

## Travelling East without Leaving the West: Diagetic Perspectives and Occidental Privilege in *Mongólia* by Bernardo Carvalho

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In 2004, Brazilian author Bernardo Carvalho won the Jabuti Prize for Literature, Brazil's most prestigious literary award, for his novel *Mongólia*.<sup>1</sup> In order to write the novel he received a grant from the foundation Livros Cotovia and the Fundação Oriente that paid for two months of travel in East Asia. This money was conceived to increase inter-cultural dialogue between Asia and the Americas through art and literature.<sup>2</sup> The narrative that the grant helped pay for is full of fascinating visions of the steppes of central Asia- but inter-cultural dialogue and understanding between the Brazilian narrators and the people of China and Mongolia is scarce. While the novel purports to critique the Eurocentric generalizations of a main character travelling through China and Mongolia, it does so by asserting that Asia is unknowable for a Western observer. This evinces a disbelief in the possibility of establishing truths that is based on cultural difference. It enacts a critique of Eurocentrism that still manages to reinforce Occidental privilege by placing the rational gaze in the Occident and the exotic other in the Orient. With the exception of an increasingly globalized upper class, Brazilians fit into the concept of the Global South. When a non-elite Brazilian or Latin American visits another region that shares a history of coloniality, they can be part of a dialogue between transmodern peoples who share the relationship of an epistemological imbalance of power with Western Europe and the United States. Enrique Dussel posits an alternative to the epistemological view that privileges the western gaze. He suggests a "transmodern pluriversality . . . which is pluricultural, and engaged in a critical intercultural dialogue" (23). Dussel's concept is of an alternative global epistemological system that is not dependent upon the Occident as center and the non-West as peripheral. This novel could have bridged the gap without reinforcing old hierarchies but in this particular instance, the novel *Mongólia* demonstrates a resistance to dialogue. The Brazilian viewpoint becomes a stand-in for the Occidental perspective and Mongolia figures as the unknowable other.

In the novel, there are three diagetic levels of narration spoken by three Brazilians abroad; the first is the metadiagetic level of the diary of a photojournalist on assignment in Mongolia who gets lost in the steppe and figures as a character of a story within a story, the second is the diagetic level of the correspondence of a diplomat in China nicknamed the Occidental who is sent to find him. Finally the extradiagetic level, or the narrator outside the story, is his older colleague, a super-narrator, who compiles the fragments of text and explains the overall story from Brazil. The basic roles of the three narrators are based upon the epistemology of their perspectives.<sup>3</sup> The photographer is an explorer who emotionally searches for deeper meaning like a romantic nineteenth-century European traveler who is mesmerized by Mongolian legends. The Occidental has the perspective of a cosmopolitan diplomat but lacks any empathy or desire to understand a Chinese or Mongolian viewpoint. He is frequently rattled, angered, and left incredulous by the cultural differences that hinder his search for the photographer. In the novel, he discovers the secret about the missing man's identity and his own personal relation to him and this eventually causes him to resign his job and return to Brazil where he dies at the hands of a gang of kidnappers. The super-narrator is a retired fellow diplomat who, as he parses through the journals of the photographer and the diplomat, critiques them both with disbelief in the possibility of knowing the other or establishing truths. By means of the separation of the first two diagetic levels from the super-narrator, the narrative portrays and critiques Romantic, Eurocentric and Orientalist attitudes towards Asia. The third level purports to be the perspective of a rational observer who describes the breakdown of the myth of understanding cultural experiences that operate by another set of rules. This supposedly rational third level of the novel bases its epistemic sense of order and reason in the West and uses Mongolia as an object of study that escapes its gaze.

Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo and other decolonialist scholars' concept of the "geopolitics of knowledge" and the criticism on the writing of history by Michel de Certeau and Michel Rolph Trouillot hold that the site of enunciation of the speaking voice places it into an epistemological balance of power with the place that it appropriates for a setting. In short, no interpretation of history can be written from a neutral, objective position because it will always be grounded in the particular conditions of its place of enunciation. Mignolo speaks of entering a room from different doors--entering from the North (the position of Western European epistemological privilege) allows a certain perspective on the interior and when all other doors are closed, this view becomes the epistemologically dominant view (233).

However, when entered from another door, say that of the subaltern, or marginalized global peoples who experienced the condition of coloniality, the room looks different. The particular socio-economic cultural and literary tradition of the place of enunciation invariably affects the resulting narrative, because there is no universally neutral space from which writing can emerge: the room is always viewed from a particular entrance. Furthermore, realistic effects, to borrow a concept from Roland Barthes, which the narrative creates a sense of place for the setting also refute or reinforce cultural stereotypes. Literary appropriations have a representational power that can reinforce stereotypes or, if created with the spirit of empathy, participate in Dussel's "critical intercultural dialogue" between transmodern peoples.

The novel begins with the super-narrator describing how he found out about the death of the main character/narrator who he calls "O Occidental," because nomads had been unable to pronounce his Portuguese name. He reflects on the difficult last days of the Occidental's deployment to China and his mysterious mission to search for the photographer in Mongolia who had been ordered by at the highest level of the Brazilian diplomatic corps. The photographer became lost in Mongolia because of his romantic feelings towards the legends and stories he heard in his travels.<sup>4</sup> According to the super-narrator, "o desaparecido ainda tentava tratar o mundo como aliado. Era mais ingênuo ou otimista" (50). He is drawn to the romantic idea the Western traveler in the Orient. When visiting a wrestling competition, he states: "Há uma violência contida entre os mongóis, que pode se desencadear a qualquer instante. É uma violência louca, uma manifestação da ignorância e da brutalidade que o nomadismo dilui entre as paisagens mais belas do planeta" (171). The photographer is emotionally moved by visions of sweeping landscapes, sex and violence. He becomes fascinated with Naro Hajodma, also called Narkhajid, the naked flaming goddess of Tantra, whose image he sees in the Ulan Bator art gallery. Afterwards in his diary he admits "Vejo sexo por todos os lados" (61). The erotic focus of the photographer's gaze brings to mind Edward Said's analysis of the structure of the European idea of the exoticized Orient. He begins a mystical quest to find the sacred place of the goddess, he quarrels with his local guide and retraces his steps alone into an oncoming blizzard and disappears. Rather than approaching the Mongols in a spirit open to dialogue as posited by Dussel, in his journal writings the photographer struggles to see the Mongols outside of the Orientalist stereotype he had of them before he arrived.

The Occidental reads the photographer's diary entries, left behind with his incredulous local guide, and investigates his cultural interests in Mongolia in order to gather clues as to his possible whereabouts. Then he begins his search. The Occidental describes his arrival in Beijing: "Desde que pusera os pés em Pequim, a cidade lhe parecera opressiva e irreal, outra capital do poder, como Brasília ou Washington, que era justamente do que ele vinha tentando escapar. Sofria de irrealidade. Era mais um pesadelo" (16). Referencing the oppressive, monumental architectures of these world capitals could have been an opportunity to reflect on the common situations of groups peripheral to nationalist discourse. Instead, it evokes the tradition of modern western literature. The first journal entry of the Occidental is titled "Um palácio no deserto" and the epigraph of the novel is from Franz Kafka's "A Message from the Emperor." Kafka's story is about the impossibility of a message sent by the Emperor ever leaving a never-ending palace on its way to the reader. It holds that the post-structuralist and deconstructionist positions that the author's intent is never exactly expressed through writing, that meaning is always deferred. The epigraph in the novel points towards the artificiality of narrative and its role as an open playing field of creation for the author. The Occidental views the Forbidden City in Beijing through the lens of what he had read, "A idéia da muralha e de um muro após o outro, que tanto fascinou Kafka y Borges, está representada na planta baixa da capital" (18). Nevertheless, a European story about an outsider who will never arrive at an understanding of the message of the Emperor's court combined with the super-narrator's skepticism towards the possibility of establishing truths about Asia reinforces the feeling that the book resists opening dialogue with the peoples and cultures of its narrative setting.

Another way in which dialogue is opposed is when the Occidental contrasts his idea of Orient with that of the Occident. He is mystified at the lack of modern literature and questions if perhaps the writing system, complicated ideograms, only lends itself to poetry and calligraphy: "O ideograma, que nos fascina à distância, é também o que os impede de escrever como nós. Só uma transformação da língua visual em auditiva permitiria o nascimento da prosa literária e da própria noção de literatura moderna como a conhecemos no Ocidente" (25). In this fragment, the Occidental holds that China does not write modern literature because of its visual format. The idea of literature as a universal canon of great scripts perfected in the Modern European novel is Eurocentrist and permanently distances the rest of the world from catching up with Western modernity. The super-narrator reflects on the Occidental's statement and in this moment comes close to admitting that non-western

cultures would have their literary values. He states of the Occidental: “Seus argumentos ... eram de uma arrogância, de um etnocentrismo e de uma ignorância constrangedores até para um sujeito como eu, que também não sabia grande coisa ... Para um chinês que tivesse acabado de chegar ao Brasil, a literatura brasileira podia ser igualmente rala. Antes de mais nada, suas conclusões nada tinham a ver com a realidade” (25). In a spirit of dialogue the novel might have then embarked on a discussion of the merits of Chinese and Mongolian cultural production but unfortunately this does not occur. Rather, it continues to explore plastic arts that are also impossible for the westerner to comprehend.

An example of this inability to open dialogue occurs when the Occidental visits and is bewildered by the Modern Art Gallery in Ulan Bator. He determines that the art is not modern but rather new editions of traditional forms: “é a confirmação que faltava de que a arte moderna é uma invenção ocidental que mal se adapta a estas paragens” (102). The Occidental looks in vain for modernity, but the super-narrator does not criticize him for looking for modes of cultural production that are not universal. Rather the super-narrator states, “Não compreendemos nada do que vemos na China” (23). This extra-diegetic narrator expresses doubt in the ability to establish or express truths. For him there is no way to cross so vast a cultural divide. These comments undermine the value of the dialogue that could result from intercultural exchange and research that the novel displays of Chinese and Mongolian cultural production. The super-narrator feels that “... o fascínio está justamente no que há neles de inexprimível. Falar já é traí-los. A tradução é impossível” (27). Where the Occidental assumes the role of the Western art critic who sees a poor copy of Western modern Art, the super-narrator sees an impossible comparison. He considers the Occidental a Eurocentrist who refuses to view Asia outside of his close-minded preconceptions, but he does not see the possibility of dialogue or achieving an understanding between Brazil and Asia.

This encapsulation of Asian letters in a permanent state of otherness evokes Pedro Erber’s critique of Carvalho’s fiction. According to Erber, Carvalho creates situations where people living in different conceptualizations of time (indigenous villagers or nomads and Western urbanites) come into contact and conflict as a means to challenge and expand the traditional concept of time as being a strictly European one:

Long before the emergence of anthropology as a science, European literary fiction, as Edward Said forcefully demonstrated, has been a principal medium

for the construction of a discourse that objectifies the Oriental other, isolating her/him in a different historical time. Carvalho's writing brings these supposedly separate temporal spheres into jarring proximity with one another, thus revealing their fundamental contemporaneity (34)

The Occidental cannot fathom how Asian writing can seem so out of step with his own time, and the super-narrator finds that it is his own series of attitudes that are restricted. But they avoid most encounters with a critic or creator of Asian cultural production that might enlighten them. When they do speak with locals it is hesitantly and with disbelief.

Dissimulation of Brazil as the Occident and China/Mongolia as the periphery occurs throughout the novel. The narrators are focused on applying the rational Western gaze upon a land that defies them. In one instance, the Occidental sits next to an Australian on a flight west, eschewing the company of his Mongol guide, because the Australian was lonely for a familiar Westerner to talk to in English. The Australian sees the Brazilian as a kindred spirit in comparison to the more different Chinese and Mongolians they are surrounded by and the novel dryly makes obvious the fact that the common bond between them is English. If the Occidental only spoke Portuguese then there could have been no common bond.

However, there are cracks in this Occidental façade appearing periodically, which portray Brazil as a failed modern state that does not fit in with an idealized modernity. For example, Brazilian bank accounts are assumed to be false. The diplomatic corps is corrupt and had the photographer's father not been a powerful business oligarch with connections in government, there would have been no search. Most tellingly, the super-narrator is witness to senseless violence in Rio as he thinks of his former colleague. Brazil fills in for the Occident as the place from which reason gazes at the rest of the world for much of the novel, but in these sections the novel could have explored the similar situations between a supposedly violent Mongolian national character and the endemic urban violence of Brazil.

The Occidental believes in universal values that are defined by a European gaze even as they criticize European imperialism. He takes a critical stand against the history of European colonial exploitation of the nineteenth century. Speaking of the summer palace in Beijing, he states:

E não é à toa que os ocidentais o bombardearam mais de uma vez, destruindo como bárbaros ignorantes uma relíquia extraordinária da cultura local, sempre que quiseram subjugar os chineses e obrigá-los a abrir a China ao comércio

exterior... Saí de lá com ódio da hipocrisia de ingleses e franceses, a defender o patrimônio cultural da humanidade só quando lhes interessava. (20-21)

The Occidental's complaint resembles a "Eurocentric critiques of modernity" to borrow a phrase from Dussel. It is a criticism of imperialism that still privileges the Western gaze. This section could have been an opportunity for exploring the common bonds of the post-colonial experience. From here the Occidental might have made attempts at understanding what happened in Shanghai from the Chinese perspective through what has been written or by asking locals about their perspectives. But instead it is an internal complaint about when European powers used cruelty and death for financial gain. The brutal tactics of the British and the French do not make them less civilized. It does not attempt to see what happened from the Chinese perspective.

Much background information has the tone of an Encyclopedia entry written about Mongolia. In one passage the super-narrator describes the twentieth-century history of Mongolia as if it were read from textbook on Contemporary Asian History written in Western Europe: "O marechal Choibalsan, um dos heróis da Revolução de 21, chegou ao poder em 1928, ao que consta depois de eliminar adversários e inimigos. Governou a Mongólia com mão de ferro até 1952" (93). The wording of this description evokes the way anti-capitalist leaders of the twentieth century are frequently portrayed, from Lenin to Fidel Castro. They are often described as paranoid authoritarian despots who use state terror to silence critics and consolidate their power in their person with the metaphor of the "iron hand." This draws upon a Cold War logic that all socialist leadership is Stalin in disguise and does not accurately portray the real differences that may exist. The Occidental understands Mongolian history because of its correlates in Western history--a dictator connected to Stalin will naturally be iron-fisted and the years of his rule are measured with the Gregorian calendar. To invoke Mignolo's metaphor of a room with multiple doors, the Brazilian narration opens the same door to the room of Mongolian history as the Western encyclopedia writers of the twentieth-century. The novel is full of historical and cultural observations that explain Asia to an Occidental readership; but they evoke library research rather than intercultural exploration.

There are stereotypes in the novel of Mongolian character being non-linear and inscrutable. The oral stories of his guides explaining the photographer's disappearance are confounding for the Occidental. When he questions Ganbold, one of the photographer's

guides, he struggles to redirect the narrative into a simple account of the facts and is uninterested in the details:

“Não gosto de mistérios. Afinal, e de uma vez por todas, o que essa deusa tem a ver com a história e com o desaparecimento do rapaz?”, o Ocidental interrompeu a narrativa de Ganbold, já sem nenhuma paciência para a maneira tortuosa como o guia se aproximava do essencial, aos poucos e em círculos, sem nunca atingi-lo, e que era uma característica recorrente entre os mongóis que havia encontrado. (84)

The Occidental's impatience reflects the stereotyped theory of European narration occurring in a direct, causal fashion while Asian narratives circle around the subject. By vocalizing impatience in the flawed character of the Occidental, the narrative critiques the assumption that one oral style is more reasonable than the other. But the Occidental never learns to respect local culture and becomes more and more confounded by his guides. In one instance, the Occidental arrives in Altai with his guide Purevbaatar and feels isolated by his inability to understand the cultural contours of his environment:

Purevbaatar o deixou no hotel e o aconselhou a aproveitar a tarde livre para desfrutar a cidade. Desfrutar era eufemismo. Era impossível saber onde terminava a ingenuidade e começava a ironia do guia, e mesmo se havia alguma ironia. O mais delicado era que qualquer reação mais afiada a um suposto sarcasmo poderia ofendê-lo se no fundo tivesse falado com pureza de alma e sinceridade de motivos. Sem conseguir dominar as diferenças culturais, o Ocidental se sentia de mãos atadas: em geral evitava revidar de igual para igual e, no seu paternalismo, nunca sabia ao certo se estava fazendo papel de bobo ou não. (111-12)

The inability for the Occidental to feel self-assured in his communication with his guides testifies to his close-mindedness as a character and the difficulties of travel in general but it also reinforces the stereotype that his guides are essentially unknowable. However, there is one comment made Purevbaatar to quell the Occidental's angry tirades that shows his point of view the potential the novel had to foster a dialogue. Purevbaatar tells the Occidental:

Tal vez você não tenha entendido o meu trabalho quando me contratou. Não brinco em serviço. Você me pediu para fazer o mesmo percurso que fiz com ele há seis meses. Acontece que esse percurso

depende das pessoas que encontramos no caminho. Num país de nômades, por definição, as pessoas nunca estão no mesmo lugar. Mudam conforme as estações. Os lugares são as pessoas. Você não está procurando um lugar. Está procurando uma pessoa. (115)

By stressing the necessity of viewing circumstances from a local perspective, the guide forces the Occidental to accept that his thinking must adapt to achieve his goal. This interchange could have been expanded and used as the moment in which the Occidental realizes that to achieve his ends he must open his thinking and engage in a transmodern dialogue. The super-narrator could have made a similar conclusion. But unfortunately both narrative voices quickly revert to viewing Mongolia from their prior positions of Western subjectivity observing an opaque Orient.

Many of the people the Occidental comes across make an effort to accommodate him. While staying with some of Purevbataar's relatives in a yurt on the steppe, he discovers that they are nervous around him and speak quietly because they do not know what to say in his presence. They take a photograph together with him in front of their homes dressed in their best clothes, because it is a special event to have a visitor from a land they had never heard of before: "Purevbaatar me diz que estão preocupados comigo. Não sabem como se comportar diante de mim nem o que dar de comer a um ocidental" (120). They make a warm event out of his visit- a fact that contrasts with stereotypes about Mongolians being inscrutable.

While a healthy dose of modesty regarding one's ability to understand a foreign culture can be an asset to travel writing, it does not follow that travel writing itself is incapable of creating a positive intercultural exchange. Fictional travel writing strikes a balance between representation and invention. The details, commonplaces, and realistic effects of the narrative appropriation create a sense of place and imply the existence of the real by interacting with what the reader already has read and knows. The nineteenth-century tradition of travel writing is replete with footnotes and words in italics from the native language that explain, in some measure, the language and character of the place as in an ethnographic study. *Mongólia* repeats some of these techniques to create realistic effects that form a sense of place for the setting. The super-narrator of the novel, who disbelieves in the possibility of understanding Asia, provides a footnote for the pronunciation of Mongol names that evokes colonial travel writing. The book also has a map of Mongolia at the beginning with the traced routes of the photographer and the Occidental. Travel maps imply their own particular cultural and political

history. As Yara Viera notes, one of the Occidental's drivers is named Batnasan and in the *Mongólia's* acknowledgments section Carvalho gives thanks to his driver Batnasan who drove him through the steppes for two months. Furthermore, on the back flap of the book there is a photograph of the author in front of his tent in Mongolia. If the narrative were only appreciable as a meditation on the creative freedom of writing, then these realist markers would be out of place. As de Certeau and Troillot note, writing is bound to the context of its creation and in this case the means by which the novel was written affect how the reader will perceive the veracity of its content. The realist markers reinforce the perceived connection between fiction and the place of its appropriation; they show that the novel appropriates a place in the real world as its setting. The characters travel through a real place, research its culture and past in a series narrative levels that the reader interprets as establishing truths about Mongolia.

The novel has a one-sided, western perspective that resists dialoguing with voices from its place of narrative appropriation. The epigraph of the novel from Kafka holds that the author's intent is never exactly expressed through writing, that meaning is always deferred. This points towards the author's belief in the artificiality of narrative and its role as the open playing field of creation for the author and open field of interpretation for the reader because representation of truth is impossible. According to Vieira, Carvalho's works both recreate informative writing like journalism, scholarly investigation and autobiography while also disqualifying them as producers of truth, and this literary game plays out as a trick on the Brazilian reader: "cria uma espécie de armadilha para um público medianamente letrado, que procura cada vez mais se informar" (230). Vieira's critique of Carvalho's writing technique is representative of the reaction the novel received after it won the Premio Jabuti in 2004.

Carvalho was disappointed that reviews in literary supplements of his novel expect his writing to be held to lived-experience, when what he intended was for his creation freedom to be admired. In a translated interview he stated:

I wanted the reader to understand that literature is creation, invention, and that to reduce it to the direct expression of the author's experience is not only misleading, but also impoverishing, since experience is something that you can create as well as suffer. To my complete dismay, these books... ended up being read respectively as autobiography and as a travel log. And this was partially because I had .

. . . really traveled in Mongolia before writing a novel called *Mongólia*. I realized that what I was trying to fight was much stronger than I thought. (4).

While he reacts against the idea of fiction being bound to the reality of the author, he also seems to be espousing the notion that fiction is not responsible when it represents the world, because it should be understood as free from the politics of identity. This perspective is in-line with the tradition of cosmopolitan Latin American narrative that sees itself as being beyond the responsibilities of representing the culture of its author but it ignores the epistemological imbalance of power created by a narrative that appropriates the perspective of Western rationality observing an opaque Orient. Appropriation can be cosmopolitan but it is unlikely to be neutral between the site of enunciation and the site of its fiction because as decolonialist scholars hold, a text dialogues with, sympathizes with, speaks over, or stereotypes the place of its setting.

In reaction to the reception by critics of *Mongólia*, Carvalho explains that he endeavored to separate his next work from any possibility of autobiographical critique:

This is when I began conceiving, in reaction to all that, a book called *O sol se põe em São Paulo* (The Sun Sets in São Paulo), as an artificial, deliberate and manifest appraisal of fiction as a liberating tool. In this book, every single character is either Japanese or of Japanese descent, so there is apparently no trace of the author in what is related, no possibility of reducing the novel to the author's immediate experience or background. It is a book about the powers of literature as we came to understand it through the modern western tradition, as the potential creative strength of a radical and subjective singularity. (4-5)

In this work, he expects to liberate the text from the responsibilities of representation, completely erasing the presence of the author, which was the flaw he believes responsible for the negative reaction to *Mongólia*. But by appropriating the history and cultural experience of a specific group of people across a cultural, historical and economic distance, the novel inevitably either confirms or challenges existing stereotypes. The novel exists in a context of other writing and cultural understandings about the subject, and the reader does not complete a narrative about Asia or Asian peoples without creating new understandings that either confront or confirm old ones. Fiction, however untrue, relates and represents what the reader

understands to be real. When a cross-cultural appropriation takes place, as is the expression of Mongolian identity and space by the Brazilian subjectivity of the narrative voices in the novel, the fiction engages in representation.

Dussel imagines an alternative to the growth of Western European thought as the increasingly global definition of modernity. A novel like *Mongólia* could have been an opportunity to engage in this kind of critical conversation between peoples inhabiting the global south who share a relationship to the hegemony of Europe epistemological thought. Instead, the novel subsumes European modernity into the perspectives of Brazilian/Occidental narrators who fail to connect with Asia. The novel appropriates the place of Mongolia and China for its place of creation and the Occident as its site of enunciation. The digetic voices of narration critique one another's Eurocentrism at times but from within the privilege of the Occident and also reinforce the idea that Mongolia and China are not places that can be dialogued with or understood. The author's desire to craft fiction for the sake of fiction and not engage in autobiography explains his personal position with regards to his text. But no narrative setting is neutral and in *Mongólia*, the realistic effects that ground the narrative in place evoke various Occidentalist visions of Asia; savage beauty as seen by a romantic explorer, the chaotic travels and disjointed communications experienced by the Occidental, and the incredulity of the super-narrator who refuses to dialogue with the chaotic East from the equally chaotic West.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernardo Carvalho was included in “Geração 90” defined by Nelson de Oliveira to mean the group of writers born in the 1960s who began to publish their fiction in the 1990s with an eclectic interest in national and international, social and individual stories. Many important facets of this group coincide with those of the Crack authors in Mexico and with *McOndo* authors of Latin America. These authors, in general, see themselves as the inheritors of the tradition of Latin American fiction that peaked with the Boom and since then has continued to branch out in new directions. They also see themselves as members of an international reading community. For example, Carvalho published a piece in Dave Eggers’ *McSweeney’s* 2014 *Latin American Crime: Thirteen Short Stories* among other authors who see themselves as writers in a global market of fiction.

<sup>2</sup> The Fundação Oriente, a philanthropic organization devoted to promoting inter-lusophone and Chinese/Asian cultural dialogue and was funded by an agreement that allowed gambling in the former Portuguese colony and now Chinese city of Macau.

<sup>3</sup> The Occidental’s letters are marked as separate with italicized letters. The letters of the photographer are marked by Helvetica font. The super-narrator puts together an album-novel of narrative fragments and then comments on them as they relate.

<sup>4</sup> Yara Vieira sees the possibility that the photographer may be fleeing prejudice both in Brazil and then later in Asia against homosexuality, “Todas essas pistas levam afinal o leitor a ver o rapaz brasileiro como um (possível) homossexual que é vitimizado no país de origem e depois no outro extremo do mundo pelo preconceito” (19). The possibility of the character’s homosexual closeting would be in line with similar character construction in other novels by Carvalho according to Vieira.

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