated by definitions of race, class and gender. All the characters, but especially the women, are in reality trapped since as individuals they cannot ultimately make choices except to absorb the opposing expectations within themselves and so only find agency in the act of fetishizing (which is mostly perceived as an odd or perverse univocal obsession). For the most part, fetishism in the plays becomes a way of embodying something, which, when unleashed, reveals the mechanisms of honor associated with certain types of family structures and their contrasts.

Fetishism and Ambiguity

We will start by recapping an idea that was briefly examined in the previous chapter, which also complements the fetishism as image in the gender dynamics of the plays. Whereas, for Louise Kaplan, the fetish is used as a strategy for dealing with ambiguity and making the uncertain more certain, one of the main characteristics of fetishism, as described by Walter Benjamin and other writers indirectly, is its ambiguous nature: "...all things, in a perpetual process of mingling and contamination, are losing their intrinsic character while ambiguity displaces authenticity" (*SW I*, 454). Moreover, in the *Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, Michael Jennings points out that:

Ambiguity is for Benjamin at once an epistemological and a moral category. The cognitive disorientation that results from encounters with

the deeply ambiguous world of things prevents the human subject from an adequate moral agency and above all denies her a capacity for resistance and social change. (27)

In Nelson Rodrigues' plays, the seemingly material, superficially unambiguous fetish (giving the fetishist a modicum of certainty) is developed in the plays in order to provoke thought, to confuse, and perhaps even help the characters resist because of the "disorientation" engendered by the ambiguity of the fetishized objects. In a literal way, the objects are par excellence (in Benjamin's view) ambiguous since they mean nothing in and of themselves. They only acquire meaning once they are positioned in relation to one another, either in exchange or in contrast. So, it would seem that the idea explored by Kaplan that the fetish is reassuring, is almost impossible. However, the fetishized object can do both.

In the case of an ambiguous relationship with the racialized black characters, the ambiguous racial democracy stance does prevent change, since it prevents the characters from seeing the clear racial divides. But in the theater, it is as if the author were telling us two different things. On one level, his plays seem to be saying: "Look, we tend to use ambiguity and pretend we have this unnamed, not easily-defined attitude towards issues of gender, race and class; but we actually follow a very traditional dichotomous system, which some fetishes help to confirm" (by the striking, contrasting black and white images on stage as well as the violence among the characters, for example). When on stage, the fetish (seemingly unambiguously mimicking superficial definitions of gender roles and other values such as the fetishism of the female body or its parts) demonstrates strong vitality in contrast to the other physical objects on stage (including bodies) at the moment they are being highlighted, as a kind of proof that the fetish helps delineate clear

distinctions between and among objects. In this case, the fetish actually dismantles ambiguity by pointing to clear binaries.

The wedding dress, a fetish, is used more than once in many of Nelson Rodrigues' plays and short stories. When fetishized by the family patriarch, it initially appears to be very clearly defined. However, when looked at from the perspective of other characters in the play, it is never seen as an easily-defined fetish. In *The Seven Kittens*, for example, Seu Noronha fetishizes the wedding dress as an object of redemption of the whole family including himself in tune with a patriarchal dichotomous relationship. The patriarchal figure needs to control and possess an object that benefits him through the female body of his daughter. This fetish would fit in more closely with a familiar Freudian interpretation in which a little boy wants to hold on to an object he thinks once belonged to his mother. In a post-Freudian, Lacanian interpretation, however, the wedding dress functions as the mother's phallus. That is, by fetishizing the dress, Silene becomes a complete female figure capable of fulfilling her father's desires, at least temporarily, while immersed in the illusion of the fetishistic dynamic. Significantly, this is not just Seu Noronha's fetish, but also the whole family's and, as such, it has acquired a different multifaceted dimension.

Again, Nelson Rodrigues might conjecture in line with another fetishistic logic: "Look how, at first glance, the objects and bodies are strongly marked by the very clear definitions of gender, morality, race, class and other characteristics typically associated with each of these definitions. However, as the fetishistic relationship is set into motion, the once clear-cut, dichotomous definitions become problematic when referring to ultimately highly ambiguous objects, structures or relationships". This description, in

turn, reveals another aspect of the culture, which is its ability to mask and silence violent relationships by maintaining ambiguous allegories about them, which also represent Brazil's multifaceted social structures and individual creativity.

But, as will be seen later, we find ourselves having to go back to the more violent, clear-cut demarcations, returning once more to the circulatory problem of definition. This is exactly when the fetish comes into play since it is a structural relationship that, accepting of these paradoxes and contradictions, allows for circulatory interpretations. So here, we can see, that even though the fetish can dismantle ambiguity to form a clear picture of the existing social power structures, it can also be used to create another set marked by confusion and ambiguity since there is more to society and the life of the characters than the simple revelation of one set of power structures can clarify. In this case, the fetishes can complicate, confuse, and, at the same time, go to the fulcrum of what Rodrigues wanted to say about Brazilian society. While there is discrimination and a dichotomous power structure, there is also a highly complex and creative network of ideas that could prove difficult to interpret.

The images of women and their bodies whether in parts or whole are presented in the plays as fetishes and are often associated with ambiguous definitions. It is never clear whether they are presented as existing at only one extreme of a spectrum, or, sometimes, at both extremes simultaneously, as, for example: "whores" *or* "saints", "moral" *or* "immoral", "ugly *or* asexual", "beautiful *and* asexual" or "ugly *and* sensual". These binaries presented so clearly in the plays, on the other hand, could be associated with the ambiguity of modernity attributed to different genders in the view of the legal reformers of the new penal code in Brazil in the mid-1920s. Caulfield claims that:

Modernity, however, was an extremely ambiguous goal for reformers, for although they sought to replace ascriptive bases of power with bourgeois notions of individual merit, they were preoccupied by postwar challenges to the social hierarchies that supported their own privileged position. This ambiguity was expressed through gender. ... When applied to men, modernity was generally understood in its positive sense of progressive rationality. When applied to women, however, modernity usually implied loose morals and a dissolute lifestyle. (99)

Another aspect of fetishism, which serves to shake up the stereotypical gender boundaries in Rodrigues' theater, is that are not very clearly articulated so that the interplay surrounding gender dynamics is accentuated, confounding the stereotypical expectations of gender performativity. An aunt may be portrayed as being masculine while a man may exhibit feminine qualities. Transvestites and homosexuals add another level of confusion in defying traditional gender boundaries. At the same time, some of the characters yearn to hold on to simple categories through fetishism of the other characters, objects or body parts. Silene might not be the saintly creature her whole family wishes she were, but she is presented on stage as such before deconstructing into something else. According to Wittig, when exploring the gendered body:

I confront a nonexistent object, a fetish, an ideological form which cannot be grasped in reality, except through its effects, whose existence lies in the mind of people, but in a way that affects their whole life, the way they act, the way they move, the way they think. So we are dealing with an object both imaginary and real. (154)

The female body, its parts and objects, often associated with feminine characteristics like sexual purity and the wedding dress are often the most significant fetishes in all of Nelson Rodrigues' plays. Since fetishes function in the arena of masculine and feminine as do the performative and the masquerade, Rodrigues highlights gender stereotypes in order to contest them in his theater of display. At first glance, we

are confronted with the fetish of the gendered body – one that is associated with gender boundaries and one that is made to act in ideological terms. Although an imaginary association, the “object” engenders a contrast of previously-stipulated definitions between the fetishist and “him/herself”. By contrasting the object relationships and, in the process, creating shock and surprise by making them show other unexpected characteristics, the ideological dimensions become somewhat dissolved.

In the analysis of the plays *Doroteia* and *The Deceased Woman* that follow, we will examine the ways fetishes as images serve to lock in the stereotypical definitions of gender and their vicissitudes just as they empower the characters. These definitions also shed light on Rodrigues’ explorations of gender relations and their psychological impact on Brazilian society as a whole. Thus, his theater is not just a display of easily-accessible power structures accompanied by a myriad of clichés, but one in which even the individuals at the top of the pyramid are an integral part of the network of dependence and violence, changing positions according to the circumstances. The perpetrators and victims constantly exchange positions in that the victim inevitably also becomes the perpetrator and the latter becomes the former in a never-ending cycle throughout the process. Rodrigues juggles these types of easily-accessible binaries to ultimately invert and confuse the expectations associated with them.

Dorotéia

We will start by examining *Doroteia*, which is the quintessential fetishistic play due to the degree of importance attributed to each object and character on stage as material reality. *Doroteia* is defined by Magaldi as a mythical play whose characters are

sometimes dressed grotesquely to resemble objects or wear face masks that lack human features, as in the case of the sisters D. Flávia, Carmelita, Maura, and Das Dores (D. Flavia's daughter). Sábato Magaldi stresses that in

Dorotéia, o dramaturgo exarcebou essa técnica, aparentando-a ao surrealismo e já, sem dúvida, ao que veio chamar-se teatro de vanguarda ou do absurdo, na década de cinquenta. As personagens não imitam seres reais, mas parecem abstrações, criaturas fictícias, símbolos de sentimentos. É como se elas, em cena, materializassem apenas o seu subconsciente. O campo da consciência estaria descartado, por pertencer à convenção. (Nelson Rodrigues: *Dramaturgia e Encenações* 52)

[*Dorotéia*, the playwright exaggerated this technique, having resemblance to surrealism, and, undoubtedly, to what came to be called avant-garde theater or of the absurd in the fifties. The characters do not mimic real beings, but seem like abstractions, fictional creatures, symbols of feelings. It is as if they, on the scene, materialize only your subconscious. The field of consciousness would be discarded, because it belongs to conventions.]

As we will explore further, the challenge posed by this play within the theoretical framework of fetishism is to refrain from providing a psychoanalytical dictionary to be able to decipher the symbolic meanings of the all the elements in the play, describing the precise meaning of each fetish object.

Dorotéia is defined by Nelson Rodrigues as an “Irresponsible Farce”. The definition of “farce” according to Webster’s online dictionary is “a comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterization and ludicrously improbable situations”. The Magaldian classification of *Dorotéia* as a mythical play is often taken literally, and after reading the rubrics and dialogues, it is easy to agree with that interpretation and neglect the comic aspects of the play. However, the colloquial language together with specific, authentic depictions of life in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, the poetic nature of the rubrics, the contrast between the rubrics and the dialogues, the absurd and grotesque nature of their reality, the exaggerated, obsessive

desires of the characters, all lead to the outbreak of nervous laughter throughout the play. It can even be assumed that Rodrigues is poking fun at psychoanalysis and Freudian interpretations in expanding their symbolic values, imagery (fetishes) and clichés to the limit in order to make them seem ridiculously comical. So that performing the play by simply highlighting its mythical qualities in detriment to its farcical characteristics could be limiting. Thus, in order to look at the images of fetishes, not just in the psychology of the characters, but in a more multifaceted interpretation of the concept, it is important to study the structurally fetishistic elements of the play (in paradox, ambiguity or binary positions, for example), especially when considering the literary category of the play both for Magaldi (part of the cycle of mythical plays) and Rodrigues (Irresponsível Farça). As with many other titles of his plays, they help us move away from the more easily-understandable and decipherable elements of the play.

Written in 1949, the play chronicles the fate of Dorotéia and the other women in her close family (aunts and a niece), all of whom are condemned to a life of negating their bodies and renouncing their sexuality. Their fate acts as a form of expiation for the sin their great grandmother committed of having loved a man with passion but having married another. In the dialogue below, Dorotéia and D. Flávia describe the fate of the women's sexual life:

DOROTÉIA. Eu sabia o que aconteceu com a nossa bisavó... Sabia que ela amou um homem e se casou com outro... No dia do casamento...

D. FLÁVIA. Noite.

DOROTÉIA. Desculpe. Noite... Na noite do casamento, nossa bisavó teve a náusea... (desesperada) do amor, do homem!

D. FLÁVIA. (num grito) Do homem!

DOROTÉIA. (baixo) - Desde então há uma fatalidade na família: a náusea de uma mulher passa a outra mulher, assim como o som passa de um grito a outro grito... Todas nós – eu também! A recebemos na noite do

casamento... (1029)

[DOROTEIA - I knew what happened to our great-grandmother ... I knew she loved a man and married another ... On the wedding day ...

D. FLÁVIA. Night.

Doroteia. Sorry. Night ... On the wedding night, our great-grandmother had the nausea ... (desperate) of love, of man!

D. FLÁVIA. (a scream) Of the man!

DOROTEIA. (low voice) - Since then there is a fatality in the family: the nausea of a woman passes to another woman, as well as the sound passes from one cry to another cry... All of us - me too! We receive in on our wedding night ...]

From this passage onward, we realize that the women are not destined to be nauseated at all times as if they were victims of a curse. Rather, it is the fetishistic experience, the memories, the repeated retellings, and the images associated with them that actually give meaning and a modicum of control to their lives. Fetishistic in the sense that it gives them some control over the scary emptiness of marriage and their own lack of power within the confines of the patriarchal structure (in lacking an imaginary *phallus* as representative of male authority). It also acts as a familial myth to help them deal with the cruel reality women are condemned to experience.

Within the context of the play, social class and racial barriers limit the institution of marriage, especially for women, as the only real goal they are allowed to strive for. They are not supposed to marry for love but be chosen by a man their families deem suitable. This man must ultimately give the female access to a higher social class. The Catholic morality paradigm, which the playwright places front and center, defines women as having to choose one of two unattractive extremes: to act as a “prostitute” with all its stereotypical associations or be a chaste and devoted wife. In analyzing a multiplicity of records related to women’s honor and virginity during the beginning of the 20th century,

including judicial cases and penal codes, Sueaann Caulfield concludes that even after attitudes related to sexual behavior in the lives of women had changed,

it was in the public interest, according to the viewpoint that prevailed in the 1940 penal code, to protect female virginity. ... For example, the notion that virginity lost outside marriage led to prostitution was often explained as a natural psychological process: once women's naturally latent sexuality was awakened, if not sublimated through wifely and maternal duties, women would follow their base sexual drive to indulge in increasingly depraved activities. (142)

In fact, for Juliana da Silva Passos, the perhaps antiquated definition of love as being deprived of erotism and passion together with the imaginary dichotomy of women's sexual behavior as either prostitutes or saint like have remained a specter in the Brazilian imaginary:

A concepção de amor casto, esvaziado de paixão, desejo e erotismo, e o matrimônio realizado por motivações outras que não o amor, mas em acordos familiares que almejavam a contenção da sexualidade e a geração de prole conveniente, legítima e não mestiça, acomete os valores contemporâneos, e permanece no imaginário brasileiro como uma espécie de espectro, de assombro. (3)

[The conception of chaste love, devoid of passion, desire and eroticism, and marriage performed by motivations other than love, but family agreements which seek the containment of sexuality and the generation of convenient offspring, legitimate and not mestizo, affects contemporary values and remains in the Brazilian imagination as a kind of specter, of fear.]

Despite Dona Flávia's obsession with and control over her sisters and daughter, all the aunts (including her daughter Das Dores) actually aspire to more than their confined lives can provide, exemplified by their repeated sighs throughout the play. Contrary to their telling body movements and sighs, however, they often proclaim the value of chastity and nausea as virtues, clearly acting out the very picture of virtuosity.

The women embody fetishes in wearing masks, being adored, and being portrayed as fetishistic religious types for concocting a grotesque mixture of saint and monster. By controlling, confining and transforming them into fetishes, Dona Flávia has the illusion of having total domination over them. It is important to note that their status as fetishes is not only shown in the stage setting and dialogues, but also as a type of materialization of the fetish for the audience as well. However, as the play progresses, the women slowly begin going beyond acting like mere models of chastity by showing through their body language more and more signs of actually desiring sexual pleasure.

Dorotéia, depicted on stage as the stereotypical definition of beautiful and sensual, challenges the destiny of her family, at first by having multiple sexual partners and, ultimately, by becoming a prostitute. A beautiful woman's body in this scenario is equated with the stereotype of the prostitute. The fetishized body of a woman cannot be both beautiful and moral at the same time. Due to the guilt that Dorotéia unconsciously bears for becoming a prostitute, it is her belief that hers is a crime for which she must pay with the death of her only son. To find redemption for her sins and the self-inflicting pain of losing her son, she returns to her cousins' house, to the place where all women must renounce any sexual pleasure, to the fetishistic image of the house as this place of purity and patriarchal authority. In this case, the house is representative of patriarchal authority because it is the law of the father that regulates women's virginity and honor. This is not so simply because men create the law and regulate it to reinforce the importance of female virginity and not theirs while protecting men from being penalized depending on their social and racial class, but also because it is the men who can ultimately *take a*

woman's virginity. It is also the father who is expected to protect the women before they get married.

In the house, all the women are celibate and their faces are deformed (although the deformations are imprinted on the theatrical masks they wear). They lack an actual father figure in the house, but the fetish representing the space occupied by the house remains masculine, containing the paradox of being and not being a protector, being and not being the completeness Dorotéia might be seeking upon returning to the house.

Das Dores, her second cousin (which means something like "multiple pains" or "in pain" in English), is dead but thinks she is still alive. Similarly to the nausea myth, the mere thought of believing she is alive produces materiality to her body on stage as a fetish to others and herself. Dona Flávia explains the fact of her imagistic and fetishistic existence as follows:

D. FLÁVIA - Sim, porque eu podia ter dito "Minha filha, infelizmente você nasceu morta" etc. etc. (patética) Mas não era direito dar esta informação... Seria pecado enterrá-la sem ter conhecido o nosso enjôo nupcial... (tom moderado) De forma que Das Dores foi crescendo... Pôde crescer, não ignorância da própria morte... (ao ouvido de Dorotéia) Pensa que vive, pensa que existe... (formalizando-se e com extrema naturalidade) E ajuda nos pequenos serviços da casa. (1040)

[D. FLÁVIA - Yes, because I could have said, "My daughter, unfortunately you were born dead" etc.. etc.. (pathetic) But it was not right to give her this information ... It would have been a sin to bury her without having met our nuptial sickness ... (moderate tone) So that Das Dores was growing ... Could grow, in the ignorance of her own death ... (in Dorotéia's ear) She thinks she lives, thinks that she exists ... (slowly appearing formal with extreme ease) And she help with small house chores.]

Dorotéia slowly accepts the destiny the women in her family “have” to face by becoming deformed due to a terrible skin disease and, towards the end of the play, at last feeling “nausea” in regard to having sex with a man.

Again, according to the character definitions, women have to constantly suffer episodes of nausea to pay for their great grandmother’s sin of marrying without love. Contrary to critics such as Passos or even the overt explanations of the characters, I do not see the “nausea” as an actual payment for something they are condemned to suffer in this almost surrealistic play. Nausea is a fetish, a construct that requires awareness. Passos supports her argument via autobiographical commentaries emphasizing the importance of love in marriage:

Para Nelson Rodrigues, pecar contra o amor é tão grande falta, é tamanho pecado, que a punição não se volta apenas a quem o comete, mas é transmitida de geração a geração. Assim, todas as mulheres da família estão fadadas a ter a indisposição na noite do casamento. Tal indisposição remete justamente à violência ligada à noite de núpcias em uma época em que se esperava não apenas a virgindade, mas a completa inexperiência sexual das donzelas e os casamentos convenientes não implicavam laços afetivos entre os noivos. (3)

[For Nelson Rodrigues, sin against love is such a great lack, such a great sin, that the punishment is not just done to the one who commits it, but it is transmitted from generation to generation. So all the women of the family are bound to feel unwell on their wedding night. Such indisposition refers precisely to violence linked to the wedding night in a time that it was expected not only virginity, but the full sexual inexperience of the maidens and convenient marriages did not involve affective bonding between the couple.]

Contrary to Passos, nausea functions as a fetish, a thing, which they all hold on to, both in their imaginations and in the reality of their daily lives. It functions as image since nausea is depicted in the different characters’ masks and objects. For fetishism to

exist, there must be a conscious effort to find the object that will fulfill the contradictory stance of the fetishist (as filling and not filling the lack). By making it a fetish, the discourses and belief systems of the social imagery surrounding the position of women can be brought to light and investigated. Rodrigues also provides a type of female agency (albeit distorted), which can perhaps be used as a source of commentary on the multiple types of family models (the homes of single women and widows, for example) Nelson Rodrigues was exposed to and visited in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. Since he is always exploring the overall mentality surrounding the interaction of male and female Brazilians (and the spectrum in between), the explorations of fetishism as both a female form of agency and subjugation in the play lead to the recognition of the psychological impact of gender dynamics. Therefore, for the female characters, marrying for love, which would a priori represent the other side of the coin for the women in the family, would ultimately not resolve the issues facing them in society. In fact, according to Anchyses Jobim Lopes:

Mais que uma denúncia contra a cultura e a religião que enaltecem a doença e o sofrimento, a peça traz, por meio de seu sarcasmo brutal, uma denúncia contra a culpabilização da sexualidade e contra o culto da apologia da morte. Acometido de uma fúria verdadeiramente báquica – unindo por meio da sátira o trágico e o cômico – Nelson expõe até a medula a violência dos paradigmas do patriarcado em sua vertente católica e mediterrânea transplantada para o Brasil.

[More than a complaint against culture and religion, which underpin disease and suffering, the play brings through his brutal sarcasm, a complaint against the scapegoating of sexuality and the cult of defense against death. Stricken with a truly Bacchic fury – uniting through the tragic and the comic satire – Nelson exposes the violence to the core paradigms of patriarchy in his shed and Mediterranean Catholic transplanted to Brazil.]

Thus, the guilt associated with sexuality and the death cult in the religious ceremonies and life style of these women who must appear chaste or risk being considered prostitutes are all manifested in the fetishes in the play since even a love relationship would be incapable of changing the preexisting paradigms.

Furthermore, *Doroteia* proves to be minimalist in set design and the small number of props exhibited on an almost bare stage. This characteristic helps elevate the value of the objects and bodies that appear as condensed fetishistic images. Photographs and images that are part of the set design function as cultural artifacts from a past when these women might have participated more actively in society, but also as fetishes as a means to connect them to that past. There are a few objects on stage, which, at first glance, seem to pinpoint specific psychological and social features and lead to a very literal Freudian interpretation of the play. However, although the highly symbolic and even mythical nature of the drama is undeniable, a Freudian interpretation can also be problematic for the purpose of this analysis.

Although fetishism is developed as a strategy and social commentary in the play, it is not my purpose to create a dictionary of psychoanalysis and define the meaning of objects such as the “jar”, for example, as representing the sexual organ of the female characters, associations that must have been made countless times in the past. However, the connection between the jar and Dorotéia’s sexuality, which is about to be given surrendered, cannot be completely denied. As Jobim Lopes states, while commenting on Martuscello:

Comenta o psicanalista Martuscello (1993): *Objetos utilizados para a higiene íntima da mulher em alguns prostíbulos, a bacia e o jarro aparecem aqui como evidência da culpa sexual de Dorotéia.*
Entretanto, não concordamos com este autor quando interpreta o jarro

como símbolo fálico, pelo contrário, mostra-se como clara evidência da sexualidade feminina: um símbolo uterino. Ao final da peça, tendo se metamorfoseado em uma criatura repugnante que nem as primas, o jarro finalmente deixará de perseguir-la.

[The Psychoanalyst Martuscello says (1993): Objects used for intimate hygiene of women in some brothels, bowl and pitcher appear here as evidence of guilt of sexual Doroteia. However, we disagree with this author when interpreting the pitcher as phallic symbol, by contrast, shows up as clear evidence of female sexuality: a symbol uterus. At the end of the piece, having morphed into a disgusting creature that neither the materials, the pitcher finally cease to pursue it.]

The debate on whether the jar symbolizes a phallic or feminine identity seems trivial, at least for the purposes of this dissertation. In fact, the fetish encompasses both. The fetish is an object that stands for something else yet it is as furtive as female sexuality itself. There is an obvious relationship between Dorotéia's suffering/guilt, her beauty, and her remembrances when the jar appears on stage. The jar also represents that which cannot be spoken, the unconscious desire of all the other characters for pleasure although they never see the jar. Furthermore, it adds to the other elements on stage due to its performative presence and power. The jar is also a commodity, something that could be merely decorative or might serve a purpose (used to wash the body after sex, for example). Since the women's house lacks any type of commodity, the power of the jar as an object with an exchange value, as an object from the outside world, or as a mere trinket, is accentuated. Possession of the jar would allude to Dorotéia's work as a "prostitute" in exchanging the services of her body for money, exchanging her body to create life (by becoming pregnant) and death (by losing her son), exchanging the jar for money, for nausea/ugliness, and so on.

In Dorotéia's mind, the jar represents all the following characteristics: possession, money, being alive/dead, and independence. It is also a fetish for the audience because it

remains one of the very few objects in the play that is capable of provoking a myriad of feelings depending on how it is staged. As a fetish, it is obviously a thing that stands for something else in addition to irradiating innumerable possibilities for interpretations. In an actual performance, the jar could change its shape and appearance to denote the multiple values it might contain as well as its importance to the play. Or it could be shown at times as a big or small object to denote its importance or lack thereof, depending on the situation.

I concur with Naomi Schor when she says about Kofman that “female fetishism is not so much, if at all, a perversion, rather a strategy designed to turn the so-called ‘riddle of femininity’ to women's account” (8), as we have discussed in the beginning of the chapter. Particularly in this play, where all the characters but the “boots” are women, the process of fetishization proposes a response to the all-mighty patriarchal family code. Stepping away from the obvious psychoanalytic interpretations of the jar, we can say that many of the objects displayed on stage are cultural relics, fetishistic objects that refer to stereotypical definitions of gender boundaries and cultural connotations. This is done in a way to deconstruct those same stereotypes, making women the conveyors of the message to which they are victims as well as the creators of the same messages.

In terms of the characters’ images on stage as fetishes, just like the aunts, the boots and the daughter, Doroteia herself is a fetish since she is at one and the same time the dead Doroteia and the one who got lost (in the beginning of the play, we learn there are two Dorotéias in the family). Both were lost in different but complementary ways, just like the fetish, which embodies contradictory meanings (of being and not being nauseated and of being both dead and alive). They are presented as two different distinct

characters named Doroteia. But, on stage, Doroteia embodies both of them through fragments of memory:

D. FLÁVIA (frenética) - A outra Dorotéia se afogou de ódio, de dor... Ela não podia viver sabendo que por dentro do vestido estava seu corpo nu...
MAURA E CARMELITA (apavoradas) - Despido!
(NOVA E CATEGÓRICA MANIFESTAÇÃO DE PUDOR)
D. FLÁVIA - É também esta a nossa vergonha eterna!... (baixo) Saber que temos um corpo nu debaixo da roupa... Mas seco, felizmente, magro... E o corpo tão seco e tão magro que não sei como há nele sangue, como há nele vida... (1034)

[D. FLÁVIA (frantic) - The other Doroteia drowned for hatred, pain ... She could not live knowing that inside her dress was her naked body ...
MAURA E CARMELITA (terrified) - Naked!
(NEW AND CATEGORICAL EXPRESSION OF MODESTY)
D. FLÁVIA - this is also our eternal shame! ... (low) To know that we have a naked body under the clothes ... But dry, thankfully, thin ... And the body is so dry and thin that I do not know how there is still blood in it, how there is still life in it ...]

Because Doroteia is a fetish for all the women as well as a fetish as stereotype for the audience, she represents the extreme opposite of the aunts as image on stage in that she is a prostitute who has given birth to a son and who ultimately becomes ugly (via an infectious diseases that deforms her face) to pay for her sins. Her ability to become pregnant and have sexual intercourse becomes the envy of all the women in the family. In contrast to the other objects and bodies in the play, she alone is a beautiful woman whose provocative red dress sharply counterbalances the color black on stage. She is also the only actor who is not wearing a mask and the only one who acts like an object but moves like a real human being.

Besides, since all the aunts and her cousin are also made to believe in the power of feeling “nausea” at the end, the body of Doroteia becomes a fetish (with its contradictory power to attract and repulse at the same time). Doroteia is not just a fetish

for them but to the audience as well in terms of her image. Everyone ends up accepting Dorotéia's transformation into an ugly, "nauseous" woman, out of sheer envy, not because they truly believe she should give up her sensual self and become like them.

For Dorotéia, her excessive beauty as womanliness functions as a type of masquerade, as described by Joan Rivière:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (306)

Her skin deformation is not to be looked at as a mere object, or just a fetishistic object at that, but as a reaction to and an exercise in controlling her own image in response to the anxiety of castration. In this case, castration is defined in the psychoanalytical sense of losing the phallus or of not having a phallus as well as in the sense of living under the permanent threat of losing beauty and sensuality.

To compensate for this feeling, Dorotéia becomes the ultimate beauty, the most beautiful of all. She enacts a performance of beauty, exemplified as images of what have become stereotypical such as red lips and a red dress. Dorotéia does become ugly towards the end of the play, eventually getting Chagas disease (a skin disease), which was her goal all along. Therefore, ugliness and beauty are defined as not necessarily natural nor a birth right but as something that is developed and worked on to achieve. So these attributes act as masks the same way as the masks of the other characters although Doroteia is the only one who does not actually wear one. A skin disease also denotes

ugliness, especially for a woman. In this society, there is no way a woman considered beautiful and sexy could ever marry simply because being sexy and beautiful at the same time would inevitably have tragic consequences.

The memory of the other Doroteia who dies out of shame of her own body acts as a figment of Dona Flavia's imagination in order for her to experience a type of pleasure in imagining her naked body. Although Dorotéia's objective is to finally feel nausea (since it does not come to her naturally), all of the other characters openly yearn to be like Doroteia who loves and has sexual relations without needing to throw up, an impossible feat for any of them (due to the immense power wielded by nausea as a fetish). Both Doroteias cause repulsion and attraction. The women learn of Doroteia's sexual encounters from a voice that reverberates throughout their entire bodies and becomes material knowledge on stage. Even the fabric of the table cloth has relevance since it is their indirect link to what is part of their sense of touch:

D. FLÁVIA. A toalha era de linho...Eu acabara de dizer a oração, que as outras repetiram...De repente, a voz anunciou: Uma Dorotéia morreu... (baixa a voz,espantada) Outra perdeu-se... (1025)

[D. FLÁVIA- The towel was linen...I had just said the prayer, and the others repeated it...Suddenly, a voice announced: Doroteia died ... (low voice, amazed) Another was lost...]

And later the material reality of the scene and the voice are transformed into a vision. The aunts experience pleasure from a remembrance of a sense of touch along with audio and visual sensations when learning about Doroteia, the main fetish as image in the play, immediately after they hear news of the death of the other Doroteia (the one who was not promiscuous). It is important to perceive the simultaneity of both events in

the minds of the characters since it is the presence of these opposite events that aid in the creation of the fetish:

D. FLÁVIA. Nós três tivemos uma visão... Ficamos assim mesmo, unidas como agora... Os três rostos juntos...
(JUNTAM OS ROSTOS).

D. FLÁVIA - E foi como se estivéssemos vendo... Uma rua de muitas janelas acesas...
(os três todos juntos) E você mesma numa janela acesa... Passos de homem na calçada...
Olhos de homens por toda parte... Não foi?

[D. FLÁVIA. We three had a vision... We also, as we are united now ...
The three faces together...
(JOIN THE FACES).

D. FLÁVIA. It was as if we were seeing... A street of many lighted windows...
(all three together) And yourself a window lit... Steps of man on the sidewalk...
Eyes of men everywhere... wasn't it?]

And later, Dona Flávia physically experiences the room in which Dorotéia used to live and have sexual relationships. All the objects in that room hold tremendous power over her and the other women, who react by trembling and covering up their faces upon listening to the description of the room and ensuing events. Even the coffin of Dorotéia's son is described as being lined with a smooth, white silk material, symbolizing sensuality for the women who are listening:

D. FLÁVIA. (implacável) jura que não moraste num quarto... Parece que eu estou vendo esse quarto... Havia um guarda-vestidos com espelho...
(para as primas, crispando-se) Detrás desse guarda-vestidos uma bacia e
(lenta) um jarro...(NOVA MANIFESTAÇÃO DE PUDOR DAS
VIÚVAS: ESCONDEM OS ROSTOS SOB A PROTEÇÃO DO LEQUE).
DOROTÉIA. (dolorosa) O jarro!

[D. FLÁVIA. (ruthless) swears that you did not live in a bedroom ... It seems like I'm seeing this room ... There were wardrobes with a mirror ...
(to the cousins, twitching up) Behind this wardrobe, a bowl (slow) and a

jar... (NEW EXPRESSION OF MODESTY FROM THE WIDOWS:
THEY HIDE THEIR FACES BEHIND THE FAN).
DOROTÉIA. (painfully) A Jar!]

As portrayed in the play, sexuality itself is also rendered a fetish (causing both repulsion and attraction), which, in occupying the space between two opposite polar extremes in the play, ultimately leads to all the women experiencing their sexuality as nausea (starting at the two extremes: from its negation or total banalization through prostitution). Sexuality is thus manifested by a multiplicity of objects, bodies and images that are able to condense the many different facets of sexuality presented in the play. In *Trágico, Então Moderno*, Angela Leite Lopes mentions the “coisificação” (objectification or transforming everything into things) of all the elements presented on stage, which, in our interpretation, could be seen as a fetishization of all the qualities, judgments and moral codes explored in Rodrigues’ theater (208). There is, for example, the element of guilt, at times materialized by the jar. Every time they discuss the death of Dorotéia’s son, for example (which occurs right after she “sells” her body to pay for the doctor’s appointment), the jar appears on stage.

Furthermore, whenever someone dies, the women immediately know and their bodies and positions on stage change by becoming erect or frozen in an expression reflecting horror or delight. The aunts are always vigilant and refuse to sleep to make sure their sexual desires remain adequately repressed, as represented by their almost lifeless bodies (pale, frail and usually faceless). They hide their faces with a fan every time something is said that causes shame or a desire they know is taboo. The mask intensifies the artificiality of Rodrigues’ theater and is a metafictional reminder to the audience that the actors are playing fictional characters. The author also creates the belief

that the deformation of the women's faces is so repulsive it is impossible to look at them without recoiling. In this way, the repulsiveness behind the masks contributes to their fetishization as objects that cover up a reality of lack and the shame of the sexual body:

Casa de três viúvas - d. Flávia, Carmelita e Maura. Todas de luto, num vestido longo e castíssimo, que esconde qualquer curva feminina. De rosto erguido, hieráticas, conservam-se em obstinada vigília, através dos anos. Cada uma das três jamais dormiu, para jamais sonhar. Sabem que, no sonho, rompem volúpias secretas e abomináveis. (1023)

[House of the three widows - d. Flávia, Carmelita and Maura. All dressed in long, chaste dresses for mourning hiding any feminine curve. With upturned faces, hieratic, they remain in stubborn vigil through the years. Each of the three has never slept, to never dream. They know that, in the dream, secrets and abominable pleasures break out.]

This shame of the sexual body, which leads to nausea and the deformation of the face, is explored by J. Brooks Bouson as a reaction to the abject body towards an idealized clean body, as is seen below, contributing to the idea of a female masquerading as an idealized women's body:

What in part lies behind this desire for self-improvement and the drive to achieve the idealized body image is the fear of the "out-of-control" body to which the docile body serves as an antidote. Julia Kristeva vividly describes what women most fear in her account of the abject body. In her analysis, Kristeva uses the work of cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who, drawing a distinction between what is clean and unclean, equates dirtiness with that which is out of its proper place. For Kristeva, "there looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). In Kristeva's scheme, the body, which must be "clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic," must "bear no trace of its debt to nature" (102). (16)

Therefore, the maternal body, the sexualized body, in a society that places the

only two possibilities available to women at opposite extremes leaves shame as the only relation to the maternal sexual body:

The abject, which is opposed the clean and proper body, produces visceral feelings of loathing, shame, and disgust. Associated with bodily substances and waste products— such as tears, saliva, feces, urine, vomit, and mucus— the abject is defiling and disgusting, but because it is part of the self and body, it cannot be totally expelled or rejected. Representing the horror of physical embodiment, the abject produces a visceral reaction: “Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck” (2). Culturally manifested in various ways— as food loathing and food taboos, as repulsion for bodily fluids and waste products, and as revulsion for the signs of sexual difference evident in the taboo against incest and the cultural horror of menstruation— abjection involves a fundamental rejection of the maternal body.... In her account of the visceral disgust for bodily processes and embodiment and the related fear that the “clean and proper” body will be tainted, Kristeva calls attention to the shame and disgust associated with the abject maternal— and female— body in our culture.

This deeply psychological reaction of a woman to her own body explored above is echoed in the play *Dorotéia* by the idea of nausea. The play also shows the effect on the body of this attitude of disgust in the characters’ appearances on stage.

Dorotéia’s story is also a type of fetish but with a reality of its own. The women hold on to her story as image, and the memory of her life is resuscitated by them to facilitate feeling a little bit of the pleasure they are prohibited from feeling. By holding on to Dorotéia’s story as memory, they are able to create it and own it. To this end, Dona Flávia exclaims: “D.FLÁVIA. (gritando) Leva tua história daqui... Afoga tua história no mar...”(1034) [D.FLÁVIA. (shouting) Take your story away from her... Drown your story in the ocean...], as if the story itself was a living being. Even if they could have a

bedroom of their own, it would represent the act of dreaming about repressed sexual desires: “D. FLÁVIA (dogmática, sinistra e ameaçadora) - Porque é no quarto que a carne e alma se perdem!... Esta casa só tem salas e nenhum quarto, nenhum leito... Só nos deitamos no chão frio do assoalho...” [D. FLÁVIA. (dogmatic, sinister and menacing) Why is it in the bedroom where the flesh and the soul are lost! ... This house only has living rooms and no bedrooms, no beds ... We only lay on the cold wooden floor ...] (1034), creating a symbiotic relationship between what is material and external and what reflects an internal psychological state in the minds of the characters. Their conviction that “seeing is believing” to determine what is real and powerful elevates what is material and even imaginary (but vivid) as fetish since they are able to see much more than they usually allow themselves too (through imagination and memory materialized on stage). The memory of all the members of their family also remains very vivid and is experienced as material reality whenever someone dies, elevating death to a type of fetishism as image:

D. FLÁVIA. Sabemos de tudo que acontece com parente...Quando alguém na família morre ou dá um mal passo, recebemos a notícia imediatamente... na mesma hora, no mesmo instante...Ninguém precisa dizer... É como se uma voz fosse, de porta em porta anunciando...(1023)

[D. FLÁVIA. We know everything that happens with a relative... When someone in the family dies or does something wrong, we get the news immediately...at the same time, at the same moment ... No need to say ... It is as though a voice were going door to door announcing...]

Prayer is also a powerful fetish in the play since it makes the women compulsively repeat the act of not falling victim to sensuality by concentrating on death and forgetting about the material reality of their bodies, as expressed by their mourning

attire. Because prayer is represented on stage by colors, static positions of prayer, and objects reflective of mourning and religion, it gains a vitality primarily through these evocative objects, which are the only means affording them even limited individual pleasure and self-control.

While the aunts describe the gradual deterioration of Dorotéia's face and body throughout the play, Doroteia shows signs of doubting the necessity of her having to become ugly and deformed in order to be considered a "respectable" woman in society. This is one of the only times she perceives the absurdity of the social position women hold, always being forced to choose between two unappealing extremes. However, as a fetish herself, she does not have much agency since, in this context, she is manipulated by the members of her family as an object of the female gaze. On the other hand, her image as beautiful and representative of an object of sexual pleasure is above all associated with the male gaze, constructed from the perspective of the patriarchal code. Her repugnant, deteriorating face could ultimately represent a form of agency for her in the sense that she could now control her destiny (before feeling an uncontrollable desire to see and be with men). She is able to fulfill a need all the women share of vicariously imagining and experiencing sexual pleasure while possessing sensuality and, at the same time, being able to transform it into something meaningful, but on her own terms.

DOROTÉIA - Não que eu queira desculpar os meus encantos... Longe de mim... Já disse que estou arrependida de ser como sou... Mas me dá pena... Não sei, mas me dá uma pena como você não imagina!...(agarrando-se a D. Flávia) E se eu pudesse ser bonita e ao mesmo tempo ter um proceder correto...(1034)

[DOROTEIA - not that I want to apologize for my charms...Far from that...I already said I feel sorry for being the way I am... But I feel pity... I

do not know, but it makes me feel sorry, you cannot imagine!... (clinging to Flávia D.) And if I could be beautiful and at the same time have a correct way of life...]

The “men” also appear as fetishes to the women on stage. Nepomuceno, the man called in to infect Doroteia with *Chagas* disease, functions as a fetish mostly as the objectification of and attraction to disease and death. Eusébio da Abadia, Das Dores’s “husband”, the man who is supposed to make her nauseated, appears on stage as a pair of unlaced boots. Even though the women do not see the man in person, they can see his boots, setting into motion the process during which Dona Flávia murders all the women except Dorotéia (we could also assume within the surrealist reality of the stage setting that the boots represent the man). The sense of sight engenders desires and eliminates the vivid memory of their recent nausea. In this situation, it is via the boot fetish that the women aim to garner control of their sexuality and voyeuristically feel desire. However, this limited type of agency represents the destructive violation of the previously fetishistic contract of the nausea myth. Lopes affirms that:

Eusebio da Abadia é um par de botas – um personagem que não se vê, que não se deve ver ou que não deveria ser visto. Um personagem; e queremos acentuar assim que não se trata de um símbolo ou de uma metáfora. Trata-se, antes, de uma espécie de operação de síntese, uma concentração do fenômeno teatral como um todo no seio de um elemento específico. (211)

[Eusebio da Abadia is a pair of boots - a character that is not seen, that should not see or should not be seen. A character, and so we want to emphasize that this is not a symbol or a metaphor. It is, rather, a kind of synthesis operation, a concentration of the theatrical phenomenon as a whole within a specific element.]

Although Lopes does not explore fetishism per se, it can be seen here how the construction of the object as a character that cannot be seen as a full human being but that

has a material presence nonetheless, which, while not symbolic (in the sense of pointing to something else besides its materiality on stage), functions as an emblem of the fetish.

Because of the play's highly emotionally-charged poetic language, it also seems to be part of a theatrical game of fetishes to the point that the existence of certain characters such as Das Dores (as images on stage) "depende de uma palavra" [depends on one word] (Lopes 209) to exist. Words are presented on stage as reality and gain strong materiality as fetishes. As we will investigate in the next chapter, part of the fetish of images brought into existence by words is the fetishism of performance, the performance of words to create imagistic reality on stage. However, the fetish of image embodies the contradictory elements in the clash on stage between what is said and what is seen (it is brought into reality by what is said, revealing the thoughts behind what is said). Doroteia says she wants to be ugly but remains remarkably beautiful. Dona Flávia says she wants to feel nauseated while showing signs of sexual desire; and Das Dores falls in love with a pair of boots while claiming she wants to feel nauseated.

Everyone appears irrational, illogical and contradictory; and so it is easy to come to the conclusion that such and such only stands for a phallic symbol or that it (the phallic symbol) could represent one extreme of a spectrum such as repression in order to explain and contain the contradictory nature of the women's language in interpreting these images. As fetishes, objects and words complement one another and provide a multifaceted picture of the society in which the play is inscribed. While women might be forced to deal with repression by living their desires through the other and through fetishes, they might also find a means to counteract it by appearing ugly and remaining single, or finding a way of living in two different realities (sensual at home and pure

outside the home) at the same time. In the play, albeit contradictorily, Das Dores is the only one who is able to create her own reality and actually live it, despite D. Flávia. Das Dores gets married without being nauseated while facing the opposing force of the nausea and of her family, pressuring her to succumb.

In terms of the performance of the play, how can this scenario of apparent dichotomies (ugly versus beautiful, black versus red and white, prostitute versus saint) be performed and transformed into something more multifaceted as image on stage? Since image and embodiment in theater are immediate perceptions evoked by images, how can the intensity of this immediacy convey the complexity of the theme? If we go beyond the apparent obvious relations or clichés and even the contradictions involved in pitching tragedy against comedy and prioritize the objects and embodiments as a type of fetishism that goes beyond the passive vs. active male and female roles, we might be able to come up with an original interpretation of the play.

The boots, the bodies, and the jar at times occupy seemingly equal positions in the psychic of the characters so they could be reenacted as being of equal size on stage, for example, depending on who is speaking or when. With regard to many of Rodrigues' plays, especially the ones he refers to as mythical, critics have tended to forget the context and specificity of his theater and instead have focused on their universality and tragic aspects while ignoring its full potential.

Magaldi defines the mythical plays as bringing to the fore archetypes and myths of origin by referring to the line: "Dorotéia deseja cultivar a morte" (61) [Doroteia desires to cultivate death] as representative of the cycles of life and death. If we view the play as delving into and exposing myths of a social and cultural nature that go beyond the larger

universal aspects of the play, the fetishes can help shed light onto the many images that have become part and parcel of Brazilian culture, media and film and are explored as fetishes in *Doroteia*. Because death occupies a prominent place in Brazilian society as represented in typical funeral rituals and ceremonies related to religious rites, *A Falecida* provides us with more fetishistic images of gendered types, specifically in their relationship *vis-à-vis* death fetishes.

To conclude, *Dorotéia* is a play of quintessential fetishistic images. Due to its mythical qualities as well as its emphasis on objects and richly symbolic images on stage, the play prompts innumerable interpretations that might, at first glance, be considered too obviously psychoanalytical or symbolic. However, through the object relation-theatrical context, I aim to frame the play's easily-followed logic of opposing clichés in its irrationality. Through dichotomies, the play aims to destroy them; through fetishism and its ambiguous quality (especially in view of commodified objects and bodies), it aims to destroy the ambiguous; by revealing clear dichotomies, fetishism acts to contain. This circulatory play in which objects and images take center stage, the politics of the female body in Brazilian society is explored and deconstructed, after which different types of strategies are revealed. Thus, as it is true with other plays, to interpret *Dorotéia*, it is important to examine the stage possibilities as well as the text.

A Falecida [The Deceased Woman]

Mas na nossa cosmologia fúnebre os mortos não aparecem somente para pedir e demandar. Eles também dão e oferecem, fazendo com que se possam descobrir tesouros ou acertar na loteria. De fato, o comércio entre vivos e mortos é amplo e intenso entre nós, manifestando-se por meio de

múltiplos meios e instrumentos. Avisos, presságios, sinais, acidentes, coincidências e, sobretudo, sonhos e a mediunidade de certas pessoas são modos regulares pelos quais a comunicação se dá. (*A Casa & a Rua* 25)

[But in our death cosmology the dead appears not only to ask and demand. They also give and offer, so that you might discover treasures or win the lottery. In fact, trade between living and dead is broad and intense between us, manifesting itself through multiple means and instruments. Warnings, omens, signs, accidents, coincidences and, above all, dreams and mediumship of certain people are regular modes by which communication occurs.]

The play *A Falecida* explores the fetishism of the death image, funeral, and burial ceremonies to elaborate on and explore other types of fetishism strategies in Brazilian society and to comment on the importance of death fetishism (and rituals associated with the dead), as DaMatta describes above. Some of the same cultural myths found in *Doroteia* are also present in this play. Some examples are the cultivation of the dichotomies between the whore and the prostitute, the closeness of death to female asexuality (cultivation of the dead as a means to attain salvation from earthly desires and sins as well as the obsession of attempting to cover up intense yet repressed sexual desires), and a form of female agency through the appearance of extreme religiosity, giving rise to a number of other types of fetishism as image on stage. There are many contradictory and confusing ideas and expectations condensed in the images, which the fetishes can help deconstruct.

The first two acts of *A Falecida* focus on Zulmira, a frustrated woman from the Rio de Janeiro suburbs, who has been feeling very sick of late (non-stop coughing). At first, she does not seem to aspire to anything more lofty in life than the opportunity to plan a luxuriously elaborate and expensive funeral for herself. Poor and sickly, her

funeral plans become her *modus operandis*. As the play unfolds, it becomes evident that she aims to take revenge against the unjust class hierarchy by having the most expensive and luxurious funeral possible to represent her and the society's most treasured fetish. Zulmira yearns to show off her superiority over Glorinha in death so that its fetishistic display also serves as form of revenge against her.

In the first scene, Zulmira goes to see Madame Crisálida, a card reader, to discover what her future holds. Rodrigues pokes fun at Zulmira's fetishism of mysticism, referring to what DaMatta calls mediumship. Although feeling very sick, instead of going to the doctor's, Zulmira goes straight to the card reader, who is made to look ridiculous by the way Madame Crisálida is described as image on stage:

De chinelos, desgrenhada, um aspecto inconfundível de miséria e desleixo. Atrás, de pé no chão, seu filho de dez anos. Durante toda a cena, a criança permanece, bravamente, com o dedo no nariz. Zulmira tosse muito. (733)

[Wearing slippers, disheveled, with an unmistakable aspect of misery and neglect. Behind her, standing barefoot, her ten-year-old son. Throughout the scene, the child remains, bravely, with a finger inside his nose. Zulmira coughs a lot.]

As expected after this unfavorable description, Madame Crisálida, instead of revealing something important about Zulmira's life (whether her husband will get a job or there is something wrong with her lungs), tells her about a certain blond woman without providing any concrete information to back it up. She just says: "Cuidado com a mulher loura!" (734) [Be careful with the blond woman!] This triggers Zulmira's hatred for the one blond woman she can think of in her life, Glorinha, which initially seems totally absurd. The fetishism of the dead, of mysticism, and of religious piety that are depicted here, resemble ironic commentary on the multiplicity of belief systems in

Brazilian society, especially after Zulmira is converted to *Teofilismo*. As was seen in the first scene, there is a sense of compensation and, at the same, backwardness of this type of blind religious piety. None of the characters appear to ultimately receive any kind of benefit by way of this belief system, which the fetish aids in conceptualizing on stage.

Zulmira later alleges that she first became motivated to take revenge against her cousin because Glorinha, after seeing Zulmira one day with her lover, Pimentel, suddenly stopped greeting her and snubbed her whenever they ran into each other on the street. This revelation makes her visit to the card reader even more trivial since her hatred for Glorinha started way before the card reader spoke. Like other female characters in Rodrigues' plays, Zulmira's own guilt for acting out her sexual frustrations and cheating on her husband is transformed into a fetishism of exaggerated chastity and religious piety, as in the embodiment of the dualism in the prostitute/nun dichotomy. Therefore, Glorinha is only used in the play to create both a contrast and an ideal in regards to Zulmira's confusing feelings.

As with many of Rodrigues' plays, the title *A Falecida* leads the audience to believe that a dead woman must be the main theme of the play. As audience/readers, the expectations triggered by the title are the way we will eventually discover why this woman is so obsessed with her own death and funeral and make us wonder whether she might die soon, by, or at the end of the play. As the story unfolds, we are bewildered by the ensuing occurrences and flashbacks, which comprise half of the play after Zulmira's death. The fact that her demise is made less important by a lack of climax or revelations further contributes to the conceptualization of fetishes as perennial trinkets.

Following DaMatta's interpretation regarding the type of relationship Brazilians

have with death, it is easy to understand why Nelson Rodrigues would put so much emphasis on a dead woman's life after death, almost ridiculing it. As DaMatta points out:

Também não precisaria mencionar o dia de Finados ou "dia dos mortos", data que, no Brasil, goza de imensa popularidade, ocasião em que, todas as famílias visitam o cemitério e lembram os "seus mortos" mais queridos ou mais recentes. Vivemos em um universo onde os vivos têm relações permanentes com os mortos e as almas voltam sistematicamente para pedir e ajudar, para dar lições de humildade cristã aos vivos, mostrando sua assustadora realidade. (107)

[Also no need to mention All Souls' Day or "Day of the Dead", a date that, in Brazil, enjoys immense popularity, at which time, all families visit the cemetery and remember "their dead". We live in a universe where the living has ongoing relationships with the dead and the souls return systematically to ask for help and to give lessons of Christian humility to the living, exposing a frightening reality.]

This same phenomenon is also seen in *Toda Nudez*, *Valsa N. 6*, *Boca de Ouro*, *Beijo no Asfalto*, *Perdoa-me*, and *Vestido de Noiva* in which the presence of the dead is even more strongly felt than the presence of the living, creating a strange expectation or lack thereof on the part of the characters who have relationships with the dead.

In terms of the theoretical framework that will be used to examine fetishism in this play, the fetishes of funeral and death serve as the Lacanian *objet petit a* both for fetishism as desire and its relationship with death/lack in Brazilian culture. As with the Lacanian concept of the *objet petit a*, and, in this case, the fetish object, there is a "thing" that we are made aware of as audience, which is Zulmira's funeral and the fact of her death in the title *The Deceased Woman*. As Lacan explains in defining *objet petit a*:

The *objet petit a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and,

secondly, that has some relation to the lack. (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, 112)

Or that “[this] is why Lacan argues the apparently chimerical position that the *objet petit a* is by definition an object that has come into being in being lost”⁴².

Zulmira will never experience her elaborate funeral (and could never do so) since it can only take place once she is dead. It also proves to be evasive both for her husband and her former lover becoming part of the dynamic of desire as object/image in the play as something that represents loss (while a respite from loss). Her husband feels obliged to obey his dead wife’s last wishes due to the belief of the power of the presence of the dead. But once he finds out she cheated on him with the man he is supposed to get money from, his motivation and his fetish change according to his own desires (stepping away from the collective fetishism of the dead to the fetishism of soccer). In the case of Tuninho, his feelings of winning a soccer match as a team fan affords him a temporary social and economic power he does not have in real life. However, as an *objet petit a*, it is founded on the principle that he can never “own” a soccer team, it is just a passing ritual:

O fetichismo é também um exemplo fundamental da dinâmica do desejo. Um desejo que conhecemos em nossa prática com todos os seus paradoxos. Em particular, no que diz respeito ao desejo, Freud partiu do desejo perverso. O desejo perverso nos dá a dimensão deste ser mágico, para além do objeto, a que pode se fixar toda uma série de fantasias idealizadoras. (171)⁴³

[Fetishism is also an example of the fundamental dynamics of desire. A desire to know in our practice with all its paradoxes. In particular, with regard to desire, Freud left the perverse desire. The perverse desire gives us the size of this magical being, beyond the object, you can set a whole series of idealizing fantasies.]

As in other plays by Nelson Rodrigues, a multitude of contradictory ideas

constantly clash with each other and the characters are never fully aware of the many different motivations and cultural pressures pulling them in diverse directions. As such, the fetish becomes this condensed performative object on stage, encompassing the many different elements in an object or object-like idea as image.

In fact, Zulmira embodies and directs her guilt, sexual pleasure, and the desire for social mobility all into one fetishism: the fetishism of her funeral, burial and grave. If she can muster all her energies to reach her goal and eventually die (even though she seems to have tuberculosis, she also acts like a hypochondriac so it is not clear in the play whether she contributes to her death due to her obsessive behavior towards a number of things), she might be able to get some respite from her agonies. As DaMatta describes in referring to death in Brazil:

Ou seja, a morte no Brasil é concebida como uma passagem de um mundo a outro, numa metáfora de subida ou descida – algo verticalizado, como a própria sociedade – e jamais como um movimento horizontal, como ocorre na sociedade americana, onde a morte é quase sempre encapsulada na figura de uma viagem aos confins, limites ou fronteiras do universo (Cf., para o caso brasileiro, Freyre, 1977: 84). (*A Casa & a Rua* 103)

[i.e., death in Brazil is conceived as a passage from one world to another, a metaphor of ascent or descent – something vertical, as society itself – and never as a horizontal movement, as in American society, where death is almost always encapsulated in the figure of a journey to the ends, limits or boundaries of the universe (cf., for Brazil, Freyre, 1977: 84).]

As with the hierarchical, vertical society in which Zulmira lives, her death will also provide the same possibility of attaining a higher social status. However, in life, she finds a glimmer of hope by fetishizing her funeral in order to not only rise to heaven after death but rise in the social scale on earth as well. By having a luxurious funeral, she hopes to gain the respect and envy of those around her. As DaMatta describes:

Assim, o outro mundo - o mundo dos mortos, fantasmas, espíritos, espectros, almas, santos, anjos e demônios - é também uma realidade social marcada por esperanças, desejos que aqui ainda não puderam se realizar pessoal ou coletivamente. No caso brasileiro, é um mundo de esperanças e de potenciais que a história e o rumo dos acontecimentos não fizeram com que se realizasse. É, conforme falamos cotidianamente, o “mundo do outro lado das coisas”, e, como quase tudo para nós tem um “outro lado” (porque tudo pode ter mais de uma leitura ou interpretação), o outro mundo pode aspirar à posição de ser esse “outro lado” revestido num tempo de eternidade. Um tempo que, a rigor, não passa e é tão fixo como são os nossos valores morais. Tempo que, em vez de durar ou passar, perdendo-se na memória, está aqui rigorosamente revertido, posto que neste “outro mundo” ele é uma “zona eternal”, para sempre relacionada às nossas mais esperançosas memórias e valores. Tempo, então, ligado “àquilo que não passa nunca”, como às vezes queremos e gostamos de dizer. (111)

[Thus the other world - the world of the dead, ghosts, spirits, specters, souls, saints, angels and demons - it is also a social reality marked by hopes, desires here that yet could not be realized personally and collectively. In Brazil, it's a world of hopes and potential of the story and turn of events did not cause to take place. It is, as we speak every day, "the world on the other side of things", and, like almost everything for us has an "other side" (because everything can have more than one reading or interpretation), the other world can aspire to the position of be the "other side" coated in a time of eternity. A time that, strictly speaking, is nothing and is as fixed as are our moral values. Time rather than last or pass, losing memory, here is strictly reversed, since this "other world" he is a "zone eternal", forever linked to our most hopeful memories and values. Time then on "that which does not pass ever", and how sometimes we like to say.]

We could also say that Zulmira's main fetish is not even her death, funeral, tomb or coffin (all encapsulated into one fetish), but the fixed idea she has in her mind that also becomes a fetish for the audience. Her fetish encompasses a number of elements from her life and society. Her relationship with her fetish changes yet remains strange and ambiguous, likewise revealing the *MacGuffin* strategy, originally coined by Alfred

Hitchcock to describe a cinematic device⁴⁴. Whereas the fetishistic images in *Doroteia* refer to a process of objectification of many different elements related to women besides presenting a myriad of images, all contained and referring back to one another in the fetishistic theatricality within the confines of the play, the images seen in *A Falecida* all seem to be pointing to something that cannot be seen. This is perhaps due to the fact that we see in this play a mixture of the mystical elements explored in other plays together with a more realistic register of the Carioca Tragedy, stripping the stage of the highly symbolic images seen in the mystical Plays, for example.

At a lecture given at Columbia University, Hitchcock states: “[We] have a name in the studio, and we call it the *MacGuffin*. It is the mechanical element that usually crops up in any story. In crook stories it is almost always the necklace and in spy stories it is most always the papers”. Interviewed in 1966 by François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock illustrated the term *MacGuffin* with this story:

It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says “What's that package up there in the baggage rack?”, and the other answers, “Oh, that's a *MacGuffin*”. The first one asks “What's a *MacGuffin*?” “Well”, the other man says, “It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands”. The first man says, “But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands”, and the other one answers, “Well, then that's no *MacGuffin*!” So you see, a *MacGuffin* is nothing at all⁴⁵.

As Slavoj explains in *Love thy symptom as thyself*, “[The] *MacGuffin* is *objet petit a* pure and simple: the lack, the remainder of the Real that sets in motion the symbolic movement of interpretation, a hole at the center of the symbolic order, the mere appearance of some secret to be explained, interpreted, etc” (24). In *A Falecida*, the main fetishes of the play, death, the funeral and the coffin, set the whole play into motion and continue to do so even after Zulmira's death, changing images and meanings as the

fetishes change and move along. However, as with the *MacGuffin/objet petit a*-fetish, they function as a secret to be explained, losing importance as an object per se after the adultery has been revealed, for example. Tuninho cannot hold on to the image of his wife's coffin as luxurious (which puzzled him even when she was still alive) after he finds out about her cheating on him, thus removing the fetishistic value of the dead as funeral.

Conversely, Tuninho's main fetishes turn out to be the money to pay for the funeral as revenge and soccer as redemption from everything. So, this lack, which the fetish-*objet petit a* might represent, is transformed into an obsession with money and the final score of the soccer match between Vasco and Fluminense at the end of the play.

Another aspect of the stage that contributes to the magnification of objects (whether ideas, relationships or elements in society) as fetishes is, paradoxically, the minimalist set design. Although *Dorotéia* is also presented on a bare stage, the objects of variable sizes, the contrasts, and the masks provide a rich display of images. In turn, in *A Falecida*, the stage set design is clearly minimal, as just mentioned, but is also artificially theatrical (purposefully showing that we are dealing with performance and theater). So, even though there is an emphasis on the use of colloquial language together with the portrayal of typical suburban characters from Rio de Janeiro, there is also a concerted effort to make that same reality appear obviously fictitious and unrealistic on stage.

As David George states in his book *The Modern Brazilian Stage*, Nelson Rodrigues is a master at creating archetypes out of ordinary types and he "cannot be judged according to the realist canon, whose rules of cause and effect the work suspends while it carries the reader into a mythical and archetypal universe" (130). At the same

time, he is also moving in the opposite direction by poking fun at the high theater originating in Europe and the United States, which oftentimes portrayed characters very far removed from Brazilian reality. Moreover, Rodrigues is emphasizing the lack in Brazilian society and the people who are always striving to accumulate more and more material goods and social status due to the anxiety associated with the scarcity of material wealth. Fetishizing a myriad of objects also appears as a compensation for this material lack, which the fetishizing of so many objects as an idea together with the paucity of objects as image on stage serve to confirm.

The rubrics are the first indication of the mix of archetypal and typical Brazilian characteristics to create images: “Teoricamente está desabando um aguaceiro tremendo. A moça está diante de um prédio imaginário. Bate na porta, também imaginária” (733) [Theoretically there is a gigantic downpour. The woman is in front of an imaginary building. She knocks on a door, also imaginary]. The theatricalization of these scenes along with their fetishization in the process of on-stage materialization could be considered “vulgar” but they also lead to a number of paradoxical interpretations: Tuninho, for example, by assuming a thinking pose (with reference to Rodin’s sculpture *The Thinker*) when in the bathroom (more precisely while sitting on the toilet) elevates him and his condition as well as trivializes high art as a fetishistic object. Other contrasting elements highlight the ambivalent quality of the different fetishes such as the story about beautiful horses leaving their feces behind after funerals, Zulmira’s mother finding out about her daughter’s death while scratching her hairy legs, and Glorinha dying her hair to become a peroxide blonde (emphasis on the idea of artificiality or mask).

Even though a person like Zulmira, or her brother-in-law, could never have afforded a psychoanalyst (since she affirms she can barely afford a doctor's visit), we hear the dialogue below (an interaction used as a commentary/chorus to the scene in the form of "other" and "brother-in-law" gossiping about Zulmira), to emphasize the juxtaposition of contradictory and absurd ideas in the play:

CUNHADO (de óculos e livro debaixo do braço) - Caso de psicanálise!

OUTRO - De quê?

CUNHADO - Psicanálise.

OUTRO (feroz e polêmico) - Freud era um vigarista! (747)

[BROTHER IN LAW. (in glasses and book under his arm) A case for psychoanalysis!

OTHER. For what?

BROTHER IN LAW. Psychoanalysis.

OTHER. (fierce and controversial) Freud was a crook! (747)]

The problem with only seeing the archetypal in Rodrigues' plays, a mistake committed by many of his critics and stage directors, is that we might be inclined to ignore the route filled with laughter and destruction that the plays also contain, all of which are neatly encompassed within the fetishistic imagery. The images are revealed at one and the same time as ridiculous as well as exemplifying an elevated art form, rendering the performances of Rodrigues' plays a veritable challenge.

Another aspect of fetishization as image is the manner in which the plays represent certain aspects of life on a variety of moral levels. Rodrigues portrays Brazil as a place wherein serious matters (such as death and love) are trivialized whereas the mundane (funerals, sports events, animal game, sexual acts) is awarded a higher status and instantly transformed into fetishes on stage, often being performed on the same plane as the more serious thematic. The "haves", so to speak, view their elevated

socioeconomic positions as justifications for committing the most violent and brutal acts, often exploiting others for their own selfish ends and fetishizing whatever and whomever they come into contact with (all to fulfill their own selfish desires). In turn, the “have-nots” also put aside their so-called moral convictions and ideas if there is the slightest chance of picking up some trinkets along the way or a fetish to satisfy the feeling of void/lack/emptiness.

For his part, Tuninho feels betrayed and for that reason takes revenge on Pimentel (by taking a good sum of money from him) and his dead wife by not giving her the elaborate funeral she so desperately wanted. At first, the obsession with getting the money and using it to gamble on a soccer match gains a fetishistic dimension for him. However, he becomes disillusioned even with the money he gets from winning the bet on the soccer match. Ultimately, he is the least narcissistic and selfish of all the characters in the play in that he gives away all the money he got from Pimentel by throwing it up in the air and shouting: “Casaca! Casaca! A turma é boa! É mesmo da fuzarca! Vassssco!” (779) Winning for him is gradually transformed into giving up the money as a fetishistic object.

As with any of Nelson Rodrigues’ plays, the double-meanings and revelations contained in the fetishes unearth a number of other themes after they are deconstructed. The funeral, the grave, and the death itself are fetishized (both by Zulmira and the funeral home workers), but not in order to preserve and repeat a traumatic experience (fetishism of racial confrontation as stereotype) as in *Black Angel*, but initially in order to attain a higher social level on earth and perhaps in the world of the dead, as an idealized fantasy. In *The Seven Kittens*, we are presented with the mechanics of the family structure along

with a patriarch acting like a machine, responsible for violent and traumatic situations and mechanisms, which are fodder for the creation of new fetishes, fomented within the constraints of the home and family as structure. In turn, the fantasy reenacted by the images of fetishism in the *The Deceased Woman* foments more and more images on stage, displaying the confusing expectations and situations of the different characters vis-à-vis one another and society at large.

In establishing the fetishism of the coffin and funeral in light of Zulmira's feelings of impending doom plus her hatred towards Glorinha and her own image as a sexual being, an ambivalent relationship forms between Zulmira and her fetish. On the one hand, she wants to die in order to obliterate her guilt and shame through annihilation. Glorinha represents the eyes of the others, of society, of her own guilt looking at herself, of religiosity:

An intensely painful experience, shame “follows a moment of exposure ,” an uncovering that “reveals aspects of the self of a peculiarly sensitive, intimate, and vulnerable nature” (Nathanson, “Timetable” 4). Shame sufferers feel in some profound way inferior to others— they perceive themselves as deeply flawed and defective or as bad individuals or as failures— and this internalized shame script grows out of repeated interactions with shaming parents or contemptuous others. At once an interpersonal and intrapsychic experience, shame derives from the shame sufferer's “vicarious experience of the other's scorn,” and, indeed, central to the shame experience is the “self-in-the-eyes-of-the-other” (H. Lewis, “Introduction” 15). (Bousoin 17)

On the other hand, she wants to gain something from her luxurious funeral besides death: a step or two up the social scale, redemption, and revenge. Her fetishism of her own death, coffin and funeral should all culminate in this veritable imagistic extravaganza in which all the anxiety she feels for being a woman, for being poor, and for having committed adultery would come together and triumphantly help her overcome and

compensate for her feelings of inadequacy and lack. To further complicate things, Zulmira cannot come to terms with her divided sexual feelings. She cannot have sex with her husband and love him at the same time although she might desire that. She cannot marry Pimentel, but yearns to have sexual encounters with him. Pimentel is rich and her husband is poor, creating complicated and conflicting expectations in Zulmira's mind.

Petra Ramalho Souto in her book *As Mulheres de Nelson* observes through other critics of Rodrigues' work that the playwright explores "a visão dicotômica da mulher na sociedade brasileira (puta/santa)"(29) [the dichotomous vision of women in Brazilian society (whore/saint)]. Souto concludes by interpreting the behavior of a number of female characters (but focusing on Aurora and Silene in *The Seven Kittens*) in Rodrigues *oeuvre* as essentially having two different facets, or dichotomous selves:

uma, de quem se espera retidão (leia-se retidão, virgindade e pureza, segundo os preceitos da época) mas que deseja entregar-se aos prazeres do sexo e a outra, 'mulher que faz a vida', mas deseja intimamente casar-se e ser mãe e esposa. (73)

[one, from who it is expected righteousness (read righteousness, virginity and purity, according to the precepts of the time) but who wants to surrender to the pleasures of sex and, the other, "woman who sells her body" (*in Portuguese, the literal translation of an expression to denote prostitution is "that does life", "from life"*), but who deep inside want to get married and be a mother and wife]

The female characters in the plays usually find themselves on one side of a moral stance while craving its exact opposite. Zulmira sees Glorinha as a competitor since she has become a mirror of what Zulmira would like to see in herself but could never attain. Zulmira proclaims: "A mulher de maiô está nua. Compreendeu? Nua no meio da rua, nua no meio dos homens!" (746) [The woman wearing a bathing suit is naked. Do you understand? Naked on the streets, naked in the middle of men!], or "Agora é que eu sou

fria, de verdade. Glorinha não me deixa amar” (767) [Now I am frigid, for real. Glorinha does not let me love]. To compensate for feelings of sexual impurity (due to committing adultery), she decides she would like to appear rich in death (which is a twisted form of compensation) in line with the idea of “commerce” imbued in her fetish, as seen in the quote by DaMatta. Commerce and monetary exchanges for social advancement and redemption in death take on a materiality despite their inherent immateriality.

Zulmira feels happy but becomes sad when she finds out her cousin no longer goes to the beach to hide her mastectomy, which then places her at an even higher level of sexual purity than before. But when she compares her own breasts and sexuality to Glorinha’s, Zulmira feels happy about that part of herself that is still associated with sexual desire. She also feels sadness since she wishes she could be at least as asexual in appearance as Glorinha seems to be.

In the case of Zulmira’s fetishistic obsession with Glorinha’s one breast (the one that has been removed) in the play intensifies the fetish as image since it reinforces the fetishistic contrast of owning something to avoid confronting what is missing. As pointed out in a quote from the article by Donia Mounsef entitled “The seen, the scene and the obscene: Commodity fetishism and corporeal ghosting” below, this is in fact what creates the fetish and makes it even more easily comprehensible. But because it is a fetish for Zulmira, the breast, which is absent (whose strong absence is a reminder of chastity as a virtue, chastity as masquerade, and chastity as the epitomic sign of female sexuality in this society) becomes a tool used to reveal the theatrical apparatus of society itself.

Donia Mounsef analyzes Janet Jackson’s exposition (whether staged or accidental) of one of her breasts, assuming she has two, during a show celebrating the

2004 Super Bowl. For Mounsef, the breast is a priori a fetish for the male gaze, which is also society 's gaze as male. However, when only one breast appears (but not fully) during a show at a major national sporting event when the breast is not expected to be fetishized (she refers to the fact that in pornography, for example, there is an a priori expectation to consider the breast a fetish. In this case, however, the naked breast comes as a surprise in this family-oriented scenario), it becomes superexposed and at the same time dissected and fabricated. Fabricated since it was practically invisible. The idea that the breast was exposed for a very short period of time (rendering it practically invisible) becomes a stronger reality than a view of the breast itself. Dissected, since it is taken out of the context of the person and her biological body and is elevated to the level of a fetish of something else. Foremost, like all fetishes, the appearance of the breast with no stereotypical racial or gender connotations is simply a façade.

The body part hidden [hidden since it is moved from the area of pornography or adult entertainment] from the fetishizing gaze cannot remain pure, clear, and without ambiguity, and thus, it provides a sense of euphoria of recognizable codes; this excessive bodily sign manifests various levels of complexity of die corporeal as mapped, configured, and traversed by various levels of control and discipline. The corporeal sign cannot derive its meaning relationally, independently of any inherent value. The body's inherent physical characteristics— based on natural, racial, sexual, ethnic assumptions—predetermine its functionality on the stage and differentiate it from other signs. Furthermore, in this particular case, racialized, sexed, and gendered identities refer back to a biological materiality at the same time as they reveal the constructedness of this very materiality. Perhaps, Jackson's performance makes us realize that the breast is a fabrication, organized not according to a historically or structurally progressive discovery of the body but as an already insecure and anxiously inconsistent artifact, which is merely capable of mimicking the idea of a real breast, even less serving as a fetishized sign of it. (255)

A take away from this quote, despite the differences in perspectives and time, is

the fact that the fetishized breast is an anxious artifact referring to something else than the real biological body. It carries with it the weight of an anxious insecurity of affirmation and, in *A Falecida*, Zulmira's aggressiveness of belonging, anxiously yearning for agency. Zulmira ultimately does not believe that the body as breast determines Glorinha's sexuality. Zulmira even asks her husband to seduce Glorinha believing she will ultimately fall for him and give up her apparent chastity, contained due to the lack of a breast. Zulmira's agency in this equation is that what most disturbs the male fetishizing gaze is Zulmira's fetishistic gaze towards the breast, which also dissects and fabricates it. Since hers is not the expected, typical gaze, it also elevates the breast to another level, making the audience more acutely aware of the structures of patriarchy, class and gender in society. The breast also gives Zulmira a level of agency through the fetish that she might not otherwise have been able to attain. Zulmira knows that the breasts are constructed forms of female sexuality in Brazilian society, which must be exposed to and hidden from the male gaze in the play between appearance and lack, presence and absence.

When deconstructing Zulmira's core fetishes (of death and chastity), none of her actions can be explained in a logical fashion. Rather, all her actions result from a myriad of reasonings and feelings laden with contradictions. She does not see any way out of this dichotomous reality since she has internalized two different psychological scenarios: If she continues acting out her sexual desires outside of marriage (since, for her, marriage should be considered as more of a sacred/asexual institution), she might one day be accused of acting like a prostitute. If she is faithful to her husband (who happens to also be poor), she is condemned to a life of material poverty and unhappiness.

In fact, Zulmira's hatred of her husband starts when she notices him washing his hands after having sex, which she interprets as a sign of repugnance towards her. On other occasions, Zulmira admits to feeling sick to her stomach when kissing him. Tuninho describes Zulmira's feelings towards him: "Mas como? – perguntei eu a minha mulher – você tem nojo de seu marido? Zulmira rasgou o jogo e disse assim mesmo: 'Tuninho, se você me beijar na boca, eu vomito, Tuninho, vomito!'" (756) [But how? I asked my wife – Do you loathe your husband? Zulmira revealed without any qualms and said: 'Tuninho, if you kiss me on the mouth, I'll vomit, Tuninho, vomit!'], or "Tudo, menos beijo! Beijo, não! Eu admito tudo em amor. Mas esse negócio de misturar saliva com saliva, não! Não topo! Nunca!"(789) [Everything but a kiss! A kiss, no! I admit everything in love. But this business of mixing saliva with saliva, no! I will never accept that! Never!].

She is thus trapped in a cycle of material wealth together with religious and ethical morality, which has completely clouded her reasoning and her ability to think things through while positioning herself as a female in this society (which she has still not figured out). Similarly to the nausea, the fetishism of "nojo" (also nausea towards her husband) serves the purpose of keeping her divided between cultivating purity within the sanctity of marriage according to the norms of Catholic morality or being sexually promiscuous on the street. Her fetishistic obsession with her coffin and funeral is so strong that she is not even afraid her husband might discover her affair with Pimentel, who asks her husband to pay for her funeral. She does not "get caught" in life but secretly wants to get caught in death.

From the third act on, the protagonist's focus changes. Zulmira dies at the end of

the second act, but she comes back in flashback episodes as described to Tuninho by Pimentel when he recounts her betrayal. Thus, the first two acts focus on an obsessive woman who fetishizes her funeral, death and grave. The irrelevance and superficiality of the whole situation is emphasized by the funeral home scenes and the interaction between Zulmira and the funeral home 's representative, who unabashedly flirts with her. The other employees also make jokes about and trivialize death as a mere commodity, which glaringly points to their sole motivation in selling the most expensive and ornate coffins for profit. They denigrate people according to how much money they are willing and able to spend on a funeral. Conversely, the employees seem to despise the rich, upper-class government officials to whom the employee Timbira proposes a reversal of positions in the hierarchical scale: “A solução do Brasil é o jogo do bicho! E, minha palavra de honra, eu, se fosse presidente da República, punha o Anacleto (bicheiro) como ministro da Fazenda” (789) [The solution for Brazil is the numbers game! And, I give you my word that if were president, I would make Anacleto (a numbers game dealer??) Minister of Finance].

To finalize, Tuninho's main fetish is soccer. As with death and funerals, soccer also provides the possibility of reaching equality or a higher status in society. As with any fetish-*objet petit a*, soccer is a means of attaining something else, of revealing something still unknown about a character, a void he or she might be trying to fill. As DaMatta points out:

Ademais, o futebol ensinou ao povo brasileiro, que vivia numa sociedade de senhores e escravos e até hoje vive num universo social de superiores e inferiores, que no campo e no jogo todos são iguais perante as regras que não podem mudar no seu decorrer (como ocorre na política) e que tem que ser por todos seguidas (diferentemente do que se sabe quando nos defrontamos com um sujeito rico ou do governo). Ao lado disso, o futebol

oferece às massas, antigamente destituídas de tudo, a identificação com grupos vitoriosos. Ele produz uma relação prazerosa e vitoriosa em vidas que jamais viram o gozo ou a superioridade.⁴⁶

[Moreover, soccer taught the Brazilian people, who lived in a society of masters and slaves, and today lives in a social universe of superior and inferior, that the field in the game and all are equal before the rules can not change in its course (as occurs in politics) and that has to be followed by all (unlike what we know when we are faced with a rich guy or the government). Beside this, football offers to the masses, once stripped of all identification with groups victorious. It produces a pleasurable relationship and victorious lives that never saw the enjoyment or the superiority.]

The key here is that soccer will not transform anyone's financial or social situation or create a feeling of superiority over others. It will help maintain the status quo in terms of what that means in reality by giving the soccer fans a type of agency, albeit briefly.

In "Ambiguidade Exemplar", Maria Lúcia Campanha da Rocha Ribeiro states that:

neste sentido, o recurso aos arquétipos, o discurso simbólico, o uso criativo do cliché, do slogan, da reiteração de composição dramatúrgica, para não falar da eficiência com que transforma a denúncia em situações de palco, evitando o recurso fácil da explicitação verbal, assumem proporção esclarecedora. ("Fortuna Crítica" in *Teatro Completo*, p.261)

[this sense, the use of archetypes, symbolic speech, the creative use of cliché, the slogan, the reiteration of dramaturgical composition, not to mention the efficiency with which the complaint turns into performance situations, easily avoiding the use of explicit verbal assume proportion enlightening.]

As Ribeiro succinctly explains, we can conclude that after analyzing both *Dorotéia* and *The Deceased Woman*, Nelson Rodrigues lavishly uses archetypes, symbolisms, clichés, slogans and cultural images as fetishes on stage in order to

deconstruct the many facets of repression and oppression in operation in Brazilian society. We have explored the specific images associated with femininity, women and the patriarchal society together with the conflicting aspects involved in Catholicism, religiosity, ritual, cultural manifestations and death. What I propose is that the fetishism of images proposes a creative and unique theatrical style quite challenging to stage. Limiting its scope to the Magaldian definitions without considering the complex, contradictory meanings relative to the many different objects employed on stage could impoverish the tenor of Rodrigues' theater, erroneously stressing what shockingly and exaggeratedly depicts the Brazilian reality over the deeper social and psychological complexities so creatively presented in his work

Notes to Chapter 2

³³Dino Felluga defines repetition compulsion as “the mind's tendency to repeat traumatic events in order to deal with them. The repetition can take the form of dreams, storytelling, or even hallucination. This compulsion is closely tied up with the death drive”. For the purposes of this analysis, fetishistic repetition compulsion occurs as a structural type of relationship either with objects or in performance. All manifestations are part of a type of performance that needs to be repeated. The author explains Freud’s exposition of the repetition compulsion as part of the death drive:

Freud had to acknowledge that “the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed” (18.20). Freud therefore concludes that one must theorize a “compulsion to repeat” that “seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides” (18.23), that is, the death drive. (“Modules on Freud: Transference and Trauma”. *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. [May 2012]. Purdue U. [April 2013]. <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetothory/psychoanalysis/freud5.html>>).

³⁴See Homi Bhabha’s definition of fetishism as stereotype explored in the Introduction and in Chapter 1.

³⁵The stereotype helps create a coherence that denotes essentialism such as “all women are whores”, or “all women are seductresses”, or “all blacks are wild”, or “all whites are superior”. These stereotypes are widely explored in Rodrigues’ plays, especially in his depictions of the female characters living through the inherent contradictions of having to be saints and whores at the same time. This essentialism is a fantasy of unity. For Bhabha, referring to Lacan, the Imaginary is that place in the mind where he or she is one with the mother. Language starts the movement toward separating the child from the mother along with the discourse of racism and patriarchalism. However, language makes this discourse even more unstable since it needs constant repetition to perpetuate its message to make sure the sign is not separated from the signifier. As a final note Bhabha does not explicitly connect fetishism as stereotype to fetishism of women or their bodies. I’ve made this leap here since it follows what I see as a similar structure.

³⁶According to Dipane Hlahlele, Bourdieu’s

Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170). In this sense habitus is created

and reproduced unconsciously, ‘without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration’ (ibid: 170).

³⁷The full Brazilian Civil Code of 1916 can be accessed at the site:
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101065113407;seq=7;view=1up;num=i>

³⁸Fatima Tardelli writes about women’s rights in Brazil, specifically the law, which is inherited from Portugal’s old civil code laws, about the man’s right to kill a woman if she is caught in adulterous behavior:

No âmbito jurídico, nas ‘Ordenações do Reino’ (legislação utilizada no Brasil antes do Código Civil de 1916), se a mulher com idade inferior a 25 anos se casasse sem a permissão de seu pai, era punida com a deserção (Título LXXXVIII), quando a mesma exigência não se aplicava a um filho homem com idade equivalente; o femicídio em caso de adultério era tolerado:

Do que matou sua mulher, póla achar em adultério.
Achando o homem casado sua mulher em adultério,
licitamente poderá matar assi a ella, como o adultero, salvo
se o marido for peão, e o adultero fidalgo, ou nosso
desembargador, ou pessoa de maior qualidade. Porém,
quando matasse algumas das sobreditas pessoas, achando-a
com sua mulher em adultério, não morrerá por isso mas
será degradado para África com pregão na audiência pelo
tempo, que os Julgadores bem parecer, segundo a pessoa,
que matar, não passando de três annos. (“Ordenações
Afonsinas”)

Um desavisado poderia dizer: ‘mas o enganado poderia matar ambos, não só sua esposa’. O diabo mora nos detalhes; em qualquer caso a mulher adúltera poderia ser morta; mas o cúmplice da adúltera só poderia ser morto se não fosse fidalgo. No Código Civil de 1916 também a mulher recebia tratamento diverso do que recebia o homem.

³⁹The compulsion to repeat in Freud’s text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* inaugurates his discussion of the death drive besides the pleasure principle as one of the regulating impulses in one’s life.

⁴⁰For references to female characters in Machado de Assis’ novels, see, for example, *O Enigma Mulher no Universo Masculino Machadiano* by Anélia Montechiari Pietrani.

⁴¹There are not page numbers on the only version. This citation can be found on Chapter II, B on the following link: <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/brazil.html#1>

⁴²<http://www.iep.utm.edu/lacweb/>

⁴³Salgado, Renata. “Sobre o Fetichismo”. Parte da série de Cartéis da Letra Freudiana no Rio de Janeiro acessado no site:

http://escolalettrafreudiana.com.br/UserFiles/110/File/carteis2009/10_fetichismo.pdf, p. 28

⁴⁴Hitchcock made the term and technique of *MacGuffin* known, with his 1935 film “The 39 Steps”, an early example of the concept.

⁴⁵<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin>

⁴⁶DaMatta, Roberto. “Entrevista com Roberto DaMatta”. Brasil 2014.

http://www.copa2014.turismo.gov.br/copa/copa_cabeca/detalhe/entrevista_damatta.htm

CHAPTER 3 Fetishism as Performance

Performance Studies scholars see all of social reality as constructed by ‘Doings’—actions, behaviors and events. No aspect of human expression—religious, artistic, political, physical, sexual—descends from On High, fixed for eternity. Instead, the various features of a culture’s life are contingent—they are shaped and reshaped in particular social and historical circumstances, in complex and lengthy processes. By way of analogy, then, a group’s alleged ‘nature’ is actually a series of performances: behaviors which are learned, rehearsed and presented over time. But PS’s decisive initiative, however, was to disentangle the terms ‘play,’ ‘act,’ ‘acting’ and ‘performance’ from an exclusive association with the performing arts. While everyone agrees that the 2005 Broadway staging of *The Glass Menagerie* is a performance, PS asserts that a theatrical dimension underlines all human activity. Therefore, any event, action, or behavior can be studied as a performance, and a scholar can investigate the various processes that go into making it up⁴⁷.

—Shana Komitee

Performance theory has expanded its scope in the last century to include the study of many aspects of society besides its obvious focus on the performing arts and theater, as Komitee points out above. So much so that it is an area often very difficult to define in just a few short sentences. In his article “Approaches” published in 1965, Richard Schechner was one of the first performance theory critics to expand the term to include other types of performances. Schechner describes the complexity of this “new” field in an article entitled “What is Performance Studies?”:

Is performance studies a “field”, an “area”, a “discipline”? The sidewinder snake moves across the desert floor by contracting and extending itself in a sideways motion. Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there. Such (in)direction is characteristic of performance studies. This area/field/discipline often plays at what it is not, tricking those who want to fix it, alarming some, amusing others, astounding a few as it sidewinds its way across the deserts of academia.⁴⁸

Performance Studies critic Shannon Jackson⁴⁹ has even adverted to the efforts made by critics, educators and students of performance studies to move away from the obvious theater realm to the many other forms of performance including the performative⁵⁰ in everyday life and in rituals. However, he also discusses that perhaps drama as performance and as text may have triggered the first fundamental questions on the “theatrical”⁵¹ aspects of everyday life, further solidifying the importance of drama as a continual frame of reference to performance studies as a theoretical framework. In addition, Raymond Williams writes:

I learned something from analyzing drama, which seemed to me effective not only as a way of seeing certain aspects of society but as a way of getting through to some of the fundamental conventions which we group as society itself. These, in their turn, make some of the problems of drama quite newly active. (20)⁵²

The aim of this short preamble is to justify the study of performance and fetish as performance itself in the theater realm of Nelson Rodrigues, which initially might seem too obvious an approach. Thus, some of the problems that I have begun to investigate in the author’s work have been related to the theme of performance itself as a theoretical framework through which to examine the larger implications of his theater. The main questions I would like to clarify are: Is it performance because it is theater or is it performance and the performative because it deals with theatricality and performance to elucidate other aspects of society and the fictional process?⁵³

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the definitions of fetishism as image, structure and performance crisscross each other besides being simultaneously present in the plays analyzed so far. The difference that has been accentuated is in the privileged

position occupied by one type of fetishism in each of the plays studied. In the case of *Toda Nudez Será Castigada* [*All Nudity Shall be Punished*], *Boca de Ouro* [*The Golden Mouth*], *O Beijo no Asfalto* [*The Kiss on the Asphalt*] and *Otto Lara Resende or Bonitinha, Mas Ordinária* [*Otto Lara Resende or Cute, but a Tramp*], the fetish of story as performance, together with the fetishism of performance itself and performance of fetishism gain predominance over all the other multitude of fetishes (both as structure and image) on stage. Besides, the privileged position of the idea of performance dominates the structure, characters and themes of those plays that directly allude to particular aspects of Brazilian social structure. Furthermore, as we have seen before, the performance of fetish as a type of repetition compulsion is also accentuated. In fact, I argue that fetishism cannot take place without the contract of performance (as double-consciousness), which is directly related to the contradictory positions taken by the fetishist condensed in the process of fetishizing (i.e., the fetish is and is not the phallus, is fulfilling and is not etc.).

Nelson Rodrigues' career as a journalist has certainly played a role in his explorations of the story and points of view in performance as a type of fetishism⁵⁴. From an early age Nelson Rodrigues perceives the paradoxical reality of newspaper writing. He is on the one hand required to write with a journalistic tone as descriptive mimicry of reality, while at the same time being aware of the necessity to make the stories appealing and dramatic to the public. Also, as a sensationalist newspaper reporter, he is required to fill in the blanks on stories he does not know much about, or even create stories out of photographic images. As Ruy Castro states in describing Nelson Rodrigues' early days as

police news reporter (a type of post dedicated to reporting on crimes) when he was only 14 years old,

Como se não bastasse, era estimulado, quase entimado pela chefia, a mentir descaradamente. (No futuro, Nelson lamentaria: “Hoje o reporter mente pouco, mente cada vez menos”.) De volta à redação, o reporter despejava o material na mesa do redator e este esfregava as mãos antes de exercer sobre ele os seus pendores de ficcionista. (47)

[If nothing else, was stimulated, almost intimidated by the head of the department, to lie shamelessly. (In the future, Nelson would regret: "Today the reporter lies, progressively less and less.") Back in the newsroom, the reporter poured the stuff on the desk of the journalist and he rubbed his hands before performing his leanings of a novelist on the page.]

In his plays, Rodrigues both accentuates the fictional aspects of the media in molding, highlighting, embellishing and choosing stories for the purpose of selling more newspapers while making reference to a particular feature of the Brazilian social structure, which requires performance (in the sense of a double-consciousness). Moreover, the media also encompasses public opinion and neighbors, an idea that people's private lives are enmeshed with their neighbors who are constantly vying to find secrets about one another.

In *A Casa & a Rua*, DaMatta delineates this “performative” quality of the Brazilian social structure (although he does not mention “performance” directly) as a society with three spatial realms of existence:

Tenho tentado revelar que, no caso da sociedade brasileira, o que se percebe muitas vezes como mudança ou diferença é apenas uma parte de um sistema diferenciado, uma constelação sociológica com pelo menos três perspectivas complementares entre si. Realmente, se entrevistarmos um brasileiro comum em casa, ele pode falar da moralidade sexual, dos seus negócios, de religião ou da moda de maneira radicalmente diferente daquele que falaria caso estivesse na rua. Na rua, ele seria ousado para discursar sobre a moral sexual, seria prudente ao mencionar seus negócios e ultra-avançado ao falar de moda. Provavelmente ficaria querendo ouvir

para se comunicar sobre religião. Em casa, porém, seu comportamento seria, em geral, marcado por um conservadorismo palpável, sobretudo se fosse um homem casado e falando de moral sexual diante de suas filhas e mulher! Pela mesma lógica, uma pessoa numa igreja, num funeral, num terreiro de umbanda ou num centro espírita poderia marcar suas atitudes com um discurso diferente daqueles requeridos pelos espaços da rua e da casa. Não é agora podemos saber - ao acaso que temos um ditado que diz: “Faça como eu digo, mas não como eu faço”. Entre dizer e fazer há um abismo que parece caracterizar todo sistema dotado daquilo que Weber chamou de “éticas dúplices”, ou seja, códigos de interpretação e norteamto da conduta que são opostos e valem apenas para certas pessoas, ações e situações. (33)

[I have tried to prove that in the case of Brazilian society, what is often perceived as a change or difference is just one part of a differentiated system, a constellation having at least three sociological perspectives complement each other. Indeed, if one interviewing Brazilian common at home, he can speak of sexual morality, their business, religion or fashion so radically different from that would speak if you were on the street. On the street, it would be bold to speak about sexual morality, it would be prudent to mention their business and the ultra-advanced talk about fashion. Probably would be willing to listen to communicate about religion. At home, however, their behavior would generally marked by a conservatism palpable, especially if a married man and talking sexual morality before his daughters and wife! By the same logic, a person a church, a funeral, a yard of Umbanda or a spiritual center could mark their attitudes with a speech different from those required the spaces of the street and the house. Not now we know - that the chance we have a saying: “Do as I say, not as I do”. Between say and do is a chasm that seems to characterize the whole system with what Weber called the “ethic duplexes”, i.e. codes and interpretation guide of conduct that are opposite and apply only to certain people, actions and situations.]

DaMatta goes on to say, alluding to the word “mask” (often associated with the performative or theatrical), that the individual living in this society is not in complete control of his differentiated behavior, since the variety of spatial dimensions are intrinsic to the modus operandis of society as a whole. Thus, the different ways of being do not a priori require a conscious choice on the part of the individual:

Não se trata de cenários ou de máscaras que um sujeito usa ou desusa – como nos livros de Goffman – de acordo com suas estratégias diante da

“realidade”, mas de esferas de sentido que constituem a própria realidade e que permitem normalizar e moralizar o comportamento por meio de perspectivas próprias. (33)

[This is not about scenarios or masks that uses a subject or disuses it – as in Goffman's books – according to their strategies in the face of "reality", but ball sense that constitute reality itself and allow moralizing and normalizing the behavior perspectives by themselves.]

In addition, in regard to Nelson Rodrigues' plays, it can be said that, according to DaMatta, Brazilians learn and practice a sense of performance of performance of rituals, belief systems and behavior from an early age. This profound sense of performance becomes comfortable as the individual learns to navigate these realms without completely controlling them. It is a type of double consciousness⁵⁵, which is the direct opposite of any kind of artificiality or conscious manipulation, an awareness of the multiplicity of ethics and spatial realities one must inhabit in order to navigate in this scenario.

Marvin Carlson adds to this concept of performance, by saying that “according to Bauman, all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action” (5). An actor on stage might know he is performing a character that is not himself outside that realm, for example, but for the moment he is acting, a good actor momentarily believes he is that character, while being constantly aware he is striving to play an ideal of a character, while at the same time knowing he is someone else. In the plays, this quality of the Brazilian man is exaggerated to the point that the characters actually orchestrate and become highly aware of this aspect of the society. They, in fact, have a type of obsession or compulsion which he or she cannot control pushing him or her towards a direction he or she might not want to go if asked. They often talk to oneself or to the audience or the author uses the scenery or

imaginary props to bring the performative quality to the fore. In *Album de Familia* [*Family Album*], for example, the “speaker”, the author says in the rubrics, is “public opinion” (521). He functions as the narrator, but his narration does not correspond to what we see happening on stage. He then acts as a reminder of the performative quality of the play and characters, and the need for the audience to always be aware to not believe in appearances.

In turn, for DaMatta, the key to understanding Brazilian social relations and structure is in the “in-betweeness”, the study of that which is connecting and relating, which could additionally be defined as the main characteristic of performance as a site of knowledge and as an in-between place in which one migrates from one reality to another.

Em vez de serem alternativas, com um código dominando e excluindo o outro como uma ética absoluta e hegemônica, estamos diante de codificações complementares, o que faz com que a realidade seja sempre vista como parcial e incompleta. Por causa disso é que também gostamos de falar, no Brasil, de que “tudo tem um outro lado”.... Digo, então, que o segredo de uma interpretação correta do Brasil jaz na possibilidade de estudar aquilo que está “entre” as coisas. Seria a partir dos conectivos e das conjunções que poderíamos ver melhor as oposições, sem desmanchá-las, minimizá-las ou simplesmente tomá-las como irreduzíveis. Afirmo, posto que isso é um ensinamento básico da antropologia social que pratico, que o estilo brasileiro se define a partir de um “&”, um elo que permite batizar duas entidades e que, simultaneamente, inventa o seu próprio espaço. (16)

[Instead of alternatives, with a code and excluding the other dominating as an absolute ethical and hegemonic, we face encodings complementary, which means that reality is always seen as partial and incomplete. Because this is what we like to talk in Brazil that “Everything has a flip side” I say, then, that the secret of a correct interpretation of Brazil lies in the possibility of studying what is “between” things. It would be from the connectives and conjunctions we could see better oppositions, without cutting them, minimize them or just take them as irreducible. I say, since it is a basic teaching of social anthropology I practice, the Brazilian style is defined from a "&", a bond that allows baptize two entities and that simultaneously invents its own space.]

For Carlson,

in this more modern view, play, reality and culture are all involved in a continually shifting pattern of concepts and practices that condition each other and rather than attempt to separate or privilege any of those terms, the critic or theorist of human activity should have as a goal the explanation of “how this nature-culture manifests itself in different historical and cultural contexts”. (29)

Thus, I argue that there is something intrinsically performative in Brazilian social behaviors as interpreted by DaMatta. It is this conglomeration of factors in performance theory, together with a similar and more specific focus into the relational aspect of Brazilian society (DaMatta), in addition to Rodrigues’ exaggeration of performance as a thematic and structural element in his plays that will open the door for this chapter.

Besides, by privileging performance as a type of double consciousness within the plays’ narratives as well as for the sake of the spectator, Nelson Rodrigues also innovates in his theatrical narrative style. This double consciousness represents the ability of the characters to be aware they are actually performing, or that there might be another way of being that could be an ideal or rather a reality they are hiding. It also represents the spectators’ ability to know there might be two or even more than two versions of a story. It provides the audience with the privileged position of never being completely immersed in the stories as they unfold while remaining skeptical of all the “reality” that is being presented to them.

Another important aspect to consider when looking at fetishism as performance or fetishism of performance, is in the theatricality of the plays themselves. As we have seen, the larger commentaries on the psychology of the characters and the impact of typically

Brazilian societal mores are deeply embedded in the theatrical and narrative structures of his theater.

According to Angela Leite Lopes, Nelson Rodrigues has long been viewed by critics from the vantage point of opposite extremes. For conservatives, “seu teatro é imoral, povoado de incestos e de obsessões mórbidas” [Your theater is immoral, village of incest and morbid obsessions] (35); For liberals, “para a esquerda, inclusive, é um teatro reacionário, que só fala de paixão, esquecendo os determinantes sociais e políticos que regem a vida dos indivíduos” [to the left, including a theater is reactionary, that only speaks of passion, forgetting the social and political determinants that govern the lives of individuals] (35). She adds that these two extremes neglect “a questão central colocada por sua obra, ou seja, a experiência artística e teatral como experiência humana, social e política original” [the central question posed by his work, i.e., experience artistic and theatrical experience as human, social and political original] (35). Lopes continues her discussion concerning the impact of Nelson Rodrigues’ plays on the new theater scene he helped found by exploring how many of the theater movements that came after the performance of *The Wedding Dress*, failed to emphasize the aesthetic nature of theater but rather concentrated on the content of what was said, veering towards the political. She points to examples of theater that focuses on the oppressed and marginalized in society while maintaining a realistic format in terms of scenery, dialogue and structure.

To the contrary, Rodrigues proposes a vision of theater onto itself that Lopes affirms most theater companies have by and large neglected to explore in the staging of his plays. She claims that most theater companies have focused on the contents of the plays, but have ignored the inexorable link between the aesthetics, performance and the

content in all of the author's plays. The author's metafictional commentaries, the plays' overabundance of conscious performatic instances to comment on the process of performance itself (be it as theater or in life), have generally been overlooked by overemphasizing the text and content of the play, as opposed to their format. For Lopes, you cannot separate those qualities from one another in Rodrigues' plays without impoverishing them.

In some of Rodrigues' plays, point of view and story telling are explored on the level of the theater staging, by confusing the truth of what is being enacted. In *O Vestido de Noiva* [*The Wedding Dress*], for example, the different planes of the narrative (memory, hallucination and reality) offer different conflicting perspectives on the dying woman's story, sometimes attributing greater value and weight to the memory and hallucinatory parts of the stage than to the so called reality plane. Magaldi, in his introduction to "Teatro Completo", affirms,

Os planos da realidade, como é fácil observar, tem a função específica de fornecer as coordenadas da ação, indicando o tempo cronológico linear da história. Ao reduzi-lo aos elementos essenciais, sempre através de *flashes*, Nelson quis deixar bem claro que eram outras suas ambições artísticas. O que povoa o palco são os planos da memória e aluninação-campo exploratório privilegiado pelo autor. (18)

[The planes of reality, as it is easy to observe, have the specific function of providing the coordinates of the action, indicating the chronological time of a linear history. By reducing them down to the essential elements of the plot, always through *flashes*, Nelson wanted to make clear that his artistic ambitions were in another dimension of reality. What fills the stage with life are the planes of memory and hallucination-exploratory realms which are privileged by the author.]

In others, journalism and the media manipulate the "truth" in order to create a new reality. However, in most of the plays, the audience never actually finds out what the

reality behind the performative is, but the process of construction itself. i.e., in general, in a type of double-consciousness of performance, there is an ideal or reality to which the actual is contrasted. In the plays, the ideal or reality also seem to contrast with something else, making the truth, ideal or reality of a very amorphous nature. In *The Wedding Dress*, Rodrigues explores the double consciousness of the main character, who watches the performance of her funeral, as Nelson describes in his own words (despite the possible financial failure he could incur by staging such an abstract concept):

Imaginei, para *Vestido de Noiva*, o processo de ações simultâneas em tempos diferentes. Uma mulher morta assistia ao próprio velório e dizia do próprio cadáver: ‘Gente morta como fica’. Morrerá assassinada em 1905, e contracenava com a noiva de 1943. Eu acreditava muito no êxito intelectual, mas acreditava ainda mais no fracasso de bilheteria. (*O Reacionário*, p. 128)

[I imagined, for *The Wedding Dress*, the process of simultaneous actions at different times. A dead woman attending the funeral itself and said the cadaver itself: ‘Dead people as is’. Died murdered in 1905, with the bride and contracenava 1943. I really believed in intellectual success, but believed even more in box office failure.]

In the present chapter, I will thus explore how these stories, ideas, belief systems all gain reality by being performed as performance and being fetishized as such. What becomes a fetish is not just the stories that are being performed, but the act of performing itself, which requires a double consciousness (not only on the part of the spectators but by the characters themselves). Some characters might not have the privilege of perceiving the absurdity of fetishizing stories, ideas or belief systems. Others, however, become master performers and creators of this type of fetish and are able to become immersed in the story while simultaneously orchestrating a performance by themselves or others. The manipulation and performance of stories actually motivate and help the characters construct realities, to the point that they become fetishes both to the characters and to the

audience. Therefore, it is precisely through the pleasure of creating and manipulating reality that fetishism is going to both rest and arrest the fetishist's gaze. Even though some characters or audience members might agonize over this compulsion to construct or deconstruct reality, this same compulsion might be pleasurable (a type of *jouissance*⁵⁶ in the Lacanian sense). This compulsion creates an audience pact between the knowledge that this performance is not the only reality and the characters' temporary belief in the full tenuous performative space.

We will take an overall look on how stories, which are consciously performed become a form of social and psychological control. For Louise Kaplan,

I am arguing that the fetishism strategy aims to keep human beings enslaved to cultural norms. Fetishism, as a strategy or item of cultural discourse, is a servant of authoritarianism. The fetishism strategy works to insure that the law is upheld. A central principle of the fetishism strategy is to guarantee that creative energies and vitalities are stifled, perhaps even murdered if necessary. Since another crucial aspect of the fetishism strategy is masquerade, it is almost impossible to discern in any specific instance, or at any given moment, whether eroticism is regulating and taming violent and destructive urges or whether the death drive is insinuating its presence by painting itself in erotic colors. And this uncertainty haunts the pages of *Cultures of Fetishism*. As we go along we shall also learn to tolerate and appreciate the value of uncertainty. Certainty collaborates with the principles of the fetishism strategy. A toleration for uncertainty is the ally of the essential human spirit that opposes and undermines the fetishism strategy. (29)

When looking at the most sexualized forms of fetishism, together with the common definition of the words by referencing popular religious relics and traditions, it could be affirmed that Nelson Rodrigues is performing the fetishism strategy as a means of cultural discourse, which is essentially authoritarian and is performed to maintain the status quo. In fact, the characterization of characters such as Ritinha and Maria Cecilia (in *Cute, but a Tramp*) as the stereotypical mix of two extremes (prude versus whore)

embodies the fetishism of the female body, from the patriarchal standpoint. However, fetishism gains new vitality and becomes a form of commentary plus “positively uncertain” when the characters fetishize the act of performing certain roles themselves, thereby enacting the performative nature of fetishism itself. Ritinha and Maria Cecilia, for example, even though manipulated by different men into becoming something (a performance of an idealized prude or of a very sexually promiscuous woman), they ultimately act out their fantasies and own their performances.

Victor Rosa, in his book on writer Adriana Lisboa touches upon an aspect of women writings in Brazil, which goes in tandem with Nelson Rodrigues’ narrative style and the need to perform certain roles or digressions:

Mas esse silêncio também está relacionado com uma impossibilidade. Há algo no fragmento citado que não pode ser dito, por uma insuficiência da palavra. Uma melancolia (palavra insuficiente) que não pode ser descrita, não pode ser presentificada, representada. Logo, o silêncio surge como possibilidade de fazer aparecer o que não pode ser mostrado. Ou, como diz a voz narrativa: “[...] enxergar todas as palavras que não são ditas” (p.48). Paradoxalmente, o calar surge como única forma de dizer. (1)

[But this silence is also related to an impossibility. There is something in the fragment cited that cannot be stated, because of an insufficiency of the word. A melancholy (insufficient word) that cannot be described, that cannot be reified, represented. Hence, silence emerges as a possibility for making apparent that which cannot be shown. Or, as the narrative voice says: “to see all the words that cannot be said” (48). Paradoxically, silence emerges as the only way of speaking.]

In all of the plays, the female characters are often silenced by patriarchal impositions of what they should be and do. This silence takes the form of an acting out, a performance, a double-consciousness. Initially, the female characters gain a certain power to actually fetishize when in fact they tend to be the object of fetishization within the traditional patriarchal fetishizing code. They also deconstruct the process of being

fetishized by revealing its artificiality. In a culture that over sexualizes the female body and at the same time absorbs Catholic sexual morality, a creative solution to this incongruity might be to accept both scenarios, to construe multiple spatial and moral dynamics acting simultaneously.

In *Bonitinha*, ethics is fetishized as a series of different sets of behaviors. The two extreme poles of good and bad (and other dichotomous value systems such as saint vs. whore) are performed and change character throughout the play; In *Beijo*, the story itself is fetishized to the point of destruction of the life of the main character and actually materialized on the media, posters, slowly silencing and killing the vitalities of the main character. In this case, the construction of “truth” is more important than truth itself (which proves to be illusory); In *Boca*, the stories that Guigui tells are all treated as the truth on stage and after the 3rd story, it is impossible to find where the “truth” is; Boca is fetishized as a multifaceted and complex mythologized figure; In *Toda Nudez*, Geni performs her story, she fetishizes the reality, by showing the many different stories as fetishes or belief systems as fetishes.

Long before fetishism was named as a perversion of the sexual life, religious pundits, anthropologists, philosophers, poets, and economists employed the concept of fetishism to illuminate a vast assortment of cultural activities. A recurring theme in all these disparate ventures into the frailties and vagaries of humanity has been the duplicity inherent in fetishism. This duplicity is expressed most clearly in the fetish object, whose concrete substantiality is mistaken as a sign that the object embodies some living substance or spiritual essence, when, in fact, that **very materiality and tangibility represents decay, de-vitalization, and morbidity**. (my emphasis, Kaplan 108)

Fetishism of stories is both a form of theatricality and a theatrical device that are used to comment on the process of creating stories on stage and in life. As in many of

Nelson Rodrigues' plays, a number of the stories are performed and fetishized so as to bind and control the other or as a response to a certain action included in Kaplan's previous definitions of fetishism. Others will perform stories as a cathartic or a creative expression and a type of agency. There is vitality for the characters that are aware of the stories being performed, but it is ultimately used as a means to deconstruct and manipulate reality, as we see as one of the characteristics of fetishism articulated in the above quote. The vitality and pleasure the performance evokes are all temporary, leading, in most cases, to either death or destruction. In *Mulher sem Pecado* [*Woman without Sin*], for example, the husband makes up the story of his being paralyzed as well as orchestrate a possible revelation of adultery by his wife in order to ultimately find proof whether his wife is a "saint", although he ends up achieving the opposite effect. His overarching jealousy and mode of control through a fetishistic performance is ultimately responsible for destroying his marriage. Further, in *Bonitinha*, Maria Cecilia's story (together with Peixoto's manipulation) also concludes by having them both killed. In *Boca*, Guigui does not gain anything from her fetishistic staging, but a morbid portrayal and performance of death and killings. Even *Black Angel*'s Ismael, performs the stereotypical definitions of his role as black and his wife as white, which ultimately leads them both to suicide and murder. Apart from *Bonitinha*, where the characters of Ritinha and Edgard seem to be able to finally choose life (and a type of moral ethic) after the performance of being bad morally, most other fetishes of stories in Rodrigues' plays end in destruction or death.

In one of his chronicles entitled "Complexo de Vira-latas" [Mutt Complex], Nelson Rodrigues claims that Brazilians have a peculiar complex of inferiority that bars

them from becoming great soccer players on the one hand and at the same time propels them into that goal.

A pura, a santa verdade é a seguinte: - qualquer jogador brasileiro, quando se desamarra de suas inibições e se põe em estado de graça, é algo de único em matéria de fantasia, de improvisação, de invenção. Em suma: - temos dons em excesso. E só uma coisa nos atrapalha e, por vezes, invalida as nossas qualidades. Quero aludir ao que eu poderia chamar de “complexo de vira-latas”. (*A Sombra das Chuteiras Imortais*, 51)

[The pure, holy truth is this: - any Brazilian player, when you untie their inhibitions and puts himself in a state of grace, is something unique in terms of fantasy, improvisation, inventiveness. In short - we have gifts in excess. And there is only one thing in our way, which sometimes invalidate our qualities. I want to allude to what I might call “mutt complex”.]

Nelson Rodrigues presents two avenues of performance to deal with a type of anguish of existence (to respond to and deal with inferiority complexes, racial discrimination, power structures, crushing patriarchal functions, repressive governments, rigid social structures, and multiple ethics of behavior/ethical codes). The author affirms the performative quality of Brazilian culture with its infinite possibilities to find creative solutions to deal with seemingly immovable power and regulatory structures (such as by developing a unique style of playing soccer, which, while not directly confrontational, is highly creative, even ingenious, and enormously effective when performed). Conversely, he is sharply critical of the Brazilian media and their patriarchal stance in the way they hypocritically manipulate information for the sake of profit and power, never fearing or taking into account the consequences this skewed information might have on the individuals affected. According to the author, the media is an arbitrary type of power based on creating a scandal, a story, something out of nothing, as seen in *Beijo*.

We see characters like Geni or Guigui, who, feeling oppressed and unable to express themselves, take the opportunity to perform in an attempt to find meaning as well as a type of stardom and importance they could not otherwise achieve. In turn, they also perform in order to inflict violence upon a patriarchal society (and specific male characters) that has oppressed them beyond measure. Even though they become marionettes in the hands of others and the media, they are able to use that manipulation and transform it into something they own and have at least a modicum of control over. In the following sections, we will investigate the fetishism of performance in the above plays in more detail.

Bonitina, Mas Ordinária [Otto Lara Resende or Cute, But a Tramp]

Despite the coarse picture of humanity and particularly Brazilians Nelson Rodrigues portrays in this play, it remains one of the very few in which “love” conquers all and prevails in the end in the face of powerful monetary and social interests to the contrary. All the characters are aware of the performative qualities of their choices and stories, which are slowly revealed as orchestrated actions throughout the play, leading up to, at the end of the play, a type of catharsis and, consequently, awareness or realization.

In *Bonitinha*, the performances of certain “character” types do not, as might be expected, hide a reality that would eventually uncover something completely different about the character (e.g., a revelation) that would be the “key” to their fetishistic nature. The denouement precipitates a choice of action and a refusal to continue the fetishistic performance. However, the burning of the check by Edgard continues with his double

consciousness knowing that while he might be acting ethically “good”, his is fully aware of his “immoral” tendencies.

The first performative aspect of the play is in the title itself, which are either “Otto Lara Resende” or “Bonitinha mas ordinária”. Otto Lara Resende was a friend of Nelson Rodrigues, a well-known journalist, to whom he confers the sentence in the text “O mineiro só é solidário no câncer”. Nelson Rodrigues asks the audience to choose between one title or the other or perhaps accept the double title as a provocation for our desire as audience to know the motivations behind the optional titles.

The sentence “o mineiro só é solidário no cancer” [the mineiro (someone from Minas Gerais state in Brazil) is only compassionate in cancer] becomes a means to manipulate Edgard to marry for money even though the meaning of the sentence becomes somewhat confusing during the play and even changes meaning depending on the situation. Edgard claims that the sentence was uttered by the real-life journalist Otto Lara Resende, pointing to another performance of performance within the play. Otto, in interviews, always claimed that he never uttered this sentence and that Rodrigues had simply made it up.

The story develops around three different family nuclei: Werneck’s, Ritinha’s, and Edgard and his mother’s. In the first scene, Peixoto, son-in-law and employee of Dr. Werneck’s as well as Edgard’s co-worker, asks Edgard if he could act out the role of a “mau-caráter” (bad character) since he, Peixoto, “needs” one, to which Edgard responds:

EDGARD - O mineiro só é solidário no câncer. Mas olha a sutileza, não é bem o mineiro, ou não é só o mineiro. É o homem, o ser humano. Eu, o senhor ou qualquer um, só é solidário no câncer. Compreendeu?

PEIXOTO - E daí?

EDGARD - Daí eu posso ser um mau-caráter. E pra que pudores ou escrúpulos se o homem só é solidário no câncer? A frase do Otto mudou a minha vida. Quero subir, sim, quero vencer. (1010)

[EDGARD - The *mineiro* is only compassionate in cancer. But look at the subtlety, it is not exactly the mineiro, or it is not only the mineiro. It is man, the human being. I, you, or anyone, is only compassionate in cancer. Do you understand?

PEIXOTO - So what?

EDGARD - So I can be a bad character. And for that scruple or compunction if the man is only in supportive cancer? The sentence of Otto changed my life. I want to climb, yes, I want to win.

Again, Peixoto needs someone to perform the role of a “bad-character” type, and Edgard seems to need that too, as seen in sentences such as “I could be a bad character” (996), implying he could perform the bad character type. The main sentence (“o mineiro...”) is a parody of Dostoevsky’s “If God does not exist, everything is permitted”⁵⁷. Peixoto wants to know if Edgard would accept an arranged marriage to cover up an accident that occurred to the employer’s daughter, Maria Cecilia. “Peixoto: Esta menina sofreu um acidente, um acidente de tipo especial, estuprada por cinco crioulões em uma estrada deserta” [Peixoto: This girl had an accident, a special type of accident, raped by five crioulões on a deserted road] (995). Edgard vehemently wants to perform the bad character type and embody the role described in Otto’s sentence.

Edgard’s main fetishism turns out to be the obsession to perform the role of the bad character. It is important to remember that fetishism requires a type of relationship where the fetishist knows that the fetish is something and at the same time is not or has the potential to not be (be it the “other”, the “fulfillment”, “bad character”). Peixoto pretends he is just helping his boss and father-in-law by performing the role of Werneck’s right man, which, as we shall see, is definitely not the case either. In the first scene of the

first Act, Peixoto asks Edgard: “É hora de rasgar o jogo. De tirar as máscaras” [It's time to rip the game. Taking the masks] (995). Peixoto seems to think that Edgard was playing the good guy as mask (performance), or acting as ethically good in the work environment, while maintaining a different type of ethics somewhere else. What is important for us is observe the idea that he would immediately change personality for what is considered “bad” morally if it was for the right reason, perhaps any Brazilian would be ready to change masks (not just take off one), as if it was the most natural occurrence (the idea of the rogue type, multiple ethics of behavior). Peixoto even proclaims: “No Brasil, quem não é canalha na véspera, é canalha no dia seguinte” [In Brazil, who is not on the eve rascal, scoundrel is the next day] (998). In fact, for Rodrigues, there is “no canalha absoluto” [absolute scoundrel], so Peixoto himself, proves to be a more complex figure, proving that his fetishism is the performance of the bad character type in order to also fulfill the sexual desires of Maria Cecília.

Though, at first, it seems like Edgard is faced with an ethical question, since he is not completely comfortable with the idea of acting a certain way (perhaps morally questionably) just for money: either he chooses to be a bad fellow, marries for money and forgets his real attraction to Ritinha (who performs the good/nice-girl image), or decides to be honest and good by marrying Ritinha, whatever the financial circumstances might be. The ethical questions at hand get muddled as the play unfolds since all the characters are performing something about themselves that goes beyond what is initially believed. Maria Cecilia turns out to be someone Edgard is genuinely attracted to and Ritinha, someone that deceives Edgard into believing she is a “good” girl. Marrying Maria Cecilia could imply a loss of freedom and being manipulated and humiliated by his boss, who is

also performing a ritual of power and torture by using his money and his daughter's beauty to lure someone from a poor family into a humiliating situation of subservience. For Magaldi, Rodrigues is proposing a dichotomic set of choices in the beginning of the play, which obviously get more complicated and less black and white as the events start unfolding:

Nos termos essenciais, a equação poderia assim reduzir-se: desamor, interesse, fortuna, de um lado; e, de outro, amor, desinteresse, miséria. Ou vida fácil, resignação à materialidade; e vida difícil, encontro da espiritualidade. Imanência versus transcendência. (106)

[According essential, equation could thus be reduced: disaffection, interest, property, on the one hand and, on the other hand, love, selflessness, misery. Or easy life, resignation to materiality, and difficult life, against spirituality. Immanence versus transcendence.]

For the purposes of our analysis, the dichotomic dimensions which often accompany the first stereotypical myths and belief systems of Brazilian society (many from the religious ethics) presented in Rodrigues' plays, contribute to the double consciousness of all the characters and the contract of performance as fetishism. In the case of Edgard, although contradictory, they seem to be on the same plane of possibility, otherwise he would not be in doubt. In *A Casa & a Rua*, DaMatta elaborates on the double ethic (many times contradictory) as an accepted morality in Brazilian society:

Realmente, se entrevistarmos um brasileiro comum em casa, ele pode falar da moralidade sexual, dos seus negócios, de religião ou da moda de maneira radicalmente diferente daquele que falaria caso estivesse na rua. Na rua, ele seria ousado para discursar sobre a moral sexual, seria prudente ao mencionar seus negócios e ultra-avançado ao falar de moda. Provavelmente ficaria querendo ouvir para se comunicar sobre religião. Em casa, porém, seu comportamento seria, em geral, marcado por um conservadorismo palpável, sobretudo se fosse um homem casado e falando de moral sexual diante de suas filhas e mulher! Pela mesma lógica, uma pessoa numa igreja, num funeral, num terreiro de umbanda ou num centro espírita poderia marcar suas atitudes com um discurso diferente daqueles requeridos pelos espaços da rua e da casa. Não é agora podemos saber - ao

acaso que temos um ditado que diz: “Faça como eu digo, mas não como eu faço”. Entre dizer e fazer há um abismo que parece caracterizar todo sistema dotado daquilo que Weber chamou de “éticas dúplices”, ou seja, códigos de interpretação e norteamento da conduta que são opostos e valem apenas para certas pessoas, ações e situações. (32)

[Really, if interviewing a Brazilian joint home, he can speak of sexual morality, its business, religion or fashion so radically different from that which would speak if you were on the street. On the street, it would be bold to speak on sexual morality, it would be prudent to mention their ultra-advanced business and to talk about fashion. Probably would be willing to listen to communicate about religion. At home, however, their behavior would generally marked by a conservatism palpable, especially if a married man and talking about sexual morality before his daughters and wife! By the same logic, a person in a church, a funeral, a yard of Umbanda or a spiritual center could mark their attitudes with a speech different from those required by the spaces of the street and the house. Not now we know - we have to chance a saying: “Do as I say, not as I do”. Between saying and doing there is a chasm that seems to characterize the whole system with what Weber called the “double ethic duplexes”, i.e., interpretation and guiding codes of conduct that are opposite and apply only to certain people, actions and situations.]

In the play, Rodrigues condenses the idea of double ethics in the figure of Edgard, who feels anxious and confused by the different types of ethics, especially in what concerns the inequality between who has the power to choose between ethics, and who might become a victim of a system of multiple ethics.

Ritinha is effectively the head of the household of a family of women. As the oldest sister, she works hard to take care and educate her three younger ones: Aurora, Dinorah and Nadir, all of whom live with their mother, Dona Berta, who went crazy due to a traumatic episode in her past. Since then, Dona Berta acquired the strange habit of walking backwards. We are initially led to view Ritinha as overworked and sacrificing her personal life to protect her sisters’ virginity, therefore, from men in general (the same fetishism of virginity elaborated on in *Doroteia* and *Os Sete Gatinhos*, for example).

Ritinha has the clear understanding that to ascend to a higher social class, her sisters have to marry richer men than themselves, have an official church ceremony, and, above all, be virgins. Once again, social hypocrisy is highlighted as being closely tied to money, power, and Catholic morality. Yet, there is no guarantee that virginity in itself will ensure marriage to a man in good social standing and greater wealth and position.

Ritinha has sex in exchange for money; but, in front of Olegário, she fetishizes her performance of a “prude”. We soon discover that Ritinha was ostensibly forced into the life of a prostitute to pay for a crime her mother was accused of but in fact did not commit and was therefore innocent (according to the story Ritinha tells). She seems to have two dichotomic personalities that are complementary yet contradictory at the same time. She wants to protect her family from being sexually exploited by becoming a prostitute herself. It is a type of exchange of performances: the performance of prostitution in exchange for the performance of virginity by her sisters. This exchange takes on a monetary connotation for Ritinha, perhaps as an excuse for her behavior, which, contrary to her belief, cannot in the end control the actions of her sisters. Her two fetishes are not the ideal of purity (virginity) versus that of degradation and prostitution, but the act of performing the two roles whenever they are deemed most convenient to her.

Ritinha is always warning her sisters to under no circumstances accept a ride from a man, but especially from her neighbor, Edgard, whose ride she herself will one day accept. Edgar takes advantage of the situation and tries to play the role described in Otto’s sentence to force her into kissing him near Tijuca Forest (his guilty conscience is a very strong presence), thus performing the man “who does not care about the consequences”. Ritinha is terrified of him at first (actually performs being afraid), that is,

until the kiss, which makes her “melt”. Moments before they are able to consummate the sexual act, a man suffering from leprosy named Nepomuceno who roams the forest in rags, walks along side their car and exclaims: “Agora sou eu, eu!” [Now it is me, me!] Nepomuceno also performs a ghost-like figure here since he knows everyone is afraid of being physically near him. His disturbing presence makes them stop then and there and, feeling guilty for what could have happened and rethink their actions:

EDGARD. Aquele leproso apareceu no momento exato. Foi ele que te salvou e me salvou.

EDGARD. Ritinha, eu quase a violei porque o mineiro só é solidário no câncer. (1012)

[EDGARD. That leper appeared at the right moment. It was he who saved you and saved me.

EDGARD. Ritinha, I almost violated you because the mineiro is only caring and giving when he has cancer.]

Interestingly, they suddenly become aware of the performative nature of what they are doing by, perhaps to them, having gone against the principles they espouse (but are confused about). Death, sickness and the lack of solidarity of the society (that ostracizes a person with leprosy) trigger a spark of consciousness in both of them, albeit temporarily. This is one of the only instances of the show of solidarity in Rodrigues’ theater, especially on the part of a protagonist. Nonetheless, it is actually a very narcissistic one since their feelings of guilt and perhaps remorse are not transformed into actions in that, immediately after the incident, they go right back to their previous performances.

In the second act, the moral dilemma faced by Edgard gets more and more complicated. His mother, who also portrays herself as “moral”, suggests he accept the offer to marry Maria Cecilia. Dr. Werneck also tries to convince him:

WERNECK. Pra ti rapaz! De mão beijada. Cinco milhões de cruzeiros.

EDGARD. Mas porque? A troco de que?

WERNECK. é o teste! O mineiro só é solidário no câncer, Edgard, cinco milhões! É só passar no banco!

EDGARD. Cinco milhões!

WERNECK. é teu o dinheiro. Mas se você tem caráter. E eu acredito. Se você tem caráter, rasga o cheque. Tão simples! Rasga e depois atira na minha cara o papel picado. Ou você é Peixoto, não passa de um Peixoto... (1024)

[WERNECK. For you boy! For no reason. Five million cruzeiros.

EDGARD. But why? In exchange for what?

WERNECK. It is a test! The mineiro is only caring in cancer, Edgard, five million! Just stop by the bank!

EDGARD. Five million!

WERNECK. It is your money. But if you have character. And I believe. If you have character, rip the check. So simple! Tear it and then throw it in my face, the shredded paper. Or are you Peixoto, no more than a Peixoto ...]

Werneck himself unveils his true intentions in performing this Faustian scenario. He wants to prove to himself and to Edgard that no one has (a good) character when faced with compromising their principles in exchange for a large sum of money. His is the performance of someone who has really bought into a code of ethics similar to the one found in Otto’s sentence but stages the whole charade himself, instead of becoming a victim of one. It is not really about saving his daughter, but about buying a future son-in-law. However, the anxiety that he feels which leads to the fetishism of his performance has to do with the fact that in the end, everyone is the same, no matter what

circumstances and he is afraid of losing the illusion of power he has as the patriarch of the family.

Later in the play, Edgard is faced with another dilemma. He takes Ritinha to a cemetery and they both go inside an empty burial ground and she says: “Você quer um beijo? Olha! Te dou o beijo e o resto! Tudo! Mas de graça não!” [Do you want a kiss? Look! I kiss you and the rest! Everything! But not for free!] Ritinha finally reveals she does not work at a Catholic girls ‘ school run by nuns, but is a prostitute. She started to work as a prostitute due to an unhappy event in her mother ‘s life. She explains her mother had been falsely accused of stealing at work when she held the position of a post office clerk (at least that is her allegation). Her mother ‘s former boss proposed having sex with Ritinha in exchange for her mother ‘s being absolved. Ritinha agrees and continues the affair believing that having sex with him will keep her mother from losing her job at the post office. The man refuses to honor their agreement and fires her mother anyway. Ritinha apparently feels obliged to continue using her body to make money to help her family economically. But, even though she paints a picture of herself as a victim of patriarchal authority, discrimination and exploitation, it is not clear whether she is telling the truth, due to her duplicitous nature throughout.

The third act contains a number of revelations that lead to the final resolution of the story, which is well described by Peixoto:

PEIXOTO. Toda família tem um momento, um momento em que começa a apodrecer. Percebeu? Pode ser a família mais decente, mais digna do mundo. E lá, um dia, aparece um tio pederasta, uma irmã lésbica, um pai ladrão, um cunhado louco. Tudo ao mesmo tempo. (1023)

[PEIXOTO. Every family has a moment, a moment when it starts to rot. Got it? It can start by the most decent family, the worthiest in the world.

And then there, one day, a pederast uncle appears, a lesbian sister, a thief father, a crazy brother-in-law. All at once.]

We finally find out that Maria Cecilia's orchestrated rape was organized by Peixoto, who also witnesses the whole incident. She does not reveal her actual performance of rape at first, but the fact is that every night she dreams about the man she calls "Cadelão" and the phone calls she has received saying (which is actually her way of exposing her true feelings): "Maria Cecília, você gostou de ser violada" [Maria Cecília, you liked being raped]. Edgard listens and concludes: "Duas violadas" [Two women raped] (1024). She, like Ritinha, paints herself as a victim.

Maria Cecilia performs her innocence as the girl who was raped, a victim, also as part of her fetishism of performance. We later learn that she was the one who orchestrated the rape incident as a sado-masochistic act with Peixoto, her former lover. Maria Cecilia's stories as a rape victim is as important as the performance of the rape itself. Both give Peixoto and her pleasure and put her in the position of both victim and perpetrator. She is at one and the same time an inferior white female victimized by black men and a white woman capable of manipulating black male bodies for her own pleasure, following the fetishism of stereotype scenario in Brazilian society. In accentuating the double consciousness of the character, the spectators are simultaneously aware of the artificiality of the media in falsely and customarily accusing black men perpetrators of a myriad of crimes, and the power of money to mitigate this type of tragedy when one actually occurs. It also accentuates the violent nature of the white female who punishes black men for her own pleasure and who actually challenges social norms by desiring stereotypically virile black men. It is fetishism as a type of performatic perversion, but

that also helps Maria Cecilia find a type of agency at home as a response to her father's overarching presence and control.

The performance of virtuous chastity by both Maria Cecilia and Ritinha is gradually revealed. Peixoto recalls the last and final version of his affair with Maria Cecília, who reads about a rape in the newspaper and asks Peixoto, whom she calls "Cadelão", to reenact it.

The final resolution of the drama takes place at Werneck's house, where high society people have fun by getting Ritinha's sisters and their boyfriends drunk so that they will have sex right in front of everyone. Ritinha tries to prevent the orgy from happening to no avail. At the end of the play, Ritinha and Edgard go to the beach, at which time he burns the check and tells Ritinha he loves her before the final curtain falls.

From the analysis of fetishism of performance in this play, it can be concluded that the performative fetishism functions as a display of ethics and truth seeking. For some characters, it is about performing different ethics of behavior in order to annihilate any semblance of tender feelings or piety, which proves to be a struggle for both Edgard and Ritinha. For others, like Maria Cecilia and Werneck, to wield power is a sexually-deviant fetishism, perhaps due to a fear that this power is ultimately tenuous and frail. For Peixoto, being a sexually-exploited marionette helps counterbalance his lack of power in the home. All the types of fetishism of performance shed light on the dilemmas faced by Brazilians upon facing the multiplicity of fetishism of performance of power, social status, race and gender as a strategic response to a complicated and rigid system with a tad of flexibility.

Toda Nudez Será Castigada [All Nudity Shall be Punished]

All Nudity Shall be Punished was written in 1965 and presents types of fetishism of performance quite similar to the ones found in *Bonitinha*. In this play, we also see the same dichotomically-nuanced viewpoints on morality and sexuality as those in *Dorotéia*. However, as opposed to *Dorotéia*, in which all the images in the play become fetishized in an overtly mythical and stylized way, *Nudity* plays out in a more realistic register. The dialogues are both direct and colloquial. Geni narrates the main events of the play by way of a voice recording she has made right before committing suicide, which creates a double consciousness similarly to the one introduced in the title of *Bonitinha*, right in the beginning.

Similarly to *Golden Mouth*, *Nudity* deals with the controversial issues of point of view and authorship. As opposed to *Doroteia*, however, this play is not classified as mythical, but as one of the carioca tragedies and, by the author, as “an obsession in three acts”. According to Eudinyr Fraga, the four main characters “estão realmente presas a projetos obsessivos” (181). These characters are in fact acting out a plan of action to achieve a specific goal but, in the process, get caught up with the performance of those acts as fetishistic obsessions themselves.

In the first scene, when Herculano gets home, his maid, Nazaré, hands him a cassette tape. From the moment the tape begins playing, the facts that we learn are narrated by Geni and imagined by Herculano together with some memory fragments from the different characters. Theatrical reality is created in the act of narration, remembering and imagining, elevating the obsessive projects of every character to the status of fetish of performance, especially Geni’s. We hear Geni’s voice on the tape, which in turn is

narrated by the actress on stage: “Há uma coisa que você não sabe, nem desconfia, uma coisa que você vai saber agora, contada por mim e que é tudo. Falo pra ti e pra mim mesma. (dilacerada, ressentida e séria) Escuta, meu marido. Uma noite em tua casa” [There is one thing you do not know or suspect, one thing you will know now, told me and that is all. I speak to you and to myself. (lacerated, resentful and serious) Listen, my husband. One night at your house](992). The performative quality is accentuated by the actress and the fact that she admits narrating the story for her own sake. The question of authorship is put to the fore by the fact that the events are being narrated and performed on stage as flashbacks for Herculano to hear (and see), a staged and orchestrated event.

Going back in time, we learn that after the death of his first wife, Herculano becomes very depressed and even contemplated suicide. His brother Patricio uses his weakness to take revenge over a failed business deal between the two of them. Patricio knows that Herculano had been celibate for many years after his wife died and that his son would never approve of his dating another woman. With this in mind, Patricio convinces Herculano to meet Geni, a prostitute to whom Patricio owes some money. He aims to take revenge by putting Herculano in between his repressed sexual desire and the promise he has made to his son Serginho that he would never go out with another woman. By setting him up, Patricio could also try to extort money from him by threatening Herculano to tell Serginho about their affair. Patricio stages the whole sexual encounter as a performance and becomes more and more obsessed with this process throughout the play, a fetishism of performance of a sadistic nature.

All the relationships that are formed are purposefully constructed as a means to attain a narcissistic objective - a typical characteristic of the fetishist relationship with its

object. Geni is a woman that spends her time by obsessing about one thing: finding redemption from her life as a prostitute by dying of breast cancer. Throughout the play, she performs different functions for different people in a frenetic fetishistic manner in order to find a certain level of fulfillment and redemption (which she, in the back of her mind, knows she could never attain).

The performances and obsessive projects function as a mask, an excuse, a type of revenge, a sado-masochistic act, a trade in for something else, and a fetish. The characters are never so completely immersed in their stories to the point of not having a double consciousness (be it a consciousness of the view of society, the other, or the moral code). The performances and scenarios are constructed by the character who is fully involved in the relationship or by another, such as Patricio or Serginho, who do what they do out of revenge by manipulating others (accompanied by a heightened level of double-consciousness). In order to justify his newly discovered hypersexualized behavior with Geni, Herculano obsesses on saving Geni from her profession, as a means, for example, of compensating for his guilt feelings.

Against the wishes of his entire family but especially of Serginho, Herculano ends up marrying Geni and taking her to live in a remotely-located family home with the objective of being sexually active and appeasing Serginho at the same time. With the desire to end his father's marriage via Patricio's manipulation, Serginho meets Geni and they start having an affair. Geni, in turn, uses her performance of fetishism to save Serginho from his homosexual rape and previous sexually repressive family environment. Thus, what we can see is that fetishism of performance transform family moral codes into individual ones, regulating and making sense of the confusion of ethics present in

Brazilian society. Geni's fetishism is a means of finding pleasure and at the same excusing, giving a free pass to behaviors that on the street would be judged as immoral. It is also Geni's way of taking hold of her own position as woman, poor and a prostitute by making up her own ethics of conduct through fetishism.

Serginho, at first, appears to be very religious. He is so extreme in his devotion to his mother, to celibacy, and to his aunts that he gives the impression he is mentally deranged. Again, his performance of a prude is a fetish in itself since sexual purity is not the real aim (there is always a double and opposite consciousness acting in opposition to the one presented). An almost incestuous passion between Serginho and his aunts, Serginho and his mother, and then his father trigger another type of double consciousness between the scenes and the audience, questioning the motivation behind all the actions and words proffered. Serginho and his three aunts are obsessed with maintaining a relationship with his dead mother while virulently showing anger towards Geni. Serginho visits his mother's tomb and dreams about her every day. Serginho wants to acquire the clothes and behavior of mourning, which are almost sexually fetishistic performances. So much so that when he actually sees his father with another woman, it triggers his own repressed sexuality that was dormant. Nonetheless, this appears to be a performance of sexuality (he has a double consciousness of knowing his affair with Geni is revenge against his father and not because of his own desire, which is also duplicitous). It could also be conjectured that the other sexual encounter, which happens in prison, is also a performance of rape since Serginho escapes with the Bolivian thief who was portrayed as the original perpetrator. Thus, the performance of rape itself happens as a fetishism of performance of rape, since there is both pain and pleasure involved in this performance.

Here, even the performance of heterosexuality and homosexuality is brought to the fore.

According to Severino Albuquerque:

Serginho's elopement with the very man who raped him in prison – a development some critics decry as an element of melodrama, a “surprise ending”, is in fact subtly presaged in the drama. The danger here is not of melodrama but the implication that the victim enjoyed being raped and in fact has fallen in love with his rapist. Moreover, one is left with the impression that it was the Bolivian Thief who showed Serginho his true sexuality and freed him from a world of inhibitions and irrational preoccupations. (72)

Although I agree with Albuquerque that the thief is able to unleash a sexuality that might have been dormant (leading Serginho to find his true homosexual desires), I also feel that it is never completely accurate to completely remove the curtain of double consciousness from all the events in the play. Rodrigues is a master of letting the audience fill in the blanks, leading to a variety of interpretations. Serginho might have been also staging the rape and the escape in order to make Geni suffer, as a type of fetishism of the performance of homosexuality, for example. Serginho might have been confused by the pressures of a patriarchal society, where he would have to act a certain way as a man, that does not fit to what he thought of himself. Since we actually do not see what actually happens to Serginho, not ever see the Bolivian Thief himself, we must not, as readers, come to only one univocal conclusion. And that is the reason why Rodrigues' plays are very hard to stage as well as to analyze, unless we are able to open them up to a variety of interpretations.

The backdrop of religion and the judgmental tone of the aunts become sickening and then almost ridiculous throughout the play, exposing the hypocrisy of a society that upholds Catholic moral values to the extreme in order to maintain appearances while revealing a completely different and even deviant nature behind closed doors. The aunts,

for example, claiming to be searching for proof of Serginho's sexual encounters (or masturbation), go through his dirty underwear on a daily basis, sniffing and searching for signs of any type of bodily fluids. They fetishize his underwear and repeat the act every day, using the mask of morality to cover over the real motive behind their actions.

Words are shallow in that what the characters say actually often means something else or leads them to do something different than would be expected. . Like they might say something to someone in a certain space and the exact opposite to another in another space. Geni's voice, for example, says something about the events, which might contradict what Herculano experienced or might even be contrary to the scenes being performed on stage. These contradictory truths engender a type of continual performance of fetishism that they all need to enact on a regular basis to maintain the different scenarios in different areas of their lives. Thus, because all the relationships seem to be motivated by a narcissistic desire, none of them are mutual in that they obey the logic of the fetish (controlling and ambiguous).

The fetishism of a woman's body is focused on the breast (as breast cancer), on the naked body or breasts, and on the shame of seeing the naked body, which the aunts or Geni obsessively have to cover up. Geni, for example, constantly makes reference to her breasts: "O melhor você não sabe. Tenho uma cisma que vou morrer de cancer no seio" [The better you do not know. I have this deep ingrained belief that I will eventually die from breast cancer] (1054). Or: "A coisa mais difícil é um seio bonito"[The hardest thing is a beautiful breast]. Geni also feels that her body is that of a martyr: "meu amor é pena" [my love is martyrdom] (1091) and even though she works as a prostitute, she feels nauseated when looking at a picture of herself naked. As seen in all of Rodrigues' plays,

Geni embodies the two opposite extremes of stereotypical female fetishism (saint vs. prostitute). She attempts to redeem herself by marrying Herculano and seeing Serginho as a lover in order to save him (again, accepting a double code of ethics). Thus, all the characters have a fetish and they gain different meanings or dimensions depending on who the fetishist is. Most of all, through performance by Geni as both martyr and savior, she justifies her past behavior as a prostitute as well as her adultery, making it possible to act out both in a continual performance of these two roles as an obsession. Moreover, all the characters are looking for some sort of salvation or sexual pleasure through the adoration of one another, which seems to create split and a continuous double consciousness. The contradiction within the structural relationship highlights DaMatta's configuration of Brazilian society. Even though morally "wrong", for example, Geni feels she is doing something good so that Serginho can live. By the same token, she assures herself she is doing something good for herself by being with someone she considers to be very pure. She performs the role of prostitute, wife and lover as if they were mutually inclusive.

The sexuality and desire of the characters are repressed and easily unleashed by Patricio's manipulation in his performatic fetishism. They want to hold on to a reality that might give them a modicum of pleasure and fulfillment but are torn between what is acceptable in society (part of the world of appearances) and what is reflective of internal desires.

As has been mentioned above, although the other characters are fetishizing their performances with an awareness of double consciousness, they all believe and are emotionally invested in them, except for Patricio. Serginho ultimately reveals he is in

love with a Bolivian thief who raped him in prison, confirming his homosexuality (But not completely in that it might also reflect Patricio's revenge on Serginho for not confronting Herculano since Patricio might have orchestrated the whole "rape" scene). Patricio is obsessed with all the characters, but his particular fetish is voyeuristically watching the suffering of all the characters, especially Herculano's. Herculano yearns for deep suffering (through a devotion to his dead wife), a complete destruction of his moral character (through sexual encounters with Geni) and of his feeling of being a good father, which appear to be mutually exclusive, according to his new-found code of ethics and excuses. He embodies the Brazilian code of ethics in being a manipulator and having a constant double-consciousness but at the same truly believing they can all live together in perfect harmony. In the midst of everything, all the characters pretend to believe that a church wedding is redemptive while all the cheating and lying continues to go on. Patricio is the biggest cynic of all and knows he is watching a drama unfold that he is also helping to manipulate, a theater of naïve and false moralities.

The characters are so obsessed with their fetishes they become blind to them and create other fetishes in a cycle of attachments that are chaotically misplaced. Alcohol also seems to be the main culprit behind all "immorality" – a free pass to the performance of a behavior they might not otherwise have the courage to enact in another ethical space. Herculano and Patricio's behavior, for example, deviating from what they initially seem to profess, occurs while they are inebriated. It helps them elevate the mask, by showing another mask.

Another topic Rodrigues especially focused on in other plays is the theme of the story. Who tells the stories and the reason why something is learned are both

perspectives, which are brought to the fore in the double consciousness of both the characters and in the staging of the plays. For most of the characters, truth is a difficult concept to grasp often due to the inherent ambiguities of the characteristics of any fetishistic object, especially considering the multitude of different available social ethics of behavior. We learn the story of the play through flashbacks narrated by Geni in the tapes she recorded just before dying. Versions of stories are also fetishized such as the ideal of virginity professed by the aunts for Geni (a made-up story which serves their purpose when Geni and Herculano get married), the cancer story, which is blamed for Geni's suicide, Geni's taping her version of the stories to be listened to after her death, Patricio's versions of the stories with respect to each of the characters, Herculano's double stories (one for Geni and another for his son), the Bolivian robber's story, even the police chief (a secondary character) has a story that he fetishizes and performs for his wife in order to hide his affair.

To conclude, using certain belief systems and stories as motors for their lives is also a way of fetishizing stories as performances, as seen in *Toda Nudez*. The obsessively frenetic behaviors that accept a variety of spatial and complementary realities also serve as commentaries in mimicking an aspect of Brazilian social structure. Herculano and Geni might know that their love is immoral in the street or in the Catholic church but also know it is readily acceptable in the world of their home or even in the world of the beyond (her performance as a martyr comes to play in this spatial dynamic) in which sexual love becomes acceptable when true feelings (of love or lust) are involved. Even Serginho might have felt released from guilt when inhabiting another spatial dimension (like, first in prison and in the world of the street), or if he lived in another country (the

beyond) when he escaped with the Bolivian lover. In his eyes, his revenge is justified in the world of his home since his father betrayed him more gravely than anyone else by having sex with another woman (another contradiction considering his mother had already passed away). He sees his father as having severed sacred familial bonds although the words are contradictory and conflict with Serginho's actual behavior. So even though Serginho's revenge repeats what he accuses his father of doing in a worse way (in view of the ethics of the street and Catholic morality), he feels vindicated in the home since he actually does not seem to have tender feelings for Geni, consciously performing his love for her in a sadistic manner. Thus, while in *Bonitinha* we see a prevalence of fetishism of performance of a variety of ethical conducts, in *Toda Nudez*, we find fetishism of performance of sexuality and salvation through sexuality. In *Boca*, we will see how fetishism of the performative acts on the level of performance of violence.

Boca de Ouro [Golden Mouth]

Boca de Ouro is another of Rodrigues' plays that characterizes fetishism of stories in performance. And to do so it also explores fetishism of objects and body parts. The most obvious fetishistic object is the golden mouth and its namesake. He is a legendary figure who embodies a figure that is adored and at the same hated for both his good and bad moral character (as well as his in-betweenness within the spectrum of Brazilian morality). To explore the different ethics of behavior espoused and accepted in Brazil, *Boca de Ouro* is portrayed on stage from different ethical points of view and by different performances. Rodrigues' chooses the *malandro*⁵⁸ archetype while exploring the

different possible facets of this character. As it is common with other plays, Rodrigues provides with a cliché, an archetype, a mythological figure or word and deconstruct them, having those experienced in different ways. Morally, he is evil in that he kills and cheats. Contrariwise, he is also a symbol of redemption and success for the poorer members of society, perhaps for being described as generous with money. His material wealth is fetishized, creating a type of theater of a society notable for everyone wanting something of monetary value at whatever cost or always expecting to exchange something in return for something else of equal value, such as is portrayed by *Bonitinha*. Accumulation of material fetishes can confer a certain status to a character (such as Boca and Celeste) but can also denigrate them (morally). Boca, for example, attains respect and status but can never ascend to the status of the elite. Thus, in one of Guigui's recounting of Boca's life story, he manipulates and mistreats the elite as a matter of course. In another, he ends up being a victim of Maria Luisa, who belongs to high society. On the one hand, the performative and double consciousness of Boca in all the three scenes provide the character with a power to manipulate the other, helping him ascend to the upper echelons of power. On the other hand, it shows his frenetic desire to perform the violent man to placate his own feeling of inferiority and his inability to change his status in a society with immovable power structures, fetishizing his performance of power.

Boca de Ouro is, roughly speaking, the story of a banker of the animal game⁵⁹ (*jogo do bicho*) that has had all his teeth replaced by a set of pure gold ones. His golden teeth serve as a mask and performance of his persona as rich, powerful, and gangster-like. The fetish of performance of this character is more like an obsession than the actual fetish

of his golden teeth. A typical “rogue” figure that has become legendary in Brazilian novels and films, he emulates carioca *ginga* and way of being. He is said to have been born in a *Gafieira* sink and that his first bath was in that same sink. The inferiority complex that he carries due to the impoverished circumstances of his birth and upbringing pervades the whole play.

The play describes the character of Boca de Ouro through three different stories told by his former lover Guigui to two different reporters, who want to be the first to publish something about Boca’s death on the front page of their newspaper. The different stories reflect Guigui’s psychological state when being interviewed. In the first story she tells, without knowing of his death, she represents Boca as a cruel, insensitive and cold killer. He killed a poor innocent man, Leleco, in cold blood so he could have sex with his wife, Celeste. In her second story, after Guigui finds out about his death, he is portrayed as a man of courage that would definitely be able to kill someone, but only if he had a strong reason to do so. She actually describes Boca in a very good light while Celeste is described as the real murderer in the story and Leleco, as a manipulator. This second story irritates Guigui’s husband, whom she had left in the past to be with Boca. In order to appease her husband due to an interference from the reporter Caveirinha, Dona Guigui tells a third version of the story. In this rendition, Boca is shown as much more tri-dimensional and complex.

The fetish of the golden mouth, just as the wedding dress in *Os Sete Gatinhos* or the nausea in *Dorotéia*, functions as a form of redemption and social ascendancy, i.e., the fetish functions as a substitute for something else, a way of fulfilling a lack. It is also a way for Boca de Ouro to revert the fetishism as stereotype that he suffers for being born

to a lower class mother and not in a “golden crib”⁶⁰. Thus, he literally wants to transform himself into a person in this higher socio-economic position by having a golden mouth. He transforms the image of the crib from the expression golden crib, which is low into the ground, into the of the mouth, high up on the body. One is associated with birth and the other with words and their performative qualities.⁶¹

Boca’s love for golden teeth is looked down upon by the dentist as crude and ugly. But Boca wants to flaunt his wealth as opposed to the members of the elite who prefer to keep their wealth more private. He also has a dream of being buried in a golden coffin as another way of achieving an elite status. The fetishes of gold will supposedly elevate him to a higher position in society even after his death. Members of the elite might have a free pass to paradise or immortal power but someone like Boca has to buy it. Just like *A Falecida*, his coffin represents a means to eternal salvation. However, in order for others to believe in his transformative narrative (as someone who came from “nothing” and now has unlimited power through his golden mouth), he needs to perform the figure of the rogue (“malandro”) by performing a search for the golden coffin. The process involved in the search is much more important than what happens after he dies. For Boca, again, it is a means of attempting to compensate for his inferiority feelings.

The fetishism of story (the story that will help sell more newspapers) is accentuated in the next scene when they learn about his death. Suddenly, it is all about the construction of the story, not death or mourning. From the beginning, the reporters are very *blazé* when hearing the news of Boca ‘s death, immediately thinking about how they are going to transform this man’s life and death into a headline for the front-page news story (*manchete*). Even their opinion of Boca is volatile, depending on exactly what

kind of picture they want to paint of him (good, bad, mythological). Before the reporters go out to interview Guigui, they actually have a conversation about how they should portray Boca and make decisions on the qualities they should stress to sell more papers. Another interesting aspect about D. Guigui's performance as storyteller is the way she takes on this person. It is her chance for fame, thus she fetishizes her own image in the newspapers as well as herself as story-teller in a process of continual double consciousness. She wants to tell her story and become famous so she changes it according to how she wants to portray Boca or her relationship to her husband. She possesses a limited type of agency through fetishizing.

Violence indelibly marks interpersonal relationships and is a fetishism of performance (in a sadistic way) in three situations: betrayal, antagonism and exploitation. Thousands of people rush to see Boca 's toothless body, which is staged and narrated on the radio with dramatic descriptions of his naked corpse lying in a cheap coffin. The performance of this sadistic and, at the same time, sado-masochistic fetish is a sign of a fetishism that leads to degeneration and destruction. For the poor people who aspire to be like him, his funeral is the performance of a scenario repeated ad nauseum in which the elites represented by Maria Luisa always triumph in the end.

The last aspect of the fetishism of performance takes place with the performance of women as seductresses, as Louise Kaplan describes below:

In the making of films, the vividly seductive body of a woman occupies the foreground of the visual field, so that the traumatic histories that created this icon of sexuality can be kept in the background, where they are barely visible, or only visible in the light of interpretation. Thus the body of a woman is the glaring white lie that covers over and masks the corruptions that created her. (126)

The specific scene in the play in which Boca organizes a competition to find the most beautiful breasts creates a double type of fetishism: Boca and the audience fetishize the images as a “white lie” covering over a static patriarchal society while the women themselves are set “free” to go beyond false morality. However, despite their wealth, they are ruthlessly competing for a pearl necklace, which Boca uses as bait, condemning them to continual performances of female sexuality as a type of fetishism for themselves as well as for others (in order to get something else in return such as something of monetary value or a type of pleasure by being woman as masquerade to a man). Fetishism of performance in this case, does not provide any type of agency for the women, since they become objects of Boca and the male gaze.

As opposed to *Bonitinha* (with its conflicted characters reflecting on possible ethics of behavior) or *Toda Nudez* (in which Herculano, Geni and Serginho might accept a multitude of ethics but ultimately search for a deeper truth in the midst of chaos), in *Boca de Ouro*, we confront the effacement of any “essential” reality in which the characters perform. All accept the many different societal masks they have to wear in each of their environments and show a complete disregard for anyone or anything other than their fetishistic performances, be it in news reporting, radio narration, story tellings, or killings, etc. This play describes the performance of violence as a fetishistic phenomenon (while aestheticizing it on stage – another type of fetishism of performance of violence) in Brazilian culture as a means to respond to confusion and hypocrisy and seemingly immovable structures of power.

O Beijo no Asfalto [The Asphalt Kiss]

In *O Beijo*, Nelson Rodrigues goes a step further in the fetishizing of stories told by the media and the performance/staging that goes into it in order to create a brand new reality. The play starts at the moment Arandir sees a man being hit by a bus and rushing to his rescue. The man who has been run over by a bus in the Bandeira Square in Rio asks Arandir for a kiss before he dies. Although the scene is described in the already-established performative manner, we have a sense that the kiss is an act of generosity and compassion on the part of Arandir. Amado Ribeiro, a journalist from “Ultima Hora”, witnesses the two men kissing and, together with the corrupt police chief Cunha, transforms the story of a dying man’s last wish into a tabloid-like front-page news story. The sensationalism of the newspaper fills up the gaps in the story by portraying Arandir as a criminal that has pushed his lover to his death and then kisses him in desperation and regret. Arandir’s life is turned upside down and even his wife does not believe he is innocent. Behind this simple story, the play discusses fundamental topics related to the human condition, using a simple gesture of solidarity and a kiss to discuss appearances, judgmental attitudes, and the role of the media, specifically their manifestations in Brazilian society. Rodrigues then explores the archetypal Brazilian figure of a *fofoqueira* (a woman who is always gossiping about others) and the thirst for sensationalist stories about celebrities or ordinary people whether truthful or made up. The audience never sees the accident or the kiss, only learning about the incident through the dialogues. The dead man himself, the victim who Arandir rushes to help and kisses, is forgotten and his existence denied. He only appears in act II during his funeral, but his presence is ignored by the performance of the reporter Amado Ribeiro and Police Chief

Aruba, who are there to engage the widow in perpetuating a made-up story. The scandal they create after they claim to have actually met the lover of the widow exemplifies their complete disregard for the dead man and his legacy. As Severino Albuquerque describes, a noble type of kiss is transformed into a performance of homosexuality, judged as a perversion as a process of splitting and doubt that we saw in the other plays studied in this chapter:

In *Beijo no Asfalto*, a dying man lying on the pavement in a busy Rio de Janeiro thoroughfare begs a total stranger to kiss him on the mouth before he draws his last breath. Arandir, the protagonist, obliges. This simple act of charity for a dying human being might be considered a noble gesture, one with strong links to warrior culture in the West (for noble gesture, one with strong links to warrior culture in the West (for example, British soldiers dying on the battlefield-most famously, Lord Nelson-would demand a final, mouth-to-mouth kiss from their fellows before passing into the next world). Yet any fleeting sense of understanding on the part of those who witness the kiss gives way to vehement denunciation. (77)

The *Kiss on the Asphalt* is open to multiple interpretations. One is that the play revolves around doubt and that the kiss is the substance of that doubt. The apparently spontaneous act of charity unleashes the dark side of each of the characters, making them perform a type of sadistic fetishism of performance. In the midst of corruption, repression and contradictory moral expectations, a selfless act would not be able to placate the anguish of existence since there is no return or benefit in it. As a result, everyone is infected, including Arandir, who also starts doubting himself (we also start doubting if within this selfish environment he could have done something without expecting anything in return, without any fetishized object or pleasure). The story created by the media gains vitality and it becomes increasingly difficult to discern reality from fiction and it can be seen to what extent a fictional reading can influence the reality of the characters to the point of creating that reality. This situation throws light on how easily

the characters are ready to accept any reality if there is a sense of destruction and morbidity involved, revealing a perverse desire to see someone suffer together with a propensity to believe in any sensationalist story that is good fodder for gossip.

The most perverse character in the play is the corrupt reporter Amado Ribeiro, defined by Nelson Rodrigues as a “Dionysian scoundrel”. Cruel, evil and a unscrupulous sensationalist, he abuses his power by buying evidence, inventing witnesses, taking advantage of vulnerable situations and the ingenuity of ordinary people, and providing false and misleading information whenever he can. The play slowly gains a nightmarish feel, highlighting the perversive quality of fetishism as a cultural strategy. All the individuals involved with Arandir end up turning against him after the newspaper publishes the photo of the kiss. Werneck, his co-worker, leads the chorus of detractors and starts embarrassing Arandir at work by calling him all sorts of names. Name calling is another performance of fetishism, which reveals a perverse desire to make someone suffer. Judith, the typist, alleges she remembers the dead man going by the office building one day. Her “memory” transforms her doubts about the relationship between Arandir and the dead man into absolute certainty in a fetishism of performance of a story.

The widow's position is even worse: scared of being denounced as an adulteress in the paper, she agrees to testify against Arandir. One again, her performance is a means to hide her own “immoral” behavior. She does not have a guilty conscience, but is rather concerned in saving her own reputation. Rather, she is just afraid of being exposed in the media. It is precisely through her false testimony concerning the nature of the connection between the two men that police get the evidence they need to give verisimilitude to the farce. Dona Matilde, the neighbor, symbolizes the chorus of gossiping women, typical

figures who relish eavesdropping and taking a front-role seat in other people's tragedies. Again, as we see in all of the plays so far, Brazilians are portrayed as very duplicitous personalities, always ready to be bad characters, cheat, lie, depending on the position they are in and what they will get in return for wearing a multiplicity of masks. However, they are also portrayed as victims of a very perverse social structure, where many members of the society do not have actual power to change their condition and where ethics is thrown out the window due to the multiplicity of ethics that are accepted simultaneously.

Amidst this confusion, the only person who could fight in defense of the facts and believe Arandir is his wife, Selminha. She is quite fragile and “feminine” and because she has been with Arandir since she was a little girl, she has always completely trusted him. But his frailty and his silence has even her doubting her husband's heterosexuality. She starts refusing to kiss him and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand every time he tries. Towards the end of the play, when her husband goes into hiding, she does not accept visiting her husband at the hotel and defends the hypothesis that he is bisexual. It is not hard to see that her performance of doubt is a revengeful act against her position as a woman and wife, a compensation for her lack of power at home. With the performance of herself as a betrayed woman, she thinks she might be able to wield some power in the media, which she could never have attained in the home. To make matters more complicated, her sister Dahlia is in love with Arandir. Living in the same house with the couple, the girl takes advantage of the fact that Selminha has left her husband by confessing her love to him. In this case, her performance (there is a double consciousness of doubt as well) acts to compensate for her lack of power in the home as an unmarried woman.

Rodrigues uses the element of surprise at the end of the play, perhaps demonstrating that “it was Aprigio's closeted life-not his sudden coming-out at the end-that led to violence” (Albuquerque 78). Aprigio, the father of both women, is a closeted homosexual. But, since the beginning, it is suggested that Aprigio nurtures an incestuous love for one of his daughters. The reasons are not known by the audience, except for a few hints. He is portrayed as being responsible for making his daughter Selminha believe the newspaper story about her husband to facilitate contact with his son-in-law, a type of fetishism of performance of heterosexuality twisted as incest to cover up his homosexuality. Aprigio never calls Arandir by name and avoids visiting his daughter after she gets married. When he says his true passion is his son-in-law, the entire audience gasps in surprise. The performance of his heterosexuality and his disgust towards what is being told about Arandir also function as a fetish for him, hiding his true pleasure in painting Arandir as a homosexual. When he realizes that the passion felt by Dahlia for Arandir is even greater than Selminha's, he lies to Selminha by telling her that the wounded man was already dead when he was kissed. If that is true, Arandir kissed the dead man not to satisfy the last wish of a dying man (as he proclaims) but to satisfy his own homosexual desires. At the end of the play, Aprigio shoots Arandir, the object of his love, because he, Aprigio, has found it impossible to admit his true feelings and is aware that Arandir might find out and not be the homosexual everyone claims he is, performing another type of fetishism of violence as a response to his own feelings of repression. Thus, Aprigio stages the murder as a fetishistic, stylized performance during which time he is able to shout out Arandir's name for the first time to experience the sexual pleasure that has been contained and repressed his whole life.

So far, Arandir is but an innocent victim, kissing the wounded man kindly and without malice simply to fulfill his last wish. He also, however, is a duplicitous character. He is able to see the multiple facets of his character but has no voice except when engaged in the performance of someone as he is seen by others. He is the only character who does not fetishize his performance and may perhaps feel disillusioned by society's thirst for different types of double consciousness and a fetish of performance that only leads to destruction.

In *The Asphalt Kiss*, the performance of the fetishistic relationship comes down to the level of dialogue (the word). It appears to be a performance of silence (even though it is shouted out loud in the media and is the subject of intense gossip) through a type of syncopated dialogue (abruptly interrupted by a period). As with many of Rodrigues' plays we have analyzed, appearances are deceiving and often point to the opposite of what is being portrayed before the audience. Because the characters are often performing with a heightened level of consciousness of their performative acts, they are not concerned in actually being heard by or transmitting cohesive speech to one another. In this connection, it is the precision with which the playwright makes these cuts/interferences that enhances the feeling of spontaneity in the text (which in this case functions as a mask of silence). At one moment, for example, the police chief Cunha says "Peço-lhe, creia que." [I ask you, believe that.], cutting to the interruption of Aruba, "Mas doutor" [But doctor.] In another instance, Werneck challenges the typist: "Dona Judith, é verdade que." [Miss Judith, it is true that.], which is then interrupted by Arandir. Other phrases like "Diz que. Olhe que ele diz" [He says. Look what he says], or "Ainda não acabei. Estou que" [I'm not done. Than I am], "Eu devia, escuta. Devia, bom." [I was,

listening. I should, well.], “Ou o senhor acha que”, [Or do you think]. These successive cuts make the text move more quickly but also create a sense of doubt in the audience, which reinforces the level of continual double consciousness. Everyone is both performing and hiding something while creating a heightened level of mystery on stage.

Since Cultures of Fetishism could be misconstrued as an exploration of the pathology of social communities, I want to insist that a transfer of terminology from individual psychology to social psychology is not appropriate and is, in fact, misleading. A society cannot have a psychological disorder. A society can, however, encourage and sponsor actions and activities that keep the citizens of that social order enslaved to falsehoods and deceptions. Societies do evolve and they construct cultural strategies that serve to perpetuate themselves. It is characteristic of organized societies that they try to discourage any vitalities and energies that might disrupt or challenge the authority that upholds the social order as it is. (27)

In line with DaMatta’s interpretation of Brazil as a country in which multiple combinations of different spaces and ethics not only co-exist but thrive, we have concluded that Brazilians are performers par excellence in the sense that they are aware of the required level of double consciousness in their everyday existence. This heightened sense of performance in Brazilian society is widely explored in Nelson Rodrigues’ plays through the fetishism of performance and the performance of fetishism. In order to live life in accordance with different ethical codes, Brazilians have to perform a different person for each area of their lives while at times performing certain ethics of behavior like the *jeitinho* or *sabe com quem está falando*⁶² in exceptional situations. The importance of rituals (whether carnivalesque, religious, or civic) also complements this idea of performance as part and parcel of any Brazilian ‘s life, specifically as it relates to the idea of being aware, the double or even triple consciousness that it entails in each area

of celebration. In Carnival celebrations, for example, a participant from the *favela* would absorb the fetishistic stance in his or her performance in the samba school: “I know very well that in this scenery we are rich and luxurious, but that in reality I am poor”. This specific quality of Brazilian men and women ‘s social reality is enhanced and magnified in Rodrigues’ plays. Nelson Rodrigues further explores the challenges Brazilians face in learning to navigate within this complicated realm. It might appear, at times, to be a creative and unique atmosphere, allowing for a certain freedom of expression in specific spatial and temporal dynamics. Although compensatory, the multiple special and temporal dynamics follow very rigid rules of behavior, creating an illusory sense of freedom, while perpetuating perhaps equally rigid structures of power. In the plays, the effects of this rigidity and, at the same time, illusorily free, cause the characters to obsess about their performatic qualities and powers as a means of counterbalancing a lack of mobility and clarity, at times pointing to the fetishism of performance as sado-masochistic, sadistic, or generally perverse and destructive. He explores the performance of ethical choices, the performance of sexuality, the performance of violence, and the performance of the media as larger instances during which a fetishistic obsession can lead to destruction and at the same time a type of salvation and possible agency from the omnipresent crushing, confusing and often chaotic reality in which they live.

Notes to Chapter 3

⁴⁷ “A Student Guide to Performance Studies”, Harvard University. This guide was written by Shana Komitee, PhD candidate in GSAS, for Professor Julie Buckler as a teaching resource for Literature 128: Performing Texts.

⁴⁸Schechner, Richard. “What is Performance Studies Anyway”. *The Ends of Performance*. New York: New York University Press, c1998.

⁴⁹*Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*

⁵⁰Performative is a term, which is widely used in Performance Studies and other fields. It was defined at first as: “An utterance, such as 'I promise', which is itself the performance of an act (in this case, the act of promising) rather than a description of that act. J. L. Austin, who introduced the term, seems not to have recognized that this insight was anticipated by Hume, especially in his account in the *Treatise of promising*”. But it also has come to denote gender performativity and other types of social performance acts. (“performative”. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Macmillan. Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2002. Credo Reference. Web. 30 March 2013)

⁵¹Marvin Carlson alludes to the fact that many performance theorists have moved away from the term and concept of the “theatrical” as well, in order to define a different type of performance, away from the stage. See page 5.

⁵²*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

⁵³As a side note to these questions, see the number of adaptations the director Luiz Arthur Nunes has done of Nelson Rodrigues’ short stories and novels to the stage, focusing on the problematics of performance as a theme in a genre other than theater (http://www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicexternas/enciclopedia_teatro/index.cfm?fuseaction=personalidades_biografia&cd_verbete=230&cd_item=22).

⁵⁴A few critics even point out to the influence his brother’s death had on the author’s life, especially on his view of the medial and public opinion. Roberto Rodrigues was murdered by an angry socialite, whose turbulent marriage and separation had been revealed in Rodrigues’ father’s newspaper.

⁵⁵I am using here a concept of consciousness that comes from performance theory which is different from the term as described By Du Bois to describe the African American experience, although also useful to describe specific aspects of double consciousness experienced by women, people from the lower classes and blacks in Rodrigues theater, figures that, in a sense, also follow an ethic of seen as if by the other, through the other:

A theory of black consciousness in the United States that is associated with the sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois, who was influenced in his analysis of white-black relationships in America by G. W. E. Hegel's description of the master-slave relationship. For Hegel, the master and the slave cannot enter into a relationship of mutual recognition and respect because they are separated by a relationship of absolute power. Du Bois argued in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1961: 16) that the black man always has consciousness of himself through the consciousness of the white man, and thus “[i]t is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

⁵⁶Adrian Johnston explains *jouissance* through the distinction between the one expected and one obtained:

The “*jouissance* expected” is an illusory, mythicized “full satisfaction”, namely, the re-finding of *das Ding*, the decisive, final quelling of the incessant clamoring of the drives. However, what the subject always gets (i.e., the “*jouissance* obtained”) is, at best, a pleasure that falls short of the idealized standard. Even worse, in most cases, *jouissance* manifests itself as a “pleasure-in-pain” (as with Freud’s position that the ego experiences the success of repressed drives as pain [i.e., disavowed pleasure, or pleasure which cannot consciously be experienced as such], the Lacanian ego too cannot fully enjoy *jouissance*). Furthermore, if the gap were ever to be closed between expected and obtained *jouissance*, the repeated resurgence of *jouissance* would cease (that is, the “*Ce n’est pas ça*” effect is required for repetition). Full satisfaction implies a kind of “psychical death”, an evacuation of the tension of dissatisfaction that perpetually drives the libidinal economy. (*The Forced Choice of Enjoyment: Jouissance between Expectation and Actualization*)

⁵⁷In a variety of critical texts on *Cute, But a Tramp*, the sentence “O mineiro só é solidário no cancer” is attributed as having being an adaptation of Dostoyevsky sentence in *Brothers Karamazov*, since Nelson Rodrigues has professed his love for Dostoyevsky in a variety of chronicles throughout his career. See page 106 of Sábato Magaldi’s “Prefácio” to *Teatro Completo*.

⁵⁸Botoso mentions the definition of *malandro* by Antonio Candido, who was one of first critics to bring this Brazilian archetypal figure to life in “Dialética da Malandragem”:

No final da seção II, Antonio Candido (1970, p. 71) chega, ainda que brevemente, a definir o que seja o *malandro*: “O *malandro*, como o pícaro, é espécie de um gênero mais amplo do aventureiro astucioso, comum a todos os folclores.” A esperteza, a agilidade, a sagacidade, a capacidade de

improvisado são algumas das características mais marcantes do malandro, que renega o trabalho e procura viver do jogo, da trapaça, da gigolotagem e até de pequenos furtos. (Altamir Botoso, *Letrônica*, Porto Alegre v.4, n.1, p.124, jul./2011)

[At the end of section II, Antonio Candido (1970, p. 71) arrives, albeit briefly, to define what is the Trickster, “The Trickster, as the mischievous, is sort of a wider genus of crafty adventurer, common all folklore”. The cleverness, agility, wit, ability to improvise are some of most striking features of the trickster, which denies seeking to live and work in the game, the cheating, the gigolotagem and even petty theft.]

⁵⁹According to Maria do Carmo Andrade, *Jogo do Bicho* (“the animal game”) is an illegal gambling game in Brazil, prohibited by federal law since 1946. Very popular throughout the country, the “game” is actually a lottery-type drawing operated on a regional basis by mobsters known as *contraventores* (who commit misdemeanors), *bicheiros* or *banqueiros* (“bankers”). Unlike most state-operated lotteries, in *Jogo do Bicho* you can bet any amount of money, even a cent. Despite its popularity (and being more or less tolerated, especially in Rio de Janeiro), it is still illegal in 25 of the 26 states of Brazil and those involved may be prosecuted. Paraíba is the only state where the game is legal and regulated by the state, even though according to a federal law this activity is prohibited. In other northeastern states the game is tolerated by the government.

⁶⁰Brazilian popular expression to convey that a person was born “with a golden spoon in his mouth”, i.e., in a rich family (“berço de ouro”).

⁶¹Austin’s performative utterances.

⁶²See Roberto DaMatta’s *A Cada & a Rua*, p. 139.

CONCLUSION

Acho que o homem brasileiro vive desesperado. O heroico do brasileiro é o desespero. As personagens de Nelson Rodrigues estão, de certa maneira, em situações-limite. Elas tentam escapar desse sufoco e, quando pensam que vão ser libertadas, se afundam, se enterram ainda mais. Esse é o desespero, a tragédia, das personagens de Nelson.⁶³

-Antunes Filho

A minha idéia, depois de tantas cabriolas, constituíra-se idéia fixa. Deus te livre, leitor, de uma idéia fixa; antes um argueiro, antes uma trave no olho. Vê o Cavour; foi a idéia fixa da unidade italiana que o matou.⁶⁴

-Machado de Assis

Searching for an identity that can be easily grasped or a *tropos* that works to describe myths, clichés or *habitus* perpetuated by a culture is a slippery slope, but one that Nelson Rodrigues relentlessly explored.

Just like Zulmira's obsessive ideas regarding her own funeral and death, all the characters in Rodrigues' plays continuously search, moved by obsessive ideas. Theater director Antunes Filho represented this search particularly well by showing many of Rodrigues' characters constantly running about and moving in and out of scenes as if catapulted forward by an inexplicable force, unable to finding stability. What the plays ultimately refer to are the inherent contradictorily and ambiguous nature of those discourses of identity or myths as well as the puerility in trying to essentialize Brazilian culture.

As the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the fetish itself is impossible to completely grasp. The fetish, once found, can even dissolve or turn into nothing since all objects of desire can, in fact, be considered fetishes, making the search for fetishes irrelevant in that this

movement is but a quest to understand the structures of desire. But, perhaps, that is the rub.

In this dissertation, we have moved from relational structures and images to performance for the purpose of providing an overall view of the concept of fetish and its multifaceted theoretical corpus within the theater of Nelson Rodrigues. Even though tenuous and slippery, the theater makes use of these concepts in a very material way. The questions that I have tried to answer were: what can these fetishes say about Rodrigues' theater in relation to Brazilian myths and accompanying social structures? Did Rodrigues develop a new way to dissect society in both material and psychological ways? Is there something more to Nelson Rodrigues than a *passée* view of sexuality or a mere theater of volatile human emotions? What is essentially Brazilian about his theater?

We have concluded that the fixed ideas, obsessions and performances in his theater serve as trampolines toward exploring something beyond themselves together with describing the process of writing and authorship. Desire might be at the center of this movement, but fetishes take on different shapes when materialized as such, revealing cultural strategies and individual forms of agency.

I contend that Rodrigues might have found the quasi material key to condensing the out-of-placeness and the many opposing forces that exist in an individual as, for instance, described in the fiction of Machado de Assis; namely, the opposing forces in *Esau e Jacó*, for example, with Natividade's agreement to hear a psychic reading on the fate of her twins in a lower-class neighborhood (on top of a hill) and her subsequent literal descent from the hills towards the higher social status to which she belongs (the paradoxical viewpoints of high and low), the countless breakages and distortions of both

bodies and ideas such as what is described in a whole chapter dedicated to the tip of the nose in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, the uneven leg of a woman, or arms in his short story succinctly entitled “Os Braços”. The author seems to constantly direct the reader to think about the opposite effect of what has just been said or about parts in order to describe something akin to a disease of the mind. Assis also describes the prejudices, myths and inherent confusions of a system that accepts many different moral configurations while maintaining very rigid social structures.

In some cases, the fetish, serving as a cover up or a veil, initially appears as a fixed idea, but is gradually revealed to clothe a deep anxiety. In *Raízes do Brasil*, I would suggest that Sergio Buarque de Holanda calls the phenomenon of covering over and masking something as the typical behavior of the so-called “homem cordial”, or, the cordial man, who, often perceived as being highly sociable and friendly, is actually mired in deep-rooted psychological insecurities (a mask of cordiality that reveals more than a surface interpretation would imply). In essence, Holanda is showing the complex social position occupied by the Brazilian man or woman and the “lack” that motivates him.

Ettore Finazzi-Agro in his article “*Raízes do Brasil* ou da (im)possibilidade Comum” presents this type of cordiality as an impossibility in trying to perhaps essentialize or create a definition of a community embedded in Holanda’s text. Finazzi-Agro goes even further by stating that because Brazilian discourses of identity are defined by this “out of place” reality, “desterrados em nossa terra” [outcasts in our land] and the matters of the heart, it is impossible to create a community, which would require an discourse describing an actual ability to work together for a common good.

E esse não é senão o primeiro (e todavia fundamental) degrau de uma reflexão toda marcada pela negativa e de que o único elemento positivo

parece ser, mais uma vez, o cordialismo, prática que, como já afirmei, não consegue de jeito nenhum levar a algo em comum ou que apenas através do jeitinho consegue colocar em comum o nada que o institui enquanto comportamento social aceite e generalizado. O “homem cordial” seria, nesse sentido, apenas o emblema de uma ausência, uma figura que toma o lugar do nada: nada do ponto de vista normativo, nada do ponto de vista ético, nada do ponto de vista lógico, já que o coração, instância indefinível e ilocável, apaga ou inutiliza qualquer dispositivo racional e qualquer forma de convívio regulamentado.

...

Nessa situação dramática de desterro e de alheamento, em que a mudança é apenas uma aparência, em que o tempo se apresenta como suspenso e coalhado, em que a concórdia se resolve na prática negativa (e fora de qualquer modernidade, ainda que póstuma) do jeitinho, a própria idéia de comunidade mostra toda a sua (im)possibilidade. O que resta, afinal, são apenas os restos, tornando a realidade social e política brasileira uma paisagem de ruínas, uma espécie de *waste land* onde tudo se declina sob o signo de uma razão imprópria e arbitrária, tudo se alimenta de um “poder (não) ser” à beira do abismo e da dissolução de qualquer convívio. Tudo, enfim, se concentra e se dispersa nas fronteiras ilocáveis de um “lugar (em) comum”, que todavia não existe ou que continua existindo apenas na sua trágica inexistência. (9)

This tragic anxiety of “being displaced” is what Nelson Rodrigues explores in his plays through fetishes. These fetishes help the characters find a footing in displacement and a reality in a world of contradictions: silenced practices, confusion of placement, abysses, arbitrary laws, the desire of being together and its impossibility, the desire of being above and beyond the structures of stereotype and the specter of that impossibility, fetishes of ghostly figures such as the patriarch or the cordial man (based and not based on reality).

I hope to have been able to show that Nelson Rodrigues brought to the stage myths and discourses that have been used to describe the slippery idea of a national identity, but have, nonetheless, been impactful in the lives of those inhabiting in this system. He has brought those to life through the fetishes, in order to dissect and question those same discourses while examining the psychological anxieties accompanying some

of these complicated discourses (as ambiguous definitions of power structures).

Rodrigues has also been able to put to the stage the complementary spatial and temporal realities of Brazil's social environment, together with its constant demands to performative practices, i.e., requiring double-consciousness. This is exemplified by the different masks one must wear in each area of one's life (street, house or religious worlds) or the sentences one must pronounce in order to insert one world into another ("sabe com quem está falando"?), thus requiring an awareness about these realms, a performative consciousness.

Notes to Conclusion

⁶³Antunes Filho in *Folhetim* 29, p. 426.

⁶⁴*Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, p. 4

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