

## ARTICLE

# Narratives that matter: Reading practices in sociology teaching

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### ABSTRACT

What could be the place of literature in Sociology teaching? To what extent could reading literary narratives aid the learning of gender relations and sexuality in our society? Through school experiences with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's tale *The yellow wallpaper*, this article argues about the pedagogical potential of the use of literature in the development of consciences and sensitivities concerned with asymmetries, inequalities and violence inscribed in the genderized daily life we live on. Finally, the affinities between literature and feminist social theories are emphasized as methodological possibilities of teaching and learning that privilege the resignification of the social world, as well the reorganization of oneself, in learning other ways of conceiving and experiencing sexual diversity.

### KEYWORDS

schooling; sociology teaching; literary reading; gender and sexuality; teaching methodology.

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## NARRATIVAS QUE IMPORTAM: PRÁTICAS DE LEITURA NO ENSINO DE SOCIOLOGIA

### RESUMO

Qual seria o lugar da literatura no ensino de sociologia? Em que medida a leitura de narrativas literárias poderia favorecer o aprendizado das relações de gênero e sexualidade em nossa sociedade? Por meio de experiências escolares com o conto *O papel de parede amarelo*, de Charlotte Perkins Gilman, este artigo problematiza o potencial pedagógico do uso da literatura no desenvolvimento de consciências e sensibilidades atentas às assimetrias, desigualdades e violências inscritas no cotidiano generificado que habitamos. Por fim, as afinidades entre literatura e teorias sociais feministas são enfatizadas enquanto possibilidades metodológicas de ensino e aprendizagem que privilegiam tanto a resignificação do mundo social quanto a reorganização de si, no aprendizado de outras maneiras de se conceber e vivenciar a diversidade sexual.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

educação escolar; ensino de sociologia; leitura literária; gênero e sexualidade; metodologia de ensino.

## NARRATIVAS QUE IMPORTAN: PRÁCTICAS DE LECTURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA SOCIOLOGÍA

### RESUMEN

¿Cuál sería el lugar de la literatura en la enseñanza de la sociología? ¿Hasta qué punto la lectura de narraciones literarias favorecería al aprendizaje de las relaciones de género y sexualidad en nuestra sociedad? A través de experimentos escolares con el cuento *El papel tapiz amarillo*, de Charlotte Perkins Gilman, este artículo problematiza el potencial pedagógico del uso de la literatura en el desarrollo de conciencias y sensibilidades atentas a las asimetrías, desigualdades y violencia inscritas en la vida diaria de género que habitamos. Finalmente, las afinidades entre la literatura y las teorías sociales feministas se enfatizan como posibilidades metodológicas de enseñanza y aprendizaje que privilegian tanto la resignificación del mundo social como la reorganización de uno mismo en el aprendizaje de otras formas de concebir y experimentar la diversidad sexual.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

educación escolar; enseñanza de sociología; lectura literária; género y sexualidade; metodología de enseñanza.

## INTRODUCTION

The school, social inequalities, educational policies, career, teaching conditions, pedagogical authority, student attention, indiscipline, laughter, cell phones, reading and writing habits, teaching materials, subject contents, the curriculum, assessment, medicines, illnesses, accusations; even those who have nothing to do with this story may feel comfortable expressing their dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, many crises of meaning plague teaching imaginary and make school life precarious at the beginning of this century, in such a way that it seems increasingly difficult to find moments to ask: Which narratives matter in the classroom?

The present article discusses the pedagogical potential of literature in the sociological teaching of gender relations and sexuality via school experiences with the tale *The yellow wallpaper*. The story, considered a classic of feminist literature, was initially published in 1892 by the writer and American activist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) in first-person narrative. It tells the story of a woman forced into confinement by her husband, a doctor who intended to cure her of a passing nervous depression. Forbidden to make any physical or mental effort, the protagonist becomes obsessed with the patterns on the wallpaper in her bedroom, and ends up “going crazy” for good.

The teaching experiences with the tale’s reading are presented in this paper from our point of view as both teachers and observers of the proposed pedagogical practices. Such a paradoxical position in the context of classrooms required us to constantly cross the line in the roles of educators and researchers, thus blurring the epistemological boundaries that traditionally separate and hierarchize teaching and research, as if they were opposite activities and moralities (Carniel and Ruggi, 2015). Therefore, the result of this study is closely related to the results of those classes, launching us into a process of production of knowledge that was not established *about* school universes or *for* those who attended the course throughout 2019. This production of knowledge could only be developed *with* those three groups willing to embark on the intellectual adventure of experiencing collective reading in order to pluralize points of view, negotiate differences and give new meaning to perspectives.

After all, the literary experiences we established with classes of approximately 35 high school students<sup>1</sup> in the metropolitan region of Curitiba refer to conflicts, discomforts, doubts, emotions, strangeness, indignation, anxieties, revelations and tensions that we build together when sharing our interpretations, triggered by reading the story *The yellow wallpaper*, about the dynamics of silencing, invisibility and sexual oppression.

The next topic addresses the pedagogical potential of literature in developing awareness and sensitivities that are attentive to asymmetries, inequalities and violence inscribed in gender and sexuality relations. Then, some teaching experiences

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1 In its Portuguese language version, the present article puts into perspective the grammatical sexism intrinsic to the generalization of academic writing by the masculine, proposing a narrative turn by generalizing by the feminine. However, it was not possible to perform such a narrative turnaround in English.

are presented in order to demonstrate how reading practices give rise to particular ways of organizing the pedagogical work in the teaching of sociology. In the end, we argue that collective reading favors the sharing of multiple interpretations about the sexual diversity that constitutes the social world. In the end, we argue that the collective reading favors the sharing of multiple interpretations regarding the sexual diversity that constitutes the social world.

Thus, perhaps it can be said that such shared reading practices enabled the transformation of classes into something close to what Petit (2010, p. 85) has already called “transitional spaces”; that is, places that actively build “links with the inner and outer world, so that the intimate and the public can dialogue”, and, to some extent, reconcile.

## READING PRACTICES AND WHAT WE SHARE IN SOCIOLOGY CLASSES

When we read, thoughts usually fill our imagination, making connections with previous experiences or inferring what might happen. This process inaugurates what Cosson and Souza (2011) call “internal conversations”; a way of attributing different meanings to what is being read through skills or strategies that are developed during the act of reading — such as the activation of prior knowledge, connections, inferences, visualizations, questions to the text, summarizations or syntheses (Pressley, 2002). In this way, the constant circulation of meanings between the story told by the literary narrative and our own stories favor sociological perspectives and reflections about the cultural phenomena and experiences essential for primary schooling.

Therefore, by bringing literary texts to the classroom as seeds of shared experiences, we place a bet on the process of (re)creation of intersubjectivities. In other words, it is about conceiving literature as a didactic resource capable of promoting reorganization of itself and the world around us, as fiction made word in narrative and word made matter on paper are formative processes for both the language and the readers. According to Cosson (2018, p. 16), “both of them allow us to say what we do not know how to say and tell us more precisely what we want to say to the world and to ourselves”.

Aroused by collective reading, the multiple voices that take over the narrative end up making the groups experience the listening (and the presence) of their classmates. Thus, the acts of listening and being listened to seem to favor a specific connection between different people through a sensory immersion that calls the body to experience — or, as Castarède (2000, p. 202) has already written, “the living voice is the opposite of dead letters and stereotyped language”. As an offer of space, the fictional text read together does not predispose to a fixed manual because, as the very idea of literary experience suggests, the trajectories can each unfold along different paths. What interests us here is the social activity of negotiating meanings as a polysemic, collective, multivocal, polyphonic practice that the experience of reading activates (Seoane, 2004).

Based on these considerations, we can understand reading as a type of practice that crosses our existence in the most diverse ways, always depending on how we relate to and signify texts. This finding seems to point to the idea of literacy as a productive category for thinking about the countless potential relationships between people and texts in the educational field; that is, a perspective that highlights the power of the written text based on the knowledge that is articulated and perpetuated in it. In this way, as suggested by Cosson and Souza (2011, p. 102), the practice of literacy can contribute to our appropriation of the meanings we communicate “via writing, via the ways we use writing to communicate and relate to other people, because of the way writing is used to speak and shape the world”.

For literature to fulfil its humanizing role and be able to articulate itself as a possibility of understanding what surrounds us, as well as ourselves, it must be seen as an experience in itself, because, more than a knowledge to be re-elaborated, the narratives enhance the dialogue between the self and the other. In this way, they extend the limits of time and space of our experiences without us having to set aside our previous trajectories. Read through literacy practices, literary stories show all their reflective potential insofar as it becomes possible to enhance their narratives without turning the text into a simulacrum of itself (Cosson, 2018). Therefore, with the collective reading in the classroom, we face the offer of a transit of meanings evoked by a multiplicity of voices — sharing that can make the experience meaningful and beneficial to sociology teaching.

In this sense, it becomes possible to understand that social practices wrapped in narratives are instances of human communication that involve skills and knowledge permeated by power relations related to their social uses amidst specific realities. This is a process that presents itself as dialogic insofar as it institutes numerous relationships of meaning built from the interaction between “reader, author and text, as well as between students, texts and teachers” (Macedo, 2019, p. 42). Now, the question remains: how can processes of the meaning of sociological content, more specifically oriented to gender and sexuality, be articulated to literary reading in a context in which both areas of knowledge (sociology and literature) face numerous mishaps and questions about its educational relevance? Furthermore, how do literary narratives articulate with youth narratives in this context?

In the next topic, we report three pedagogical experiences, based on the considerations listed here, which seemed representative of the work carried out with the second year high school classes in which we were present in 2019. Through these reports, we intend to locate some clues that collective reading practices offered us, in order to reflect on the possible dialogues between narratives, emphasizing the possibilities of using literary texts for feminist pedagogy and the latency of debates unfolded by the transit of shared meanings.

## THE YELLOW WALLPAPER AND OTHER VOICES IN THE CLASSROOM

On a cold Thursday night, we suggested reading the story *The yellow wallpaper* at second year classes we worked on throughout the 2019 school year. Those were classes with a very similar student profile, predominantly made up of young people

from public schools in the metropolitan region of Curitiba, within an age group of 15 to 19 years old and primarily working women. Each one, however, bears specificities that made the dynamics of shared reading multiple. As a reoccurrence, we point to the fact that, in all groups, the suggested proposal was, at first, received with suspicion and curiosity. When distributing the printed excerpt in the hands of each of the students, we observed varied dynamics with the material received. Many readily counted the number of pages. Others read and quietly repeated the name of the author and the work. Others soon lost focus, giving preference to the illuminated screens of their cell phones. Even before the delivery was finished, initiatives to start reading were already being noticed in some rooms. Sometimes silence reigned, and waiting for a solicitous voice took a few minutes.

Once the first difficulties had been overcome, certain insecurities had been allayed, and even some curiosities had been remedied, the readings usually began many minutes after the beginning of the classes. One of these experiences occurred with class D. Júlia<sup>2</sup> was the first to be ready, being the main protagonist of the “errors on the way” questioned by the group. Paula and Rebeca, close friends of Júlia, also started to take turns reading, while the group sanctioned the practice of interruptions through laughter. José, however, seemed to be the most “annoyed” with the “mistakes” of reading, even missing the sequence of narrative events, as he would, from time to time, whisper jokes to his friends or openly laugh at the “faux pas”, especially Júlia’s.

Amidst parallel conversations, luminous cell phones and blaring headphones, reading took shape. Sometimes the text overcame the distractions. Sometimes it lost focus. However, the class as a whole seemed to follow the story read in its way. Once, when inquiring into the meaning of the word “diligently”, Júlia starred in a tongue twister that was again a high point for laughs. When the definition of the word was indicated to her as something related to the idea of care, zeal and attention, the girl turned her eyes to the paper, but was interrupted again. First, José made fun of her colleague by stating that Júlia was not diligent in her reading process. Then, when asked if he could be diligent, i.e., if he could demonstrate this quality by reading a little to the class, José fidgeted with his desk, showing some discomfort, and finally got ready to read.

With his eyes fixed on the text, the boy began the narrative with a low pronunciation and gradually raised his voice; at this point, the whole class seemed to be waiting for any slip. Soon, José committed his first “failure” — he stuttered when he pronounced “caught”, and, promptly, the laughter took place. Resuming his speech, however, José hesitated again, and the “joking” began anew. Promptly, the boy stopped reading, looked at his classmates and uttered insults, eliciting even more laughter from everyone. After the event, we retook the floor, and the reading ended in an atmosphere of apparent concentration — in this way, it is noteworthy that the teacher’s voice seemed to calm them, perhaps because it was the “usual” voice to which even intonations and enactments were allowed, which seemed to amuse the class.

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2 All names mentioned here are fictitious in order to preserve the students’ identities.

At the end of the narrative, silence took over again. When asked about the narrative, most of the class remained quiet, except for Ana's quick contribution about the possible illness of the protagonist. In the sequence, Paola also shared her interpretation, repeating in different ways that the girl in the text was unfortunate, that she must have suffered a lot and that intense suffering can make people "crazy". Also, according to the girl, the bars did not allow the character to escape from her situation, and, therefore, they could be representing something beyond the oppression of her husband, as he did not allow the girl to write, as well as engage in other activities — a metaphor for male sexism, as she later stated. Many students agreed with their colleague's considerations, and then the bell rang. Collecting the texts, Júlia said, smiling, that she had enjoyed the experience and suggested repeating this activity in the future.

The second practice of collective reading was experienced in class A, being received with some indifference by a large part of the group — the texts in hands soon ended up in desks or even dropped "accidentally" on the floor. Finally, after the proper presentations of the narrative, Maria was ready to read. During the dynamics, a soccer game was going on, a fact that was recalled repeatedly with each thrilling shot: bodies squirmed in their chairs, and short pronouncements kept the rest of the room informed; loose sentences that were said almost in sync with the reading, reproduced quickly and directly, apparently without the intention of diverting attention, but keeping the game information updated while also reading the proposed text. Mateus, the main informant, shared the events through a headphone fitted in his left ear, while the right ear was used to follow the collective reading, not letting go of the text nor taking his eyes off the narrative.

After a few paragraphs, Maria got tired of reading and said she had already read too much. Silence took the room, and, after a few seconds, Douglas suggested that his friend Natália take the lead in the speech, a suggestion that was promptly replicated by colleagues around him, with the intention, apparently, of "joking". Showing some discomfort, the girl looked at her colleagues (all boys) and called them "sexist", an accusation that, incidentally, had already been directed at the group on other occasions. Minutes after the narrative was resumed, a cell phone recording called the attention of all present: "it seems that something went wrong", a prompt and automatic sentence that indicated some interruption in a command. As expected, laughter rolled through the audience and, in an attempt to calm them down, we resumed the protagonism of reading for a few minutes — again, the teacher's voice seemed to calm down the room or even resume the logic of attention that had been suspended by the insistent laughter.

During a careful reading, notes on the text were gradually made without deviating from the dynamics of the narrative. Even the other goal announced was drowned out by interest in the text amidst a collective "shhh", intoned at the excerpt that read "I finally discovered something...". What had the girl discovered in this yellow wallpaper? The suspense overcame interest in the football match. Curiosity began to hover around the room, even arousing the interest of Léo, a deaf student, who, following the narrative through the translation made by his interpreter Cláu-



dio<sup>3</sup>, was anxious (along with the rest of the class) about the outcome of the story. When the discovery was finally revealed, amazement filled the room. At this point, Léo made a point of sharing his interpretation and (through the translation of his interpreter) told us that the creeping woman in the story resembled Momo<sup>4</sup>, a frightening figure who, a few years ago, became known for her appearances in internet videos and also for the supposed “dangerous” commands that it gave to children.

The discussion, located at the front of the room, gradually expanded, reaching the back of the room, which had been heard in silence until then. At that moment, Patrícia, a girl who had never “actively” participated in one of our classes until then, took the turn to speak. Then, as if in an epiphany, she stated that the girl in the story was sick and hallucinating in a sanatorium, as she had supposedly miscarried — following the girl’s reasoning, this event would have left the character extremely upset, to the point of having lost her reason and becoming, in her words, “mad”. Douglas, thoughtful during Patrícia’s reflections, shared his interpretation, pointing out that the character in the story must be under the effect of “hard drugs”, and, therefore, facing some hallucination, a situation that very possibly would be driving her “crazy”.

At this exact moment, Cláudio, the Libras<sup>5</sup> interpreter, made comments stating that the character’s visions must result from a “mirror”, a conclusion he supported by citing the scene in which the girl searches through the windows for other women crawling in the woods and on the road, but can only look at one at a time through the glass, even though she turns around as fast as she can. Natália, at this point, agrees with the theory, reinforcing the idea that the story of the tale has nothing to do with the loss of a child or drug use, but that everything happens because the protagonist of the story sees a woman crawling through the windows, and that it is nothing more than her reflection — understanding this, the girl in the text would have been “out of her mind” when realizing her own “crawling” condition, an idea that ends her reflection and is promptly accompanied by a celebration, as if Natália had unravelled the “puzzle”. Douglas immediately questions the girl and reprimands her, stating that it was him who, in reality, had “unveiled the puzzle” — not by reflection, but by “drugs”. With this, the girl tried to argue her point of view. However, she was promptly silenced by her colleague, who began to insistently repeat the idea that he was the one who “correctly interpreted” the text. After the incident, Douglas still sought approval, asking if we had understood his theory, eager for an affirmative answer. Nevertheless, he was frustrated when he was “warned” that this was one of many possibilities.

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3 With the recognition of the linguistic rights of the population of deaf people who use the Brazilian Sign Language (Carniel, 2018) and the implementation of Federal Decree n. 6571 of 2008, which establishes that all schools must enroll all students with special educational needs in “regular” classes in mainstream education (Américo, Carniel and Takahashi, 2014), the presence of interpreters and deaf students in the classroom has been routinized in the country’s public education systems.

4 Momo is the nickname given to a virtual character inspired by the sculpture *Mother bird*, by Keisuke Aiso.

5 Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) is the sign language used by deaf people in Brazil, being legally recognized as a means of communication and expression.



Cláudio then took the floor and changed the course of the conversation. First, he called attention to what Léo had said: the boy believed that the story he read was, without a doubt, a horror story. He also reported that Léo had narrated his interpretation as if it was a “film scene”, and, therefore, he called the attention of everyone around him, so that the boy could “act” again. Léo represented any being in motion with two fingers facing downwards, which began to “travel paths”, in a continuous displacement. However, after a few seconds, the boy undid his fingers as a sign of disappearance, a move he repeated over and over again, accompanied by expressions that referred to suspense, amazement, and, finally, fear.

In the literary experience unfolded in class C, the narrative began guided by Lúcia’s voice. Given the countless hands raised ready to read, the suggestion was made that, as soon as the urge to read came, they should take the floor, even if the previous reader had not completed the sentence, paragraph, or idea. Through this agreement, we experience a dynamic that is very different from those previously articulated. The voices were multiple, taking turns at random and often competing to lead the speech. There was, however, a narrative monopoly on the part of Lúcia and her close colleague, Flávia. As if in an implicit agreement, the two had established the dynamics of reading the text, alternating in a quick and synchronized way, leaving many students frustrated for not being allowed to take the space for speech.

The game began to be shared by the rest of the room, as if it were competition to conquer the monopoly, and, therefore, the protagonism of the narration. At that moment, boys seated at the back of the room, who had not been sharing the reading until then, were captivated by the established logic, and each looked anxiously for the newly read line. At this moment, Wesley stood for a long time, looking and laughing at the paper in his hands, rehearsing to project his voice, but soon gave up, because Lúcia and Flávia (who were ahead and had not noticed the movement) resisted in their synchrony. Then, however, an unexpected timbre took over — Marcos broke with the hegemony in a shy and stuttering way, gradually gaining strength. The boy’s nervousness was noticeable; still, the room accepted his moment and many even helped him when he was confused with the pronunciation of one or other syllable.

The text moved to the next page, and Wesley gained courage by stepping into the frame of voices to be heard. Wesley’s friends, in turn, seemed to get even more agitated as they followed the reading and cast hostile glances at his colleague, who, even projecting his voice, kept the narrative in a low tone, forcing the room to be even more silent. Tales, Wesley’s friend, seemed to enjoy the game and also proposed to take the lead — the synchrony suggested by Flávia and Lúcia was re-established, now in a comical tone, by the friends. As if the bearer of an unspoken joke, the whole class kept their eyes on the paper and laughed sporadically at the situation staged by the boys. At that moment, the phrase “it penetrates”<sup>6</sup> was uttered by one of the readers in a loud and pleased tone, with a different intonation, which caused even more laughter throughout the room.

6 The word “penetrates” was used in the tale referring the smell of the wallpaper that stuck in the character’s hair.

At the end of the text, all looked at each other, eager for some explanation. However, they remained silent and smiling. Finally, after a few long seconds, Clóvis, a boy who, until the present moment, had been silently following the reading, turned to the class as if he were the bearer of the solution of a puzzle and explained that the wallpaper was covering a hole in the wall and that is why the character in the tale could not get it out. He asked rhetorically if the class had realized that, to “solve the problem”, it would be enough to eliminate the wallpaper by removing it from the wall. Nevertheless, the girl did not do it precisely because the paper had the indicated function. However, in adhering to his colleague’s interpretation, Pedro suggested that, regardless of the hole’s original function, if the wallpaper were harming the girl, the only alternative would be to tear it off. Amidst this discussion, Marcos raised his voice and stated that a possible reason would be that the wallpaper represented a “pain” related to the character’s husband, a reasoning that led him to consider sexism the germ of that situation. At this point, the whole class was silent, perhaps digesting the idea.

After a few seconds, Tom, who was, until then, all clumsy in his chair, with the paper crumpled in one hand, jumped up in a sitting position, straightened his posture and pronounced the conclusion that crawling women would represent the false freedom of women in today’s society, as they “crawl”, but do not leave their place. A condition that gives the impression of movement, but a slow movement — in addition to being time-consuming and painful, as Flávia added. In this way, the group considered the text finished, accepting that, in fact, the paper “camouflaged” the hole of sexism and that crawling represented the agony of women trapped in this “social pattern”.

Parallel conversations resurface. There were only 5 minutes before the bell. At this point, we realized how much we had talked, and we were surprised that attention was kept until a short time before the end of the class, as, in the last 15 minutes, patience usually runs out, coats are put on, and backpacks start to be organized for the moment of departure. At this point, they were asked to organize their desks and collect the candy wrappers on the floor, a request that was accompanied by a slight disturbance in the room. Amidst the classmates moving from one side to the other, Pedro seemed to gather the courage to expose something that seemed to be confusing him; he intoned loud and clear the doubt that filled his head, asking why, amidst reflections of this type, only women are talked about — “why is it not a man reflecting on the things that trap him...?”. However, before the boy had even finished his sentence, Wesley, who was on the other side of the room, shouted back: “Oh, Pedrão, do you mean you feel trapped?” and laughed aloud, alternating his gaze between Pedro and his other girl classmates. Finally, the school bell rang, and the group left at full speed — however, we heard a lot more “good night, teacher!” than usual.

## GENDER AND SEXUALITY: NARRATIVES THAT MATTER IN SOCIOLOGY TEACHING

The tale *The yellow wallpaper* was selected to compose the didactic sequences presented in the previous topic precisely because it is classic feminist literature.

The text, written in the 19th century, articulates reflections on the intellectual silencing of women in a period in which the very possibility of authorship challenged the hegemonic North American imagination. Undoubtedly, by putting the occupied spaces into perspective, as well as the contradictions faced by literate women in the formulation of public opinion, its reading gives rise to the problematization of power relations that, in the past as well as in the present, operate as instruments for the perpetuation of male domination. However, as demonstrated by the reading practices we experience at school, Gilman's tale also can trigger many other debates.

These collective ways of producing varied interpretations, at the same time private and shared, through the reading of the work, constitute one of the primordial elements of what we are calling literary learning at school; a process that encourages the contextualization and meaning of both the narrative itself and the student's repertoires that such contents can raise. In this way, recovering narratives from female writers in the classroom seem to be a way to break with the historical invisibility that has constrained generations of students to develop their perspectives on the social world without building what Nisia Floresta (2016) called "an accurate knowledge of oneself".

Those who are not familiar with everyday school life or who nurture professorial representations of the teaching-learning processes may perhaps feel uncomfortable with the experiences reported in this text. However, we tried to shift our argumentative focus towards students' receptions of the work that we managed to register while conducting classes. The result was the discovery of multiple and complex processes of meaning brought about by collective reading. We did not always know how to respond adequately to the manifestations that were offered to us in the classroom; even so, we tried to organize those pedagogical experiences based on the attempt to ensure the participation of all people in the classroom, so that, together, we could pluralize interpretations and negotiate meanings.

In these moments of intense speculation about the possible meanings implied in Gilman's narrative, certain approximations were established between the issues raised by the literary text and the student repertoires mobilized in the discussions. Through the most diverse student reactions, we are faced with circular dynamics that, in the framing of a pedagogical community (Hooks, 2013)<sup>7</sup>, had as their primary intention to break with a unilateral didactic historically based on fragmentation and reduction of students' reflexive abilities. Thus, breaking a plastered pedagogical model presented itself as one of the main objectives of our counter-hegemonic didactics, while, through the literary experience, we oriented ourselves to dialogue and student protagonism as a way of assigning meaning of the sociological contents that are so relevant to the realities of these young people. Thus, the "epistemic privilege" (Grosfoguel, 2016) reproduced by the professorial figure

7 In other words, a space in which the ability to generate enthusiasm is linked to the interest one has for each other, for listening to each other's voice, for recognizing everyone's presence.

found possibilities to be reconsidered, while other voices asserted themselves — voices that, for a long time, were silenced amidst the structures and institutions that reproduce epistemic violence “in the face of imperial/colonial/patriarchal projects that govern the world-system” (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 25).

The multiple pedagogical experiences of the shared readings pointed to the symbolization of personal experiences that had no relation to the story read by putting ideas in motion. Through a “verbalization of feelings” (Petit, 2010), one of the great powers of the experiences reported was precisely the possibility found by the students to access, from different perspectives, interior territories perhaps never explored before. A high point for the sociological contextualization itself, while our discipline used reflexive processes close to the universes (re)created by the students, who often only had a “dry” contact with the discipline, that is, a purely theoretical and objective one, oriented towards a mere transfer of information, such as concepts, events and dates.

The reading practices experienced in groups ultimately favored the sharing of interpretations, creating a context of reflective dialogue (Lajolo, 2009) between narratives, interpretations and sociological concepts. For example, when questioning about the hallucinations of the girl confined to a country house, a story that at first seemed so far away and alien to their realities, the narrative gradually gained intelligible contours from an exercise in alterity headed by each reader in question. Therefore, we are faced with meaning processes of the story read that offered relevant themes to the conversations articulated in each experience, and suggested new ways to explore these themes by stimulating an “imaginative audacity” (Hirschman, 2011).

In this way, we witness the manifestation of different experiences, perspectives, and youth sociability in the classrooms in reaction to the reading of the tale, articulated in daily school life through the practices of “mocking”. Such practices, in analogy to what Pereira (2017) has already observed regarding student youth in the periphery of São Paulo, confront the institutional forms of school discipline through languages and manifestations specific to youth groups, in order to destabilize the control and surveillance that they are traditionally subject to “inside” and “outside” the classroom. By making fun of their classmates, Gilman’s tale and the exact steps we tried to propose for the practice of reading, the students were making fun of the school organization and establishing tensions between seriousness and playfulness within the class. But these ways of contesting the established order are also anchored in the cultural repertoires of their generation, which are structured by logics of discrimination, gendering, racialization and subordination of social relations — and this seems to be the primary mark of the ambiguities inscribed in the juvenile fuss<sup>8</sup>.

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8 A dramatic example of these ambiguities that involve banter in everyday sociability was the smear campaign of then-president Dilma Rousseff. As cultural artefacts that simultaneously generate solidarities and hostilities, the laughs unleashed by misogynistic memes favored “reactionary anger and the maintenance of structural power relations” (Carniel, Ruggi and Ruggi, 2018, p. 526).

For this reason, the repertoires mobilized during collective reading practices proposed in our experience reveal both the saturation of school discipline and its restructuring into networks of power that reinforce prejudices, stereotypes and social inequalities. A scene that seemed emblematic to us in this regard occurred when Natália was constantly put to the test by Douglas, being accused of “plagiarism” of an idea that was, in fact, hers, or even when she was silenced when in trying to give an “explanation” about what happened — something that the young woman promptly pointed out as one of the many practices of oppression that she identified in her group of colleagues. Nevertheless, this was not the only moment in which the activity made the gendering of disputes explicit. Another episode that seemed significant to us happened with Pedro. At the moment he inquired about the multiple expressions of masculinity, he was promptly mocked by Wesley, as if he, as a man, could not feel oppressed or empathetic in the face of experiences that escape hegemonic sexual standards. There was also the extreme difficulty faced by Júlia when she was constantly exposed by her colleague José, bearing in mind “errors in the course”, which, even if later committed by the boy himself, seemed to be more “scandalous” when carried out by her colleague.

By observing those conflicts, disputes and contradictions in the way we think and talk about sexuality, we are not suggesting that reading *The yellow wallpaper* contains the keys to open the Pandora’s box of inequalities and exorcise all the demons of a generation. Instead, those experiences presented us with some potential paths that the pedagogical uses of literary texts can take in teaching by offering moments of openness, experimentation, exposure, and the shared construction of senses and meanings. Paths that led us to abandon any model that idealizes a single direction for the classes or any teaching methodology rigidly constructed without the presence of classes, but which, on the other hand, allow the appreciation of collective work, cooperation in the construction of possible readings and sharing of experiences and cultural references of each student.

After all, whether by recognizing the pathologizing processes of gender relations, as observed by Patrícia and Marcos, by the subordination of women in a society dominated by male logics, as pointed out by Natália, Tom and Flávia, or even by the naturalization of symbolic violence perpetrated by those that enjoy their social privileges, as suggested by Clóvis and Marcos, we witness the construction of a type of feminist pedagogy that demands the protagonism and recognition of students’ repertoires.

Consequently, the debate on gender and sexuality based on narratives written by women seems to favour the expansion of school practices beyond the hegemony of a masculinizing and heteronormative epistemic horizon and the articulation of sociological reflections on these historical power relations. The affinities between literature and feminist social theories are perceived here as methodological potentials that privilege both the resignification of the social world and the reorganization of oneself in learning other ways of conceiving and experiencing sexual diversity.

Suppose we can admit that, given its narrative entanglements, a text does not need to be a manual to articulate a predefined discussion. In that case, its

reading must be understood as the possibility of articulating a pedagogical environment in which multiple reflections can emerge. Although, in the narratives, we find the marks of the author's intentions, as well as the protagonism of the meanings of each reader, these transits show that a text is never autonomous but conjectured from the dialogue with elements that come from outside of it. According to Lajolo (2009, p. 108), the collective perspective of social reading practices is composed of a tangle of threads in which texts are woven and loosened, "tying and untying each other". In this social fabric, the points at which the methodological powers of literary reading practices at school come to an end are evident; powers constituted by the crossing of multiple interpretations not as a pretext for the debate on sociology, but as the establishment of a possible context of meaning.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The debate on gender and sexuality in schools is under continuous surveillance, questioning and attacks, as it is the focus of conservative interventions that have been increasingly legitimized in Brazil. According to Biroli (2018), when accused of partial, such curricular axes are associated with "doctrinal ideologies" that must be eliminated, as they articulate a "threat" to the principles of the "traditional family". The idea of "threat" is precisely associated with the denaturalizing and reflexive intention that such debates articulate as sociological perspectives on the relations of power and domination inherent in a sexist, racist, class-oriented and heteronormative society (Carniel and Bueno, 2018).

Activating epistemic milestones that influence how we see the world and how we see ourselves in it, the debate on gender and sexuality occurs in the school environment as an epistemological repositioning that puts into perspective mental schemes that guide us both at the social and on an individual level. In this way, the difficulties that plague such reflections are not only conjectured outside the "school walls", but they also encounter obstacles within the same experiences of youth at school. Dealing with issues that are connected to the sphere of intimacy reverberates as a "peculiar" experience for young people, who often do not feel comfortable or even willing to problematize such deeply rooted notions — (re) thinking teaching methodologies, therefore, presents itself as an indispensable exercise for teaching practices that propose themselves to be significant both inside and outside the classroom.

Based on these considerations, we emphasize that, as a suggested teaching and learning methodology, literary reading experienced collectively favors the sharing of interpretations, creating a context of reflective dialogue between narratives, interpretations and sociological concepts. Amidst the interpretive dynamics, the texts considered previous notions claimed in attributing meaning to the stories. This process opens the door to establishing a circular dynamic that puts literary narratives and juvenile narratives in transit. This circulation of stories favours the development of sociological reflections in a less imposing way (an essential movement in the debate on issues that are socially considered "controversial", such as

those involving gender relations and sexuality today), enabling both an experience of macro-structural analysis and a reorganization of the self from paths that are non-exclusive, unilateral and immobilized.

Thus, we find reflections on such social activity of negotiation of meanings associated with the concept of literacy. At the same time, this whole narrative tangle is involved in social uses connected to broader social, political and cultural contexts that permeate the experiences of these students at different levels. Moreover, in this aspect, the sociological debate permeated by (literary and juvenile) narratives seemed to gain space amidst the student experiences, leading to reflexive dynamics based on new (or at least different) types of interest and engagement. Hence, as noted by Bezerra and Romko (2016, p. 165), through the “identity and affective bonds” placed in perspective through fictional discourse, a path to “knowledge that gives meaning to the world as it informs practices and sustains bonds of belonging”, promoting compelling opportunities for learning about corporate relations.

Therefore, we argue in favour of the potential of literary mediation for feminist pedagogical practice, a practice that aims to articulate an epistemological repositioning regarding the issues surrounding the dynamics of gender and sexuality through elements that make sense of student experiences. Literary narratives intertwined with student narratives thus suggest fertile ground for developing such perspectives — or, at least, indicate paths that can be better investigated.

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