

RESIGNIFYING CRITICAL APPROACHES IN LITERATURE, FILM, AND CULTURAL STUDIES

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Resignifying Critical Approaches in Literature, Film, and Cultural Studies is the fourth non-thematic issue of *Ilha do Desterro* dedicated to publishing academic work that focuses on literary and cultural studies. In this volume, scholars from national and international institutions explore themes related to colonial and post-colonial encounters, geographical crossings, identity and diaspora studies, life writing and genre bending, speculative fiction and issues of representation, gender roles, the interconnection between human and non-human lives, among others.

Although such themes or critical approaches might not necessarily be new to scholarship, they are revisited here with a renewed kind of urgency: in a world where ways of life have drastically changed, and when many practices we took for granted have been challenged or shaken, scholars insist in demonstrating that our lives on this planet depend on how we resignify social, political, and economic practices. The once commonplace saying “this is the end of the world as we know it” now carries in its core an uncomfortable realization as it becomes less metaphorical and more premonitory, admonishing us to take action in order to create more equitable, sustainable, and socially just practices in this planet.

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In a long autobiographical letter-essay addressed to her six-year-old daughter, North-American scholar Julietta Singh writes about the seemingly paradoxical task of preparing her child to live in a world that might actually end, to embrace a future that might never become. As she confides to her daughter,

[l]earning to mother at the end of the world is an infinite toggle between wanting to make you feel safe and needing you to know that the earth and its inhabitants are facing a catastrophic crisis. This morning, you went off to school to learn discipline, to hone your reading and writing skills, to study official state history. I am at my desk sipping tea, turning over words. The birds are chirping outside my window. You, me, the birds. We are all creatures living as though we have a future, as though tomorrow will continue to resemble today. (9)

Her letter reveals a restlessness about the state of the world and of ways of life at the verge of collapse. Yet, instead of being paralyzed by the brutalities of persistent colonialism, capitalist extractivism, gender and race inequalities, Singh transforms aches into action, building a radical pedagogy towards resistance and disruption. Through her letter-essay, she invites her daughter to “unlearn” the world she is inheriting and imagine a new one, “toppled and reborn” (10). Such radical pedagogy troubles our colonial education and our human-centered views of the world, opening up space for “making new solidarities possible, ones among and beyond humans” (65), and which can be approached as alternatives to our present realities. For Singh, parenting at the end of the world means “to always complicate the story, to never prescribe, never reduce” (12), to face the “crisis of the here and now” (22) with unabashed courage as well as with the awareness that survival “requires an unequivocal turn toward unacknowledged, discarded, and subaltern histories of collective resistance” (22). As Singh suggests, it is through those histories that we will remember how to confront systemic oppression and exploitation, resignifying our existence in this planet.

In a similar line of thought, but speaking from a radically different location, Indigenous writer, activist and leader Ailton Krenak invites us to resist the narratives about the end of the world by imagining an ancestral future, one that is shaped by the memories that can be found at the core of the Earth and that are carried by our ancestors (37). Revisiting the image of the Watu River (known in Brazil as Rio Doce), which has resisted mining contamination by reaching deep into the groundwater to the point of changing its course (36), Krenak suggests that “we are living in a world where we have to dive deep into the earth in order to recreate possible worlds. What happens is that, in the narratives of the world where only human beings act, this centrality silences all the other presences” (our translation, 37). In this context, as Krenak explains, resisting the narratives of the end of the world does not mean trying to save this collapsing human-centered world (40), but to “evoke worlds of affective cartographies” (42), which embrace plurality and are open to the intrinsic alterity of other beings, humans and non-humans (82).

It is not a coincidence, then, that the essays in this collection revisit literary or filmic productions that challenge our way of looking at social or political global structures, resisting easy categorizations or, in Julietta Singh's words, "complicat[ing] the story." From articles tackling colonial and post-colonial relations of power, to studies elaborating on gendered or marginalized bodies, this volume of *Ilha do Desterro* encourages us to resignify central issues in scholarship in the hopes that they will help us confront a world in crisis.

The first two articles of this edition attentively foreground auto/biographical topics, extending our understanding of both colonial encounters and the representation of disability in literature. In "The Wind River Scribe: Grace Darling Wetherbee Coolidge and her *Teepee Neighbors*", Tadeusz Lewandowski highlights significant life events of Grace Darling Wetherbee Coolidge, a writer who devotedly worked as a missionary in an Indian reservation in Wyoming. Lewandowski also offers an analysis of Coolidge's sketch collection of Native American life, entitled *Teepee Neighbors* (1917), which, despite its critique of Euro-American society, also shows Coolidge's own ethnocentrism in her encounters with the Indigenous populations. In the second article, Sandra Mina Takakura approaches Cece Bell's personal experiences in "Self-Reflexiveness and Reality-Fiction Friction in Cece Bell's Autobiographical Graphic Novel". Through the lenses of the fantastic autofiction and the concept of metalepsis in distinct media, Takakura examines the influence of Bell's own struggles as a person with hearing loss in her graphic novel.

Significant views regarding the works of African women writers are emphasized in the following two articles. Cláudio R. V. Braga, in "Um Experimento de Literatura Especulativa de História Alternativa com Viés Feminista: 'The Visit' (2021), de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie", investigates the speculative fiction genre. Braga reads Adichie's short story 'The Visit', bearing in mind aspects of the speculative literature of alternative history and the author's meaningful feminist approach. In the fourth article, "A pirâmide invertida e seu espaço (de leitura): um estudo comparativo de 'Leaving Lamu' de Lily Mabura (Quênia), 'The Homecoming' de Milly Jafta (Namíbia) e 'Porcelain' de Henrietta Rose-Innes (África do Sul)", Janice Inês Nodari and Mônica Stefani sensibly explore three narratives dealing with notions of time and space in Africa in the light of postcolonial and identity studies.

The fifth article in our volume, "Nidhi Chanani's Pashmina: A Single Mother's Quest for Diasporic Relocation", by Manonita Chowdhary Roy Ghatak, continues to explore a kind of semi-autobiographical fiction written by a woman whose roots extend beyond the so-called Western world. What is clearly a running thread throughout this issue is again evident here: Chanani's graphic novel transcends genres, media and places. The diasporic quest discussed by the paper brings together not only India and the United States, with its imaginary representations, conceptions, misconceptions and expectations, but also two generations of immigrant women whose worldviews often clash with the traditional ways of representing the Indian diaspora.

Authors Eduardo Marks de Marques and Lisiani Coelho tackle two novels from Octavia Butler’s dystopian Earthseed series in “Representação e experiência de corpos marginalizados na duologia Semente da terra, de Octavia E. Butler”, as part of a relatively recent and still underdeveloped area of literary studies that takes the body as its central object of analysis. The article offers a reading of the characters’ process of corporification by examining race, gender, sex, age, class, and even drug use, in order to both expand and deepen our understanding of the greater social dynamics of marginalization in a post-industrial capitalist society. Just like in Singh’s and Krenak’s works discussed above, this is an opportunity to understand how the “end of the world” can be embraced if (and only if) we bring along the possibility of a new world summoned from a de-centered, subaltern collective and resistant perspective.

In the next article, “Be Brave, Live: Reviewing Buffy’s Journey in *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* from Final Girl to Heroine Twenty-five Years Later”, authors Yasmin Pereira Yonekura and Vitor Henrique de Souza revisit this landmark show in television history by retracing the main character’s path through Joseph Campbell’s myth theory, while discussing the cinematic trope of the “final girl”—a staple in the horror genre. The article contributes to the scholarship on the show by bringing feminist theory to the table in order to resignify both the narrative arch of the main female protagonist as well as the behind-the-scenes accusations against the show’s creator, Joss Whedon, which recently surfaced.

The eighth article further explores an underlying topic in almost all of the previous papers: the process of *gendering*, which is discussed from a perspective slightly neglected in scholarly academic journals focused on literary and cultural analyses. Hatice Sezgi Sarac Durgun, Kivılcım Uzun, and Arda Arikan’s article, “Linguistic Construction of Gendered Lives in Alice Munro’s ‘Boys and Girls’”, examines Munro’s short fiction using linguistic theory to find evidence of the ways authority and power *engender* the identity of the eleven-year-old narrator/protagonist.

Finally, in “Desafios da (con)vivência pós-humana em *Klara e o sol* e *After Yang*”, author Anderson Gomes analyses the way post-human beings are represented in these two works from 2021: a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro and a film by Kogonada. Gomes manages to do so firstly by scrutinizing the concepts of identity, memory, race and faith, then by concentrating on the source of narrative conflict in these fictions: the juxtaposition of post-human entities in a familial human setting. It is precisely this tension that will drive the article’s effort of capturing and contributing to the recent philosophical and theoretical calls for redefining what it means to be, and not to be, human—and what could/would/should come *after*.

Closing this volume, Andrey Martins reviews Regina Schwartz and Patrick J. McGrath’s edited collection *Toward a Sacramental Poetics* (2021). In this book review, Martins identifies the main arguments in each of the headings of the collection while also reflecting on how each contributor approaches the role of the ritual in cultural, aesthetic, or political practices. As we close this introduction to

the current issue of *Ilha do Desterro*, we thank everyone who has contributed to the volume, and we invite our readers to interact with and resignify the cultural and literary discussions presented here.

Works Cited

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