

The Anti-Diary On Teolinda Gersão's *Os Guarda-Chuva Cintilantes*

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Abstract To include a book in a certain genre implies that it conforms to previously determined discursive constants. The originality of the work of Teolinda Gersão resides precisely in its radical break with a genre of long-standing traditions and, at the same time, in its explicit reference to a necessarily codified universe. If we are able to overcome the feeling of strangeness conveyed by the lack of obligatory markers (such as the absence of years or months), the construction of a fragmented discourse, sinuous even, gains relevance, and we can detect undeniable indicators of femininity. Life writing that escapes the canon without however forgetting the flow and/or obsessions of a *saying of the mind*, Teolinda Gersão's anti-diary is undoubtedly an example of a feminine trend marked by heterodoxy and transgression.

Keywords Diary. Anti-diary. Transgression. Solitude. Death. Ambiguity. Fragment.



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Though not an exclusively female genre, the diary has fulfilled various functions in representing a discourse which frequently feels the need to hide itself under the cover of either anonymity or a highly selective reserve. The social situation in which women found themselves for centuries was conducive to the appearance of diaries, manuscripts, and autobiographies which were more or less condemned to private circulation or otherwise concealed under false or perversely falsified identities. The volume recently edited by Laura Lunger Knoppers (2009) brings to light a rich collection of texts which expose women's social, cultural, political and economic life in a manner both daring and raw. Knoppers' collection clearly shows that women's riches or power - more virtual than real - had indeed very little influence on their daily lives. The study *Mon Histoire des Femmes* by Michelle Perrot (2006) reveals the great distance that separated writing from publishing, and the great obstacles women had to overcome to publish their works as late as the 19th century. Indeed, the constant use of male pseudonyms is the unquestionable proof of this situation.

More recently, and without the typical features of the *ancien régime* society, the diary has emerged as an instrument for revealing facts and experiences which can be viewed either as the narration of trivial daily events or as allusions to much vaster phenomena. From amongst the diaries which came to prominence during the second half of the 20th century, I have chosen a short book by Teolinda Gersão entitled *Os Guarda-Chuvas Cintilantes* (*Shimmering Umbrellas*), which unambiguously defines itself (in a sort of subtitle) as a "diary". This direct and voluntary reference, however, flies in the face of a rigorous classification (Baroni, Macé 2006), as the generally accepted characteristics of the genre are simply not there. In fact, in this supposed diary there is no mention whatsoever of months or years, and the only explicit references are weekdays and numbers. The feeling of insecurity thus generated in the reader becomes even more unsettling when the entry "Monday, 12" says, "Não é um diário, disse o crítico, porque não é um registo do que sucedeu em cada dia" (It is not a diary, said the critic, because it is not a report of what happened every day) (Gersão 1984, 20).¹

The ambiguity as to the literary genre to which the book belongs becomes even more obvious when the narrator/author² challenges the value of the genre itself in statements such as "os diários são profundamente ridículos" (diaries are deeply ridiculous) (24); or "Os diários os são perversos. [...] os diários são a forma mais idiota e mais per-

¹ All references mentioning *Os Guarda-Chuvas Cintilantes* are to the original Portuguese text (Gersão 1984). The excerpts have been translated into English by the author of this article.

² The equivalence between narrator/author is obligatory, as the work is said to be a diary.

versa de toda a literatura" (Diaries are perverse. [...] the diary is the stupidest and most perverse form of literature) (25-6); or

Os diários assentavam no equívoco de que o eu, o real e o tempo existiam e eram definíveis e fixáveis - mas a verdade era outra, para quem tivesse olhos suficientemente corrosivos para vê-la, suspeitou. (33)

Diaries were based on the wrong assumption that time and reality existed and that they were definable and fixable. But she suspected that, for those whose eyesight was sufficiently keen to see it, the truth was actually otherwise.

The mistrust engendered by such affirmations and the impossibility of the diary to fulfill its traditional role enhance the catastrophic atmosphere foreshadowed by "cogumelo gigantesco, venenoso, que rebenta inexoravelmente numa bola de fogo sobre o mundo" (the gigantic, poisonous mushroom, which inexorably explodes into a ball of fire above the world) (112).

This apocalyptic mood arises from the apparent disorganisation in the numbering of the entries. The first one, "Sunday, 1" may not, in fact, be arbitrary, though it is difficult to detect coherence in the 106 entries that make up this equivocal diary. The beginning on a Sunday and on the first cardinal number seems to call the readers' attention to the foundational nature³ of a "life writing" which is feminine, fragmented, disorderly, yet an unquestionable record of neediness, loneliness, repression and artificiality.

The umbrella (or its *simulacrum*, the parasol) is a fragile yet surprisingly lively, multi-purpose object, almost with a will of its own. It can symbolise an unstable form of protection which may be shattered at any moment ("estilhaços confusos" [confused splinters], 7) in the immeasurable flow ("ficavam transparentes" [they became transparent], 8) that makes it alien to its supposed protective function. The miniature umbrellas used for decorating ice cream ("podiam fechar-se, experimentou, e ficavam ainda mais pequenos, mais perfeitos, iguais aos da vida" [they could be folded, and they became even smaller, more perfect, exactly like real-life [umbrellas]], 64) thus become a miniature representation of a hostile and dysphoric reality:

As pessoas debaixo dos guarda-chuvas, sem cabeça, só se viam o tronco e as pernas, andando, como se o guarda-chuva fosse um enorme chapéu disforme, um cogumelo gigante substituindo a cabeça real, decapitada. (62)

3 In the Bible, however, Sunday is the day God rested after creating the universe.

People under their umbrellas, without heads, you could only see their torsos and legs, walking, as if the umbrellas were enormous crooked hats, giant mushrooms replacing the real, severed heads.

In this atmosphere of imminent disaster, the “she” is brought into frequent interchange with the “I” in a discourse which fails to establish one single narrative person. Instead, it toys with the insecurity of a subject whom we are unable to name: “E tudo o que existe, sou teneado a converter em ‘eu’” (And I am tempted to turn everything into ‘I’) (25) writes the narrator in “Wednesday, 5”.

The seemingly unjustified insistence on two narrative persons ends up accounting for the appearance of an ‘otherness’ (“Abandonara os círculos do idêntico e do uno porque desejava a tensão da alteridade” [She had abandoned the circles of the identical and the single one, as she longed for the tension of otherness], 103), which emerges as a double – indispensable for the writing of autobiographies or even biographies (“Media-se apenas, escrevendo, a distância entre o eu o seu duplo” [The only thing that was measured in writing was the distance between the ‘I’ and its double], 34). Curiously, this distance is based on the construction of imaginary dialogues with the Squirrel or the Dog, which reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s technique in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: “Estás a escrever um livro sobre quê? Pergunta o Esquilo mexendo nos papéis” (About what are you writing a book? asks the Squirrel rummaging through the papers) (39); “Ainda bem que não foste em cantigas, disse o cão saltando-lhe de repente ao caminho” (Thank goodness you did not let yourself be fooled, said the dog, jumping up suddenly) (131).

The appearance of these strange interlocutors suggests a needy and solitary world, not only insofar as they symbolise imaginary doubles, but also to the extent that they are represented via the narrator’s choice of verb tenses. These shift from present to preterit (perfect and imperfect), from future to conditional. The perfect and imperfect preterits are traditionally used for narrating specific occasional actions or actions with an aspectual dimension and spread over time. The present is normally an atemporal tense, with an almost defining function (“um ar indiferente de quem pensa noutra coisa” [the air of indifference of someone who thinks⁴ about something else], 7) or a presentification function evinced in dialogue, even in the fictitious dialogues between “I” and “I”. The use of the future, on the other hand, is linked to the creation of possible or probable events (“virá depois o jantar num tabuleiro e eu cortarei a carne sem pena

⁴ Though the correct English tense here is ‘is thinking’, the simple present ‘thinks’ has been used to show tense usage in the original.

sar" [later, dinner will come on a tray and I will cut the meat without thinking], 59) anticipating the hypothetical counterfactuality inherent in the use of the conditional mood:

Seria doutro modo se os seus olhos vissem claro.

Então atravessariam os longos corredores dos livros, e eles seriam transparentes, brilhantes, como asas irisadas de insectos, mudando de cor conforme a incidência da luz, e as pessoas poderiam lê-los com um único olhar, atravessá-los-iam num relance porque eles eram transparentes, avançariam por entre eles e bastaria um olhar para os experimentar a todos. [...] as pessoas chegariam voando ao centro, sem precisar de percorrer todos os seus caminhos [...]. (121)

It would be otherwise if her eyes could see clearly.

Then they could go through the long corridors of books, and these would be transparent, bright like the variegated wings of insects, changing colours along with the changing angles of light, and people would be able to read them all in one single look, they would go through them at a glance because they were transparent, they would walk among them and it would take a single look to try them all. [...] people would fly to the centre, without having to walk along all the paths leading to it [...].

The borderline "sobre um fio de arame estendido entre o possível e o impossível" (along a wire stretched between the possible and the impossible) (9) is explored by a writing which takes advantage of the instability of the subject (changing from "I" to "she" and signified by the use of the conditional) and intensifies the writer's loneliness and everything associated with it. The indifference of writing towards the subject using this writing ("O mundo não gira à volta do autor, está-se completamente nas tintas para que Barthes não gostasse de líchias, está-se cagando, cagando, cagando" [The world does not revolve around the author. It couldn't care less about whether Barthes likes lychees or not. It does not give a shit, literally, not a shit], 24) is enhanced by its unavoidably virtual nature and leads the narrator to exhaust herself in the inefficiency of her own discourse:

As pessoas julgam a literatura um campo adicional de experiência, diz Pip, mas esquecem que é uma experiência apenas virtual, que não pode ser utilizada de modo efectivo. (63)

People regard literature as an additional field of experience, says Pip, but they forget that it is a merely virtual experience, which cannot be used in any effective way.

The ineffectiveness of reports and stories characterised by the supposed importance of daily events or by the ironic and caustic observations offered by the Squirrel (“Desistes?” [Are you giving up?], 56) turns into the angst of “tudo se transforma[r] em escrita” (everything becoming writing) (68) and into the impossibility of being anything other than language.

The artificiality which the author cannot escape influences the subject’s relationship with others, provoking an essential solitude which is reflected in the attempt to “viver melhor as relações hut manas” (improve human relations) (118) and destroy the tyrannical division between the different grammatical persons:

- Não gosto de gramática, grita o Esquilo com raiva. Quero que as pessoas dos verbos morram todas.

Como matar as pessoas dos verbos? Interrogo-me, surpresa, porque nunca me tinha ocorrido essa ideia. Ou como neutralizá-las, pelo menos? (73)

- I don’t like grammar, rages the Squirrel. I want all persons of the verbs to die.

How can I kill the persons of the verbs? I wonder, surprised at myself, as I had never had this idea before. Or, at least, how can I neutralize them?

The attempt at destruction referred to in the above excerpt is probably much more significant in a woman’s writing, which is much more frequently dominated by the tasks and chores traditionally related to the female universe. Symbolically, Dorita, the housemaid, abandons this universe in an act of presumably unconscious rebellion which suggests, however, the genetic weight of a still essential legacy:

É verdade que as folhas de papel e a caneta me passam pelas mãos, mas não consigo prendê-las porque tenho sempre as mãos ocupadas com outras coisas, panos de cozinha, lençóis, livros, legumes, detergentes, vassouras, há uma infindável multidão de coisas que se intrometem entre a minha mão a caneta e o papel. (83)

It is true that I handle sheets of paper and pens but I can never hold on to them because my hands are always busy with other things: kitchen cloths, bed sheets, books, vegetables, detergents, brooms; there is an infinite list of things that come between my hand and pen and paper.

This disclosure, predictable in a female subject, explains opinions, dreams, and challenges, and reinforces the fragmented nature of a diary in which this reality insinuates itself into a deep structure that cannot be ignored.

The declaration that “Os diários assentavam no equívoco de que o eu, o real e o tempo existiam e eram definíveis e fixáveis” (Diaries were based on the wrong assumption that time, reality and the ‘I’ really existed and they were definable and fixable) (33) immediately leads to the realization that memory is unreliable and that the entire diary is artificial, since “há sempre dois lados nas coisas, cada uma é sempre o contrário de si própria” (there are always two sides to a story, and each is the opposite of itself) (12). Thus, all the stories “eram falsas” (were false) (90), as the narrator exclaims in the entry entitled “Monday, 16”.

The falsehood or the untruth of the stories and memories results in the appearance of dreams and nightmares which reveal the subject along with her desires and deepest fears. The projection of her terror unto her dogs, to the point of saying that they “acordam exaustos de manhã e vivem o resto do dia sob uma tensão tão forte que prometem a si mesmos nunca mais dormir” (wake up exhausted in the morning and live the rest of the day in such great tension that they promise themselves never to sleep again) (111), reveals a strategy marked by desperate attempts to attribute to others the distress caused by the impossibility of controlling time and, consequently, death (“Esse ano demorou-se um só dia” [This year lasted only a day], “Foi um dia que durou seis meses” [It was a day which lasted six months], 9 and 57). Death insinuates itself surreptitiously into daily life but is constantly disguised by various artifices, which the subject naively challenges:

Nesse dia sobraram-lhe duas horas e ela guardou-as para o dia seguinte. Sempre que calhava fazia assim uma pequena economia, que deixava para utilizar noutra altura em que se visse mais aflita. Era também um modo de adiar envelhecer, adiava sempre, somando essas economias casuais já tinha vários anos na gaveta. Se um dia precisasse, gastá-los-ia de uma vez. Mas secretamente esperava não precisar nunca.

Poderia viver milhares de anos se gastasse apenas alguns segundos por dia.

On that day, she was left with two extra hours, and she saved them for the next day. She would save up a little whenever she could, keeping these savings for moments of need. It was also a way of putting off ageing, she was always putting off ageing; and summing up all these occasional savings, she had already put many years by in her drawer. If she needed them one day, she would spend them all in one go. But, secretly, she hoped she would never need them.

She could live for thousands of years if she managed to use only some seconds a day. (11).

The nostalgia she intends to exorcise (“A primeira chuva. Serena, ligeira, matando uma qualquer saudade dentro dela” [The first rain. Serene, light, killing the nostalgia within her], 8) reminds her of “um tempo informe e sem medida” (a shapeless and immeasurable past) (12) in which mirrors and photographs play an important part.

When the mirror fails to reflect the image of the person who gazes into it (“Mas a imagem pareceu-lhe cada vez mais inexacta” [But the image seemed increasingly inaccurate], 29) the way is open for that which is forbidden and for that which is taboo: “Não coincidir com os espelhos é o maior dos crimes. O espelho é a segurança, o enquadramento” (Not coinciding with your mirror image is the greatest crime. The mirror is security, frame of reference) (30). This is the source of security sought by the female characters who identify themselves with the peacemakers of the past, as some of the characters drawn by Agustina Bessa-Luís. A perfect example is Luísa Bae-na in *O Concerto dos Flamengos*, who only manages to find herself when she looks in a mirror and sees the reflected image of Isabel of Portugal, the 15th-century princess. The shift from “I” to a comforting “she” is almost the answer the subject is looking for in her multiple portraits or in her obsessive search for shadows, viewed as an extension of the fleeting and unstable “I”. In “Saturday, 5” we read:

Iria pintando em cada dia o seu retrato, decidiu, deixaria retratos sucessivos no tempo, multiplicando-se para aumentar as suas hipóteses de escapar à morte. Porque a morte levaria mais tempo a apagar todos esses eus do que apenas um só.

E quando ela estivesse morta e não escrevesse ficariam pelo menos os retratos dela escrevendo, e seria como se a vida que ela escrevia pudesse continuar a voltar as páginas. (28)

She would paint a portrait of herself every day, she decided. She would leave behind successive portraits, multiplying herself to increase her chances to escape death. Because it would take death much longer to erase all those ‘Is’ rather than just one.

And when she were dead and could no longer write, the paintings portraying her in the act of writing would remain, and it would be as if the life she wrote about could go on turning the pages.

The shifts from mirror to portrait and then from portrait to shadow – a shadow which seems to become independent of the body casting it, as in Adelbert von Chamisso’s, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (1814) – are fundamental elements in portraying the rupture of the subject, whose only certainty is that “Tudo era sempre fragmentário e interrompido” (everything is fragmentary and interrupted) (Gersão 1984, 91).

The separation of the shadow from the body and the tricks used to try and catch the shadow in the hope that it will serve as a stabilizing force contribute to representing the fight against the fragmentation of an identity that is about to collapse. The autonomy that the shadow seems to enjoy is detectable in several passages, which become true keys to the reading of the diary:

A sombra sentou-se na beira do muro, compôs o cabelo, alisou a saia, preparou um sorriso enquanto ela focava para muito perto, diminuindo cada vez mais a zona focada, de modo que a sombra se destacasse com nitidez sobre o fundo, que não seria mais do que um ambiente sugerido. (37)

The shadow sat on the wall, tidied up her hair, flattened her skirt, and sketched a smile while she zoomed in with a gradual close-up, so that the shadow stood out clearly against the background, which was no more than the suggestion of a setting.

If we recall Adelbert von Chamisso's character, Peter Schlemiel, we realise the importance of this allusion and its cruel and perverse nature. Schlemiel lost his shadow due to a pact with a strange grey man (reminiscent of the devil) and this loss meant the eternal forfeit of happiness, which the character traded in exchange for the granting of his wishes. All this means the primacy of illusion over reality; in other words, an 'atmosphere of intimation' that cannot overcome the simulation underlying the building of the setting and, as a consequence, of the subject.

The reference to Horace's *Ars Poetica* ("Epístola aos Pisões: Corc tai os pés, pisões, cortai verdadeiramente os pés e aprendei que a poesia não pisa: é o modo mais directo de voar" ["Epistle to the Pisos: cut your feet, truly cut your feet, and learn that poetry does not tread upon things: it is the fastest form of flying], 83) reflects the ironically educational spirit permeating the poem and calls our attention to the previous entry ("Tuesday, 7") and its unmistakable references to the Latin text, which, as we know, advocates the semblance of truth rather than truth itself. The restraint and propriety the classical poet alludes to may thus function as a poetic norm which Teolinda Gersão would not find superfluous.

The inclusion of veiled references to other works gives rise to a sort of oblique reading, where these embedded text(s) appear as *mise-en-abyme* structures, disguised yet impossible to ignore. The self-reflective surface structure represented in "Monday, 30" (121-8), in which Wanda reads a book where her actions are duplicated, can be seen as an indirect representation of the key issue raised throughout the diary, i.e. women's relations with power and subservience.

It is these relations that lend urgency to a possible biography or autobiography, only fleetingly mentioned in the text. The attempt to write a biography without a specific subject, or an autobiography without a clearly identified 'sender' ("E se reincidisse em autobiografias, teria de quebrá-las pelo meio, e encontrar algures um compromisso" [And if I were to write other autobiographies, I would have to cut them in half, and somehow find a compromise], 103) is a means to redress the balance in the tension between writing (shattered into multiple references and hypotexts) and the anguish of ambiguity, in a game where the player always ends up dead ("o jogador encontrava sempre a morte" [the player would always meet death], 97). The strange diary presents short episodes bordering on the nonsensical and marked by the bewilderment of a world where women (and men) feel like puppets in the hands of an uncontrollable force. Besides the daily trivialities, the diary expands to include the deepest possible exploration of life, as illustrated by the impetuous words of the man in "Wednesday, 20". The dysfunctionality represented in "Wednesday, 2" is reinforced by the man, for whom "Prazer era o jogo com as duas, no meio das duas" (pleasure was playing with the two of them, in the middle of them) (50), which suggests the difficulty of choosing and the feeling of belonging to a repressive and inhuman world ("Às vezes imagino um mundo de repressão total" [Sometimes I imagine a world of total repression], 58).

Ironically, however, a world dominated by machines would be the perfect world, a world without disagreements or individuality:

Seria um escândalo, se uma máquina quisesse regular ela própria a quantidade e o ritmo da sua produção. Maior escândalo ainda: a máquina que quisesse decidir o seu próprio produto. [...] As cadeias de montagem ficariam descontroladas, e, se não se desse conta a tempo, sairiam monstruosidades, automóveis com pneus de gelatina, ou tanques de guerra com chapéus de coco. (70)

It would be a scandal if machines themselves were to dictate the quantity and rate of their production. And an even greater scandal if they wanted to decide what to produce [...] Assembly chains would go berserk and, if not stopped in time, they would produce monstruosities, such as cars with jelly tyres or tanks with bowler hats.

The problem is that

As máquinas são cegas e surdas e têm martelos na cabeça. Não comunicam entre si, rodam num espaço de ausência, que tentam preencher produzindo multidões de coisas inúteis. À noite deitam-se na cama e lêem livros eróticos, porque deixaram de saber como se faz amor. (72)

Machines are deaf and blind and have hammers in their heads. They do not communicate with one another. They run in a void, which they try to fill by producing millions of useless objects. At night they lie in bed and read erotic books, because they do not know how to make love.

The last sentence in the above quotation describes a dysphoric world dominated by automatons and reminiscent of innumerable works from the 18th century in which marionettes or monsters stand in for humans. In fact, the dolls in “Friday, 25” are the perfect representations of a terrifying world:

As bonecas quebram as jarras, os vidros, os cristais, as clarabóias, entortam as facas, embaraçam as linhas [...], entornam pez nos livros, furam os olhos dos pássaros com agulhas em brasa [...], deitam veneno nos biscoitos de polvilho, deitam veneno nos ouvidos das pessoas que dormem [...] deixam feitiços nas esquinas, feitos a bonecas que têm o meu rosto, espetadas nas mãos com alfinetes, com facas afiadas na garganta e tesouras em cruz debaixo da cabeça, e depois voltam para casa e tornam a pôr-se no mesmo lugar como se nunca tivessem saído e sempre tivessem lá estado, fitando-me, inocentes, com os seus olhos fixos, no momento preciso em que eu as olho. (80-1)

The dolls shatter vases, glasses, crystals, and skylights; they bend knives, entangle threads [...], pour pitch on books, pierce holes in birds' eyes with red hot needles [...], put poison on biscuits and in sleeping people's ears [...] they leave spells on street corners, dolls with my face, hands riddled with needles, sharp knives stabbing their throats, and cross-shaped scissors underneath their heads; then they go home and back to where they were before, as if they'd never been out and had stayed in the same place, and they innocently stare at me with their fixed eyes at the very moment when I look at them.

These dolls, symbols of a dysfunctional world, have several parallels in the elements representing the relationships between humans, as in the case of dogs and, in particular, *Sitting Dog* (“Cão Sentado”, 117), which reminds us of Herberto Helder's namesake and its implicit meaning (death): “Não existe nenhum Cão Sentado, diz o cão estremecendo e olhando-me de repente com dureza, nem há nenhuma solução fora de nós” (*Sitting Dog* does not exist, says the shivering dog with a harsh and sudden look. There is no solution outside ourselves) (117).

The last two sentences of Herberto Helder's partially autobiographical book *Apresentação do Rosto* portray the impossibility of escaping death: “As crianças matam, e as lagartixas morrem. / É uma ilha em forma de cão sentado” (Children kill and lizards die. It's an island

in the form of a sitting dog) (Helder 1968, 217). The island, a claustrophobic place no one can leave (even though we know that Herber to Helder's island is Madeira, his birthplace), joins the immobility of the dolls and of the little mermaid of Copenhagen – “criatura ambígua, a meio caminho entre o animal e o humano, o elementar diferenciado e oceânico e a prisão da alma e das relações humanas” (an ambiguous creature, half human half animal, a differentiated and oceanic element and the prison of the soul and human relationships) (Gersão 1984, 53-4). The need to ‘summon’ the mermaid, in addition to the other allusions to authors and places, is linked to the importance of the *simulacrum* and of indirect and oblique representation. All of the characters evoked – Cristiana, Jovita (the spiritist), Glorinha, Elza, Dorita, Wanda and many others – reinforce the idea of a newly found solitude and of desire presentified only in the conditional mood, both hypothetical and frustrated. The decision announced in the last lines – “Rebentemos o círculo mágico! Ladramos alegremente, correndo, e simbolicamente rasgando com dentes um guarda-chuva que estoura, silva, rodopia, e finalmente se abate sobre si mesmo, como um balão desfeito” (Let's break the magic circle! Let's bark joyfully and run, symbolically tearing at an umbrella with our teeth; and the umbrella bursts, floats, swirls around until finally it falls limp onto itself, like an empty balloon) (132) – seems the successful outcome of all the hesitations that transpire from the diary (or its mask).

Without fully conforming to the canon of the diary, this short volume by Teolinda Gersão manages to recreate an unorthodox journal, challenging the notions of both diary and autobiography. Complying rather loosely with the organisation into days of the week and of the month, the author expounds on a process of self-evolution and self-evaluation of her relationship with the world (be it empirical or intellectual) and travels from a closed and, as it were, childish universe (“as estações bem diferenciadas” [well-differentiated seasons], 7) to a more deceptive and chaotic one, in which the stabilizing references of early life no longer exist. The liberation recorded in the final passages, even though through the dog's words, consecrates the difference and the potential opening of the bewildering circle of a diary that closes in upon itself.

The evident hesitation between the “I” and the “she”, the present and the past, the reflection in the mirror and the static portray, lead the author/narrator of *Shimmering Umbrellas* to try and find a point of balance which summarises her female way of being in the world. Just as Alice, Teolinda might wonder, perplexedly and provocatively:

Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, *Who* in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle (Carroll [1865] 1970, 96 and 98)

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