

## SUBMISSION AND FEMALE OPPRESSION IN "ROCKING CHAIR" BY OSMAN LINS

### SUBMISSÃO E OPRESSÃO FEMININA EM “CADEIRA DE BALANÇO” DE OSMAN LINS

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**ABSTRACT:** This bibliographic study intends to reveal the narrative elements used by the Brazilian writer Osman Lins in the psychological space of submission and female oppression in "Rocking chair". The story tells the routine of the female character *Júlia Mariana*, in front of the domestic tasks, which represent a challenge to her condition as a pregnant woman. The details created by writer represent a vigil of the male figure - *Augusto* exercised over the wife. The suffering, loneliness and silence lived by the character are only relieved when she dares to empower herself and sit on the representative object of her husband's authority - the rocking chair. There she relaxes, imagines, dares, feels. In that little bit of time she is able to forget her condition of submission. Based on studies by Agranti (1999), Bachelard (1978), Brandão (2013), Perrot (2005), Dalcastagnè (2015), Lins (1976), among others, this analysis some notes on female empowerment and reveals condition of submission and oppression indicated by writer to his female character. The narrated psychological space is punctuated with objects that permanently watch the character, imposing the resignation and acceptance of its condition to have been born woman, in a society of the male chauvinist culture.

**KEYWORDS:** Rocking Chair, female empowerment; psychological space; submission.

**RESUMO:** Este estudo bibliográfico intenciona revelar os elementos narrativos utilizados pelo escritor brasileiro Osman Lins na tessitura do espaço psicológico de submissão e opressão feminina em “Cadeira de balanço” da obra *Os gestos*. O conto narra a rotina da personagem *Júlia Mariana*, diante das tarefas domésticas, as quais representam um desafio à sua condição de gestante. As nuances criadas por Osman Lins representam uma vigília permanente da figura masculina – *Augusto* (marido) sobre a personagem. O sofrimento, a solidão e o silêncio vividos por ela, apenas são aliviados quando ousa empoderar-se e sentar no objeto representativo de autoridade do marido – a cadeira de balanço. Ali ela relaxa, imagina, ousa, sente-se. Naquele pequeno pedaço de tempo a personagem é capaz de esquecer-se da sua condição de submissão. Com base nos estudos de Agranti (1999), Bachelard (1978), Brandão (2013), Perrot (2005), Dalcastagnè (2015), Lins (1976), dentre outros, esta análise traz alguns apontamentos sobre o empoderamento feminino e revela a condição de submissão e opressão indicada por Osman Lins à sua personagem feminina. O espaço psicológico narrado é pontuado de objetos que vigiam permanentemente a personagem, impondo a resignação e aceitação de sua condição por ter nascido mulher, numa sociedade latino-americana de cultura machista.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Cadeira de balanço, empoderamento feminino; espaço psicológico; submissão.

This analysis intends to explore the psychological space in the tale "Rocking chair", from the book *Os gestos* (The gestures), by contemporary Brazilian writer Osman Lins. Bachelard (1978, p.12) distinguishes between imagination as a passive register of experiences and imagination, allied to the will and the creative power. Osman Lins in "Rocking Chair" announces and reports the female condition while portraying the experience lived by the character *Júlia Mariana*, in a clear reference to the patriarchal and

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macho society, whose feminine role is bequeathed to the silence in front of male submission and oppression. The writer, while overcoming the customary description of reality, contemplates the readers with a unique literary work, unleashed in a dynamic and profuse space of sensations. The character lives a pregnant woman's routine problems, oppressed by her husband, submissive to the daily chores of a housewife, which hinder her freedom. The rocking chair, allied with the "large gold-framed mirror," becomes a symbol of permanent vigilance and demand of the authoritarian husband, dialectically deconstructing the comfortable object of gentle rest in a torturous instrument of oppression.

When we imagine the construction of space, we immediately ascribe the materiality of its objects, landscapes and scenery, however, there is a whole immateriality contained in it, either by the unreal representation, or even by the imagery<sup>2</sup>. The heavy sphere of space described by Osman Lins in "Rocking Chair" refers to a space far beyond material, induces the psychological space of oppression, characterized by the constant alertness of the husband *Augusto* on his wife *Júlia Mariana*. This immaterial space incorporates meaning and creates body, because it torments the character. Brandão (2013, page 71), reveals that:

At least two theoretical alternatives are raised by the approximation between the space as relation and the space as given; that is, between the relating operation and the reality that such operation offers (reality that, in turn, is shaped by other relations); or, in other words, between the establishment of a determination and the fact that it only establishes itself with elements already determined by other relations (establishment that occurs as it ignores or considers the other relationships irrelevant, and thus intends to deal with the elements "in themselves").

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<sup>2</sup>For Laplantine (2003, p. 79): "The imagery has a commitment to the real and not to reality. [...] if the imagery recreates and reorders reality, it is in the realm of interpretation and representation, that is, of the real. "Osman Lins, by means of the objects layout - watchful oppressors of the feminine character -, creates a psychological space in which *Júlia Mariana* suffocates.

Osman Lins in "Rocking Chair" creates a psychological space that imposes on the character the obligation to perform the heavy domestic chores, even in her critical pregnant condition. However, early in the story, the character breaks with this submission by enthroning herself in her husband's rocking chair. Seizes the power, even if for a few moments. Relaxes, sits down, empowers herself. To this approaching related to the real space, other relations are established, whether they are in the internal or external space. It

indicates the creation of an immaterial space - the one that is felt, although it cannot be described or visualized.

The female oppression and submission are silent, an unalterable torture, whose time does not end. Even out of reach from her husband's presence, she is dominated by constant vigilance: either of the objects or even of the spaces that compose the plot created by Osman Lins. Her fragile figure of a pregnant woman is enhanced by the risks presented during pregnancy. Swollen legs and feet, about to break exposed veins, a heavy atmosphere, as much as her immense womb. The permanent diligence, albeit unreal, is conveyed by the writer in determining dissimulated landscapes that imprison the character. The psychological space in the text presents a tenuous relation of reality projection, concatenating it, as a description of data and characteristics, in order to establish two approaches to such an approximation. One approach establishes that culturally conceived and accepted definitions of objects shape and define their subject matter; while the other determines the possible relations between the indetermination of the imagery and its possible relations, so that the constitutive spatiality gains projection and is defined on the horizon. As Brandão states (2013, p. 71):

The first alternative addresses space from the discussion about the links between matter (that is, "indistinct body mass") and form (that is, culturalized, semiotized matter). It may be assumed, in the wake of Jean-François Lytard, that in every "landscape" - especially in "simulated" landscapes, as it defines verbal language in a state of literature - there is the attempt of insurrection of matter against form. In this space matter and form clash, and it is fundamental to ascertain to what extent the former is capable of subverting the domestication which the latter exercises. The literary space presents itself as landscape, but it is the unreality of the landscape that matters, that which escapes the process according to which the form culturalizes matter. The second alternative proposes a system that seeks to radicalize the double and contradictory relational and corporeal aspect of literary language - aspect that defines its constitutive spatiality.

The objects distributed to compose the space suggest suffocating oppression, subverting form and matter, radicalizing in this way the relation between the culturally accepted definition of the object and the disposition in the constitutive spatiality. "When she got to the pump, she was panting. Leaned against the lever. Overhead, over the ugly, dirty yard, the calm four o'clock sun shone. Large clear clouds passed, so slowly that their flight was scarcely noticed" (LINS, 2003, p. 57). The pump matter surges against its form, it is a pump that suffocates, a lever that hypnotizes her, as if it had its own motions, illusorily makes her head seem to float, it is as if the matter takes on a disproportionate

mass, because it makes breathing more difficult as transform the routine chores of Júlia Mariana into something more exhausting.

The defined concepts of pump, lever, wall, flowerbeds, shirt, are incorporated into culture and have their functions accepted, however, in the literary work induce the unreal. And it is precisely this unreality that gives the dynamics of movement in the work of Lins. It is a pump that disfigures itself in a chimerical form, a lever that, although made of iron, seems to dissolve, to fuse, to bend and to yield to the body weight of the character. They are not just unimportant laid out objects, for they are there and serve a purpose beyond those already culturalized. In this regard Brandão (2013, pp. 71-72), reveals that:

It is important to know whether the resources that make the word's "body" identifiable - the formalizing impetus of words - can disintegrate themselves. It is crucial to ascertain whether the arrangements that meet the expectations of the human senses can renounce their ability to become recognizable. With such resignation, the force that indetermination exerts on determination makes it apt to reveal itself.

The psychological space, created from the objects layout, reproduces overwhelming scenery and landscape; anguish and potentialize the suffering of the character; impose submission. They are displaced to play the role of vigilantes, in the absence of the husband, in face of the female character's fragility.

In "Rocking Chair", it is possible to observe the profusion of metaphorical meanings and the pictorial, either in the imagery of the representation of a psychological space of oppression or in the tessitura of Osman Lins writing. The invisible threads interconnect the varied aspects described throughout the story. The broad meanings of the woman's figure before the object determinant of the narrative - rocking chair - but also, in front of the other objects, either the "large gold-framed mirror," the "lever," the "pump," or the "bed of wilted and poorly maintained flowers," traditional spaces are distributed and composed in an undetermined time. Osman Lins (1976, p. 63-64), on the study of narrative cites that:

[...] not only space and time, when we dwell on the narrative, are inseparable. The narrative is a compact and inextricable object, all its threads bind each other and each reflects countless others. It is possible, after all, to artificially isolate one of its aspects and study them – we don't understand as if the other aspects did not exist, but projecting it on them: in this sense, it is feasible to deepen, in a literary work, the understanding of its space or its time, or, more precisely, the treatment awarded therein to space or time: what role they play, how important and how the narrator introduces them.

The space created in the living room exposes heavy objects, which reinforce and intensify the effects of submission. The large gold-framed mirror, hung on a white wall, positioned as if it were a surveillance camera controlling all the movements of Julia Mariana, informing Augusto everything she did, appears like a sentinel, but also presents itself like an oppressor, whose natural function of reflecting the image becomes a reporter, dominating even the appearance of the suffering character.

"On the white wall, in its golden frame that contrasted with the poor furniture, the great mirror [...]" (Lins, 2003, p.56). The sequence in the use of the adjectives "white, golden, poor, great" refers to the creation of a psychological space of tension. The constant control exerted by the mirror over the character, without even reflecting her, brings the representation of the husband's presence. Julia Mariana does not want to see herself, and she prefers this way, "[...] the brownish spots on her face, her huge belly and swollen legs that tormented her so much [...]" Her image bothers her, so she avoids her reflection, yet she knows that it exists and that it - the mirror - watches her, and if it does, her sad image will be denounced.

The "great mirror" watches over her, like a glowing spot floating on her thoughts and keeps her under control. Osman Lins describes the character with the image she denied seeing reflected in the "great mirror", because perhaps she was afraid to see on her face, with its brownish spots, her own reality, whose livid feet, with concealed veins, swollen, seemed like a wax ex-voto. All this appearance seen by the character was increased by the dilemma of following the medical recommendation"- Abstain from salt. And make little physical effort, understand? Little physical effort." (LINS, 2003, p. 57). No salt and little physical effort, how to adopt this routine prescribed by the doctor having domestic chores to fulfill? The fear of contradicting and seeming useless before Augusto obliges her to wash shirts, make dinner, set the table, serve her husband and wash the dishes.

The very golden color of the mirror frame induces power, gold, superiority, and objects used by the nobility. Guarded by the great gold-framed mirror, contrasting with the white wall and the poor furniture, Júlia Mariana humbly becomes more and more fragile, becomes small, regardless of her proportions increased by the risky pregnancy. Stuck to this double perverse circle: one of permanent vigilance and one of a risky pregnancy, which could result in her death, Júlia Mariana retires among the invisible bars that have imprisoned her, represented by the coat hanger, the mirror, the sofa, the newspaper and

even by Augusto's armchair. Invisible walls that enclose her, suffocate and refer to a sphere that limits even her movements.

The image of Júlia Mariana, once feminine, had become a deformed mass of flesh and pain, to the point of bursting with too much pressure. Her vanity is put at stake and, therefore, she avoids being reflected by her coward vigilant. She does not want to see herself ugly, even fearing that her husband will perceive her like this. Osman Lins, in allusion to the object of waking, denominating it as the "great mirror of golden frame", uses the adjective to enhance the power it exerts on the fragile character, in the same way by naming the color – golden, as something that blinds the eyes of those who dare to be reflected.

The objects interconnected to the narrative hover over the character as a charge and reaffirmation of her submission to the husband - an imagery sense. Júlia Mariana feels nausea, fatigue, the silence bothers her, as she sways her chest is suppressed, her increased womb is pressing more and more in her task of fulfilling the imposition of the nature of being a mother. She wishes to rest, however, the object of rest - rocking chair - is both the representation of comfort and the symbol of oppression, for it is there that her husband enthrones himself, exerts power, submit her, in the feminine condition, to the oppression and resignation, in a space representing a suffocating psychological sphere. According to Brandão (2013, page 51):

Osman Lins admits that, in the Lima Barreto and the Romanesco space study, the interest lies not in space and time, but in the "treatment" given to them in the literary work. The argument disengages the critic from presenting some definition of those terms, as well as in-depth dialogue with what he calls "metaphysical theories" of space.

The spatial elements described in the work are independent of the "treatment" that defines them, since they intend to absorb the character, in a constant tension, conferring varied effects of singularization. Which is why, in this study, we chose to focus on the psychological space. The representation of the desire to be empowered, when sitting in the rocking chair, as seen in this passage: "She sat in her husband's favorite place - a wide chair whose arms he supported his strong hands and where he remained silent for hours." (Lins, 2003, p.56). In this object of representation of the power exerted by the husband, she, although relaxed for a few moments, is watched, tormented by the other objects constitutive of the space created by Osman Lins.

Brandão (2013, 62), also cites that "The space unfolds, thus, in the space observed is that makes possible the observation. Observing can amount to mimicking the record of a perceptual experience." The tension between the space observed by the character Júlia Mariana reflects what is possible of observation in the psychological space. The character's anguish is perceptible in the face of domestic tasks. Even without Augusto's presence, the character forces herself to fulfill her activities at home, thus submitting herself to the (in)visible oppression.

In the rocking chair she empowers<sup>3</sup> herself, dares to take the exclusive place of representation of the husband's power - the rocking chair - his throne, in which he reigns in silence. "Sitting in Augusto's chair, swaying lightly, she felt so good! Only there she could unburden her chest - punished by her grown womb - and breathe with relief. Why think of sad things? "(LINS, 2003, 57). However, only in the imagery it is possible to exert this power.

She empowers herself in the images that come to her mind, takes over and dreams of someday getting rid of the tedious household chores and living happy with her husband. She fears for the ugliness she now presents, suffers from imagining that she may not survive the birth, and soon her husband would find another woman and forget about her. She suffers from the terrible silence of Augusto as he sits in the rocking chair. She cannot bear the thought of imagining what he might be thinking. And what thoughts would these be? She blames herself for one day being abandoned and exchanged for another woman. Draws to herself the sense of responsibility for the acts performed by the partner.

Júlia Mariana's dilemma is enhanced: she lives in an internal space that oppresses her, and when she gains freedom of the outer space of the yard, she faces ugliness and dirt, illuminated by a calm sun, with clear, slow clouds of which the flight was scarcely noticed, suffocating her more and more. The yard, although the fresh breeze, but with the presence of a landscape that represses her, reminding her of her mission - to have been born a woman, to be submissive to her husband, and to perform household chores like most Brazilian women.

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<sup>3</sup>The woman empowers herself from the moment she assumes the direction of her destiny, albeit unconsciously by necessity. It's considered that the basis of "empowerment" distinguishes these new challenges from the proverbial types of development, glimpsing in the contemporaneity of the struggle of the women who, subjected to the masculine will, survive and seek to get rid of the secondary role, assuming their role as human beings.

It is interesting to note that the work portrays the lives of silenced women, in the submission of domestic tasks, before their husbands. They act, accept and feel like properties. The case of Brazilian society is emblematic, although it is one of the nations that debates and dialogues issues related to religion, gender, race, sexuality, etc., having vast legislation, which establishes a secular state, of respect for dignity, for freedom for equality. Yet, in some situations, it presents marks of the medieval societies - the woman like object, like property of the man, whose reproductive function is the main one. This situation is largely due to the influence of Christian beliefs inherited from the European culture of the sixteenth century. It is these traditions, among other factors, that determine the submissive role of women.

The very understanding of the figure of the Christian God's gender is dubious, for in the beginning it was the male God, the creator of Adam, a man in his likeness and of him the woman is created, Eve, submissive. A woman who, in an act of rebellion, is deceived by the serpent and contradicts the rules created by the man. That is, since the genesis, she is treacherous, must be watched, kept silent and submitted to man. The understanding that the Christian God has no gender is something of the present. The scriptures represent the virtuous woman as submissive, who must be a good wife, bear healthy children, and keep silent, for she is the source and the reason for all sin, responsible for the exclusion from paradise. Thus, for the man remained the power, the conquest of livelihood by sweat, the respect in the job market. In this respect, according to Perrot (1998):

From the first he was the Word, but the Word was God, and Man. Silence is the common one of women. It suits their secondary and subordinate position. It fits well on their faces, slightly smiling, not deformed by the impertinence of loud and virile laughter. Closed mouths, closed lips, low eyelids, women can only cry, let tears run like the water of inexhaustible pain, which, according to Michelet, they "hold the priesthood."

And it is precisely because she is subject to the discipline of a (masculine) God, that the woman has been silenced and must resign herself in her submission, just as she is portrayed in the story "Rocking chair", in which Júlia Mariana remains submissive And silent to the omnipresence of Augusto. In the same way, in both Eastern and Western beliefs, women must remain silent and discreet in temples, Julia Mariana is silent, for to her belongs only the second plane. And what's most interesting: she accepts this condition as something natural, assuming her own fault if something happens to the husband. However, just as some women, from time to time, break away from silence, take on themselves as warriors who they really are and show their faces, empower themselves,

take the power and roles traditionally occupied only by men. The character, even without realizing it, appropriates the object of her husband's exercise of authority - rocking chair - and becomes the her own owner, relaxes, even if just for a moment. She feels the owner of her time, forgets how much she is demeaned by the fact that she was born a woman. In this respect, Teles (2006, p.68), reveals that:

Gender violence is omnipresent, the result of behaviors seized by both its victims and its aggressors. It is socially legitimated, understood as natural. The cyclical phenomenon of violence reflects the accommodation of society in the face of the problem: honeymoon, tension in the relations, intensification of the conflicts between both until they explode in open violence; next, the regret comes, reconciliation and, again, the honeymoon, giving continuity to the cycle.

In a complex society, as the case of Brazil, not only because of the immense territorial space, but also because of the abyssal distances between the social strata, represented by the different "Brazils" coexisting in a single country, fantastic women survive and struggle every day fulfilling labor double shift, one at work and one at home with household chores, and they need to look beautiful and settled for when their husbands arrive. Even though our society has made significant progress in recent times, there is still much to be done. Teles (2006: 83) notes that:

In our approach to the main violations of women's human rights, we cannot fail to mention the situation of women workers, who suffer from restrictions and obstacles to equal access to the job market in relation to men. Women represent 40% of the urban economically active population in Latin America, where participation rates and schooling increased noticeably. But inequality has not diminished. The female unemployment rate is 30% higher than that of men. This is because the prevailing idea is that it is more expensive to hire women than men, and therefore women's wages are lower. The justification is that the social charges on women are higher because they have maternity leave.

Brazil has a complex legal support, representing the guarantee of the conquest of women's space, not only in the job market, but in a proper space of dignity, whether in politics, in the direction of companies or in professions formerly exclusive to men, such as bricklayers, drivers, police officers, etc. However, the establishing of this achievement is a permanent struggle. Literature fulfills this purpose of redemption and space of struggle as referring to the reflection on the role of women, on the necessary harmonious and egalitarian coexistence among beings, in a dignified environment.

Since the colonial period, many combative women not accepting the reduced space destined to them, went out fighting. They are Chiquinhas Gonzaga", "Dandaras", "Olgas

Benário”, “Terezas de Benguela”, “Anitas Garibaldi”, among many others who even though had dared in their times and assumed the role of command, empowered themselves and advanced in rights, still had their memories erased - they simply ceased to exist. Their records are forgotten, their trajectories purposely vanished, precisely because they have ventured to exist in a male universe, whose heroes are only men. However, even if some women are remembered and have their presences reflected, whether in schools or in social movements; yet it represents almost nothing. Therefore, the presence and memory of the woman arise from a permanent historical rescue. For Piscitelli apud Mello (2009, p.89):

Since colonial times, women of the lower classes, living in slavery or freedom, black, mulattos and poor white women were on the streets working. Thus, their memories and life histories can be rescued through daily activities and informal roles, where conflict and confrontation with the instituted powers were established. [...]Especially in urban areas, scholars had to rethink the patriarchal system and the rigid division of tasks and responsibilities between the sexes. [...]Thus, they serve to exemplify the distances that existed between practices and the social norm.

The importance of representing female characters in literary works takes on enormous potential. Regardless of their writers portraying them as fragile or sensual characters, these works reveal a space for struggle, it means a permanent cry for help to women. As they are read, they are appropriated by their readers, who will reflect upon the difficulty of what it is to be a woman, to become feminine, as establish as a warrior. The psychological space woven by Osman Lins reveals the cruel fate bequeathed to the female character, who, in the face of minutely adjusted objects, suffers constant oppression and vigilance. In the story "Rocking chair", Osman Lins indicates the tension between the masculine universe and the (in)conscious submission of the woman. It builds up an agonizing external space, distributing the rickety wilt flowers, thyme and daises, full of weeds that suffocated at the foot of the wounded wall, beds - dark, oscillating world - full of luminous hazards, which are there only for the purpose of tormenting Julia Mariana in a permanent parade before her eyes. It is like an invisible but unbridgeable frontier, which keeps her trapped in her feminine world. In the following passage it is possible to observe the dilemma of the character before Augusto's invisible permanent vigilance.

Well ... She had to wash Augusto's shirts, light the fire, set the table, prepare dinner, and serve him. And wash the dishes later if she was not already exhausted. Make little effort ... Well, she'd like to obey that. She felt well there, but it was not possible to sway all afternoon. There was so much to do! Dragging herself on thick feet, she went to fetch the shirts. Picked up the basin, the soap, and headed for the yard. (LINS, 2003, p 57)

Sitting in the Augusto's chair, though it is a transgression, represents the assumption of power. There she relaxes, projects her thoughts, is afflicted under the vigil of objects. She wanted to unveil his silences, penetrate his mind and reveal the true feelings of Augusto for her, yet inert she can detach herself from reality and let time pass.

Both the inner space and the outer space agonize the character. Objects - like bars, choke her. The "big gold-framed mirror" itself, or the "rocking chair," and even the table, the shirt, the plates and other objects are there, distributed by the writer in the sweltering task of imprisoning, repressing, locking, avoiding the character break free from her world. The very dynamics of movement, created by Osman Lins, translates the course of a strenuous psychological space, whose charges, as a woman, represent only small flashes of happy memories, interspersed with painful domestic tasks. In this fragment of the tale, it is possible to perceive the tension of the good memories with the oppressive reality:

She went back inside, slowly, back to the front room. Sat down again in Augusto's chair and restarted rocking. Soon, eyes closed, her mouth half open, she delighted in old and kind memories: some prom, engagement's moments, some paste tidbits that her mother knew how to prepare.... Ah! It was good to be sitting there. And how quiet the afternoon was, and what great tranquility there was in the world! But what work had she done to earn this reward? She had not made dinner, had not washed his shirts. And when he arrived...

Osman Lins, in "Rocking Chair", even in the description of the natural landscape, brings the representation of the institutional spatial factor - masculine authority - constitutive of social spatiality, making the spatial phenomenon of the masculine myth manifest and comprehensible, translating itself into the story, in an oppressive psychological space, which keeps the character Julia Mariana submissive before the figure of her husband Augusto. The tension created by Osman Lins reveals the nuances of patriarchal society, whose feminine role is marked by historical traditions. Traditions that even in the contemporaneity, inherited indelible marks of the invisible and insurmountable borders. Invisible bars like the fine webs to imprison, in a psychological space, the woman who ventures to be born in a Latin America of macho culture, who dares to become feminine and decides to assume herself a warrior.

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