

(Im)possible Dialogues between Jesuscristinho (Ruffato, 2001) and Bolsonaro: approximations between literature and discourse

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the similarities between the statements of the *jesuscristinho*, one of the characters in the work *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos*, by Ruffato (2001), and some statements made by the former president of Brazil (2019-2022), Jair Messias Bolsonaro, based on literary discursivity, addressed by Mello (2005) and Maingueneau (2005), and on the interdiscursivity of Pêcheux (2008). Pondering the similarities between statements originating from fiction and politics, about the press and journalists, we examine, based on Pêcheux's notion of ideology and drives, as well as on Rancière's (2009a, 2009b) teachings on the “experiences of the sensitive” and the effects of the arts on the “aesthetic unconscious”, how the production of senses and meanings is carried out in these contexts. In both cases, both political and literary statements have an effect on reality, as Rancière (2009b, p. 58) has already observed, a fact that further reinforces the existence of a real interface between literature and discourse.

Keywords:

Literature; Literary Discursivity Bolsonaro.

Resumo:

Este trabalho debate as aproximações entre as declarações do *jesuscristinho*, um dos personagens da obra *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos*, de Ruffato (2001), e algumas afirmações proferidas pelo ex-presidente do Brasil (2019-2022), Jair Messias Bolsonaro, com apoio na discursividade literária, abordada por Mello (2005) e Maingueneau (2005), e na interdiscursividade de Pêcheux (2008). Ponderando sobre as similitudes entre enunciados oriundos da ficção e da política, sobre imprensa e jornalistas, examinamos, com apoio na noção pecheutiana de ideologia e pulsões, bem como nos ensinamentos de Rancière (2009a, 2009b) sobre as “experiências do sensível” e dos efeitos das artes no “inconsciente estético”, como se realiza a produção de sentidos e de significados nesses contextos. Em ambos os casos, tanto os enunciados políticos quanto os enunciados literários fazem efeito no real, como já observou Rancière (2009b, p. 58), fato que reforça ainda mais a existência de uma interface real entre literatura e discurso.

Palavras-chave:

Literatura; Discursividade Literária; Bolsonaro.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is inscribed within the social context (Candido, 2000), serving as an essential collaborator in the process of historical construction (Chartier, 2021) and, among other powers, being fundamental for the establishment of thought and reflection about reality (Rancière, 2009a, 2009b). These and other reasons have contributed to a significant increase in studies that seek to examine the possible interfaces between literary art and other arts (such as cinema, theater, music, etc.), as well as with other fields of knowledge, such as sociology, education, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, and discourse analysis.

That said, this work situates itself in the intersection of two important areas—literature and discourse—with the goal of analyzing the conceptions of *jesuscristinho*, a character from *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos* (Ruffato, 2001), regarding the press and journalists, and comparing them with some statements made by the former president of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro. To this end, supported by studies on literature and discourse—such as literary discursivity, discussed by Mello (2005) and Maingueneau (2005), and the interdiscursivity of Pêcheux (2008)—we outline a framework that emphasizes the approximations between discourses about a shared theme, involving both a fictional literary character and a political figure from Brazilian reality.

Initially, by presenting the convergences between literature and discourse, we aim to demonstrate how these two areas possess ever-possible intersections, as both are embedded within the same social fabric. Sharing an ideology that is not an infallible ritual, as Pêcheux (2014) warns, all utterances are capable of being echoed in distinct contexts. At this point, we rely on studies that address literature and its interfaces with other fields, as well as on Pêcheux’s notions of ideology and interdiscourse, the literary discursivity discussed by Mello (2005) and Maingueneau (2005), and the teachings of Rancière (2009a, 2009b) regarding the “regime of the sensible,” the “experiences of the sensible,” and the “aesthetic unconscious.”

Next, moving toward the analysis of the study’s object, and in light of approaches to art and discourse, we present the character *jesuscristinho* (Ruffato, 2001), emphasizing his views on media outlets and the professionals who work within them.

Subsequently, inspired by Verissimo’s (2012) ideas on impossible dialogues that become possible within the literary text, we developed, based on Pêcheux’s interdiscursivity, a comparison between the statements made by the former president of Brazil, Bolsonaro – especially those uttered during his presidential term (2019–2022) – and those of the character *jesuscristinho*, from Ruffato (2001).

We understand that studies aiming to shed light on the proximities between two distinct fields, such as literature and discourse, represent important opportunities to advance and better understand the multiple facets of these spheres. Consequently, they broaden perspectives on how these areas influence one another and produce meanings and senses, both in the artistic field and in objective reality as well as in the unconscious.

DISCOURSE AND LITERATURE

In *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1998), Machado de Assis introduced to Brazilian literature, among other characters, Brás Cubas. Marked by his mediocrity in his political trajectory (and not only in that area, but in all aspects of his professional life), the politician Brás Cubas—encouraged by the equally mediocre Quincas Borba (a philosopher detached from science)—had his status quo secured not by scientific merit but by his opposition to science and by maintaining delusional ideas, such as the invention of the “emplastro,” a miracle remedy that would cure all diseases, though without any scientific proof of efficacy.

If a narrative written in 1881 finds parallels with certain discursivities of the present¹ (21st century), it is because, as Maingueneau (2005, p. 17) aptly notes, in “communication with the exterior,” the relationship between the literary fact and discourse rejects the notion of a “fixed point,” a “creative instance,” or the idea of an “autonomous work” that exists “as a self-conscious creation.” That is, there is no literary work that exists as an end in itself, free from external influences. Thus, Maingueneau (2005, p. 19) asserts that “the conditions of saying permeate what is said, which invests its own conditions of enunciation.” This means that the author’s condition—tied to his modes of positioning himself through literature, the behaviors related to genres, the relationship created by the literary work with its addressee (the reader), the material supports, and the forms of circulation of utterances—directly influences the work’s meaning and reception.

This is why Bakhtin (1997, p. 282) states that the novel as a whole “is an utterance, in the same sense as a reply in everyday dialogue or a personal letter (phenomena of the same nature); what differentiates the novel is that it is a secondary (complex) utterance.” Bakhtin (1997, p. 209–210) argues that through writing—that is, through the author’s relationship with language and its use—the author establishes “a primary relationship with content, that is, with the immediate data of life and the world of life, in its ethical-cognitive tension.” In this relationship,

the work, just like a reply in dialogue, anticipates the other’s (or others’) response—an active, responsive understanding—and therefore adopts all kinds of strategies: it seeks to exert didactic influence over the reader, to persuade, to arouse critical appreciation, to influence imitators and continuators, etc. The work predetermines the responsive positions of others within the complex conditions of verbal communication in a given cultural sphere. The work is a link in the chain of verbal communication; just like a reply in dialogue, it relates to other works-utterances: those it responds to and those that will respond to it, while remaining separated from others by the absolute boundary of alternating speaking subjects (Bakhtin, 1997, p. 299).

Increasingly, studies have explored the interface between literary art, other areas of knowledge (such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and history), and distinct forms of art (music, cinema, theater, etc.). In this section, given our focus, we adopt perspectives primarily from literature, philosophy, and discourse.

From a philosophical standpoint, the arts (including literature) are inscribed within what Rancière (2009b) calls the “regime of the sensible,” a space in which they operate and promote “experiences of the sensible.” When shared publicly (in the social realm), they enhance and/or problematize ideas ranging from “imaginary stories of artistic ‘modernity’ and the vain debates about the autonomy of art” to “its political submission” (Rancière, 2009b, p. 26). According to Rancière (2009b, p. 20), the arts claim spaces, influence, and provoke political and social experiences—the sensible politicization—which propels the realization of “great forms of aesthetic sharing.” Operating in this way, Rancière (2009b, p. 26) continues, the arts “never lend more to maneuvers of domination or emancipation than they can: what they share with power are the positions and movements of bodies, functions of speech, and distributions of the visible and the

¹ As when Bolsonaro, former president of Brazil, and former US president Donald J. Trump defended hydroxychloroquine sulfate for the treatment of Coronavirus/COVID-19, a drug with no proven efficacy for the disease. Sanches, Mariana. BBC Brasil (Sanches, 2020).

invisible,” and their freedom or subversion rests on the same basis.

Finally, in addressing the link between literature and discourse, Mello (2005, p. 31) highlights that this is an “interface not only possible but real.” According to Mello (2005, p. 40), with aspects of both representation and demonstration, literary language “allows words to assume a life of their own, with new meanings beyond those usually attributed to them,” and for this reason, literary creations possess value and power. Moreover, in literature, language has a distinctive “flavor,” a status that does not necessarily submit to scientific rigor (which is immutable, precise, and exact) but is instead marked by indeterminacy, multiplicity of meanings, and representational potential.

In this field, addressing the concepts of intertextuality, interdiscourse, interlanguage, and paratopy, Maingueneau (2005, p. 18) advocates for the notions of “literary discourse” and “literary discursivity” in order to give greater legibility to literary repertoires. According to him, the discursive character of literary works becomes clear when one gains access to their “modalities of enunciation,” which occurs when one moves away from romantic conceptions of literature—those that define its importance based on whether it is “too cliché” or “not enough,” “official” or “unofficial,” “original” or “sincere,” “pure” or “impure,” among others. As Maingueneau (2005, p. 26) explains, “by being part of the literary institution and bringing it into the heart of enunciation, we move away from the author’s intimate domain, that protected place of the literary thing: thus we assume the order of discourse.” For this reason, the discursive character of the literary work is understood by Maingueneau (2005, p. 26) as paratopy, a term referring to the author’s position within literary enunciation—marked simultaneously by absence and presence within the space of production. Maingueneau (2005, p. 28) further argues for the inseparability between enunciation and the literary institution, since literature itself “founds the space of its own enunciation,” as “a work cannot extend its world without constructing, within that same world, the necessity of displacement.” In other words, one cannot expand a literary universe without simultaneously creating the conditions for distancing from it—and within it.

Another crucial concept for understanding the interface between literature and discourse—interdiscourse—is articulated by Pêcheux (2008), who argues that “every utterance is susceptible to becoming another,” since ideology is not an infallible ritual. According to Pêcheux (2008, p. 153):

every utterance is intrinsically liable to become other, different from itself, to be discursively displaced from its meaning toward another (unless the prohibition of interpretation proper to the logically stable is explicitly exercised upon it). Every utterance, every sequence of utterances, is thus linguistically describable as a series (lexico-syntactically determined) of possible points of drift, giving rise to interpretation.

On this topic, Pêcheux (2014, p. 157) views the ideological space—despite its disparities—as essentially “an integrating systematicity: this or that sector of the system (for instance, literature) may then appear as the privileged point of integration of the different discursive zones of the system.” Thus, the differences between actions that arise from human use of language to mediate social relations (the socio-discursive dimension) appear only, according to Pêcheux (2014, p. 157), as “differences of valorization,” and “never as structural differences.”

From this perspective, interdiscourse, for Pêcheux (2014, p. 158), means a “principle of functioning,” since it is through the importation (metaphorization) of elements from one discursive formation² into another that discursive references are constructed and historically displaced.

Considering these insights on the viable interface between literature and discourse, and guided by the concepts of literary discursivity (Maingueneau, 2005; Mello, 2005) and interdiscursivity (Pêcheux, 2008), the following sections weave and substantiate the discursive approximations between a character of literary fiction (*jesuscristinho*, from Ruffato, 2001) and a political figure of reality (the former president of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro).

² According to Pêcheux (2009, p. 160), Discourse Formation (DF) is “that which, in a given ideological formation, that is, from a given position in a given conjuncture [...] determines what can and should be said”.

AN INCENDIARY *JESUSCRISTINHO*: THE CHARACTER OF RUFFATO (2001) AND HIS STATEMENTS AGAINST THE PRESS

At the beginning of the 21st century (in 2001), within a “narrative mosaic” — a text composed of fragments, with diverse and sometimes interconnected narratives — Ruffato created, in the very short “Text 8,” entitled *Era um garoto* (“He Was a Boy”), part of the award-winning novel *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos*, a certain *jesuscristinho*. Physically described in just a few lines by Ruffato (2001, p. 20), *jesuscristinho* was “a boy” who “did not even look like a child,” with “long blond hair,” a “goatee,” “brown eyes,” and “well-shaped muscles.” Regarding his traits, *jesuscristinho* is presented through the words of his own mother as “a wonderful boy, a genius in mathematics, physics, and chemistry, good at Portuguese, and taking advanced courses at Cultura Inglesa,” an “exceptional,” “marvelous,” and “adorable” boy (Ruffato, 2001, p. 20–22). Furthermore, his biography in Ruffato’s work (2001, p. 20–22) reveals that he symbolizes “the absence of the paternal figure”; that he worked as a freelancer for newspapers and magazines; that he later became a “partner in a communications consultancy”; that he turned into a “puppet for the city hall”; and that as a result, he experienced a social turnaround that lifted him from a simple life to a “mansion in Alphaville.”

Among the characteristics mentioned, one stands out and grounds the focus of this study: *jesuscristinho*’s conflicted relationship with certain press outlets. For this reason, and drawing upon literary discursivity (Maingueneau, 2005; Mello, 2005) and interdiscursivity (Pêcheux, 2008), we seek to establish discursive parallels between the utterances of this literary character (*jesuscristinho*) and those of a political figure in Brazilian reality (Bolsonaro). This connection between discursivities is structured on the assumption, following Maingueneau (2005), that literature operates in relation to its exteriority—it is not an end in itself. Literature both belongs to and functions within the spaces where it is produced, appreciated, and managed. This means that from its conception to its arrival at the reader, the literary work is influenced by and exerts influence upon external conditions.

Moreover, in undertaking a comparison between the utterances of a fictional character and a Brazilian political figure, we rely primarily on Pêcheux’s (2014) theory of interdiscourse, according to which any utterance can transform into another, since the subject—constituted by ideology and affected by the unconscious—can have their identity associated with other networks of memory and, through metaphorical processes, link their belonging to other discursive domains.

Through this susceptibility, the discourses of *jesuscristinho*, conceived by Ruffato in 2001, persisted over time and, approximately twenty years later, were echoed in several utterances made by Bolsonaro. This interdiscursivity occurs because, according to Mello (2005, p. 40), with its representative and demonstrative aspects, literary language “allows words to assume a life of their own, with new meanings beyond those usually attributed to them”; therefore, literary creations possess value and power. Consequently, assuming what Orlandi (2012, p. 8) calls a “discursive perspective in reading,” we recognize that “reading, as much as writing, is part of the process of meaning production” and that both subject and meaning are “historically and ideologically determined.”

In this same sense, Chartier (2021) highlights literature’s role as a collaborator in the construction of history. For Chartier (2021, p. 26), “historical authority is not reduced to historiography”; hence, historical knowledge coexists with multiple narratives of the past, including those produced within the literary field. Using theatrical works as an example, the author observes that they often present “representations of the past more ‘truthful’ than those proposed by the historians’ chronicles of the time.”

Following this idea of historical construction, Chartier (2021, p. 33–34) explains that literary works possess a “powerful capacity for knowledge,” weaving the “truth of fiction.” That is, the multiple forms of “literary truths (about the past, society, individuals) can also, paradoxically, become the condition of historical truth.” Furthermore, based on Orlandi (2012, p. 8–10), it is

essential to recognize the ambivalent nature of language—as both “world-instantiating (imitative) and thus tending toward art,” and “world-revealing, as a spearhead of knowledge, tending toward science.” Thus, in analyzing utterances from a literary text and those spoken by a Brazilian politician, we also preserve the plasticity of language that Orlandi (2012, p. 19) refers to—acknowledging both its multiplicity of meanings and the limitations it imposes. With these considerations in mind, we proceed to analyze the utterances.

In the few statements highlighted in “Text 8” regarding the press and its members, *jesuscristinho* expresses his indignation by asserting that “[...] the things that have come out in the newspapers are all lies—your mother, who’s a journalist, knows it—it’s all filth, it’s all disgusting” (Ruffato, 2001, p. 21). Several points in this excerpt deserve attention: (a) the character’s irritation arises right after the mention of his material achievements (there are no complaints about the press when his life was simple and peaceful); (b) the phrase “your mother, who’s a journalist, knows it” reflects an effort to add credibility to his discourse—both through his closeness to someone directly involved with journalism (his mother) and by suggesting that even she, a journalist, confirms that newspapers lack credibility; and (c) nouns like “filth,” “disgust,” and “dirty tricks” reveal a sense of contiguity between him and the content published in the newspapers, implying that the material likely involved him or someone close to him. In all cases, the aim is to discredit the media or journalists as a means of defending himself or others. As Ab’Sáber (2021) notes, such strategies are especially used by politicians to minimize the negative impact of unfavorable press coverage. By discrediting the media, *jesuscristinho* gains a double advantage: on one hand, he reinforces trust in his own words, positioning himself alongside “truth”; on the other, he neutralizes or diminishes the potential influence of future media criticism. This ensures him a comfortable position in maintaining his views and behavior, since subsequent publications, once discredited, would produce little or no effect among readers convinced of his statements’ credibility.

By creating such a member of “the truth of fiction,” to use Chartier’s (2021) term, Ruffato (2001) constructs a character whose speech invites associations with the reader’s reality (the exteriority of literary discourse). This occurs because, as Orlandi (2015, p. 28–29) explains, the “conditions of production” involve subjects and situation—“the circumstances of enunciation” (e.g., socio-historical context and ideology). The mobilization of discursive memory, which Orlandi (2015, p. 29) defines as “the discursive knowledge that makes all saying possible and that returns in the form of the pre-constructed, the already said that underlies the sayable,” gives rise to what Pêcheux (2014) calls metaphor and interdiscourse. This ability, as Pêcheux (2014, p. 157) clarifies, stems from the fact that the ideological space—though unequal and dissonant—is a “systematic integrative whole.” Hence, literature may serve as the “privileged point of integration of the system’s different discursive zones” (interdiscourse), where socio-discursive differences appear only as “differences of valorization (approval or rejection)” rather than structural differences.

Concerning interdiscourse, Pêcheux (2014, p. 158) further explains that, rather than producing an “integrative effect of discursivity,” it functions as its “principle of operation,” since elements within one discursive formation can be imported (metaphorized) into another, allowing discursive references to be constructed and historically displaced. Thus, the incendiary attitudes of a fictional character like Ruffato’s *jesuscristinho* toward the press can be metaphorically aligned with non-fictional behaviors—similarly hostile—found in figures such as Lenin, Stalin, Donald J. Trump, and Jair M. Bolsonaro.

Beyond this plausible alignment between discourses from different historical contexts and domains (e.g., literature and politics), it is worth emphasizing the effects of art on human life, that is, how art affects both the real and the unconscious. By articulating “what has happened” and “what could happen,” Rancière (2009b, p. 57–60) explains that arts such as literature and cinema perform a dual function: that of a “silent impression that speaks” and of a “montage that calculates the powers of meaning and the values of truth.” The author continues: “the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought,” and regarding the relationship between literality and historicity, “both political and literary utterances have effects on the real,” since “man is a political animal because he is a literary animal—diverted from his ‘natural’ destiny by the power of words.”

If, on one hand, the “effects of the visible and the sayable” that Rancière (2009b) mentions already manifest the powerful influence of the arts—the experiences of the sensible—on reality, on the other, Rancière (2009a) also highlights their effects on the aesthetic unconscious. Seeking to demonstrate this, Rancière (2009a, p. 10–11) explains that the literary and artistic figures conceived by Freud show that “there is meaning in what seems meaningless, something enigmatic in what seems evident, and a charge of thought in what appears trivial.” These figures, he says, “testify to a relationship between thought and non-thought, to the presence of thought in the sensible materiality, of the involuntary in conscious thought, and of meaning in the insignificant.” Hence, Rancière (2009a, p. 11) defines the realm of literature and the arts as a “privileged domain for the actualization of this ‘unconscious.’”

Moreover, according to Rancière (2009a, p. 30–31), situated within the aesthetic regime—a mode of thought developed around the arts—the characteristic of art is “the identity of a conscious procedure and an unconscious production, of a voluntary act and an involuntary process—in short, the identity of *logos* and *pathos*.” This aesthetic unconscious, he explains (Rancière, 2009a, p. 41), manifests itself

“in the polarity of this double scene of the mute word: on one side, the word inscribed in bodies, which must be restored to linguistic meaning through deciphering and rewriting; on the other, the deaf word of a nameless power that remains behind all consciousness and meaning—a power that must be given voice and body, even if this anonymous voice and spectral body lead the human subject along the path of renunciation, toward the nothingness of will whose Schopenhauerian shadow weighs heavily upon this literature of the unconscious.”

Thus, if through Pêcheux’s (2014) “principle of functioning” it is possible to align depreciative utterances about the press and journalists—spoken by both fictional and real figures—then through Rancière’s notion of the aesthetic unconscious, such hostilities expressed by Ruffato’s *jesuscristinho* become opportunities for the production and manifestation of meaning within both perceptible and imperceptible domains. More than mere parallels between fiction and reality, these discourses themselves create and foster perceptions and meanings that, voluntarily or not, influence behavior and shape imagination—since, as Rancière (2009b) reminds us, fiction is fundamental to human reflection and thought about the real.

ART IN DISCOURSE, DISCOURSE IN ART: BOLSONARO, THE “IDEOLOGICAL WAR,” DRIVES, DIRECTIONS, AND POLITICAL DECEPTION

In *Diálogos Impossíveis*, Luis Fernando Verissimo (2012), compiles chronicles that explore situations of (im)possibility, (in)communicability, and profound communicational conflicts. Whether depicting Don Juan attempting to seduce Death itself, Batman and Dracula “in a Swiss geriatric clinic” (Verissimo, 2012, p. 101), or reflections inspired by “a dead man’s pockets” (Verissimo, 2012, p. 41), the author reveals the inconveniences of both (mis)spoken words and undesired silences. Following Verissimo’s (2012) insight into impossible dialogues that become possible through literary text—and inspired by the blend of maxims that give this section its title, from Oscar Wilde and Aristotle (the former claiming that life imitates art, the latter that art imitates life)—we develop below, based on Pêcheux’s notion of interdiscursivity, a comparison between the statements of the former president of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro—especially those made during his presidential term (2019–2022)—and those of the character *jesuscristinho*, from Ruffato’s (2001), *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos*, regarding the press and the professionals who compose it.

Jair Messias Bolsonaro, the 38th president of Brazil, governed the country from 2019 to 2022. Aligned with far-right ideals, Bolsonaro adopted complex and often contentious positions throughout his presidency. A staunch defender of neoliberalism, he accumulated a series of problematic attitudes on various issues, many of which directly concerned his hostile relationship with portions of the Brazilian press and journalists.

Similarly to *jesuscristinho*'s way of thinking and acting toward the press, Bolsonaro also expressed significant discontent. A report³ from the Federação Nacional dos Jornalistas (FENAJ), released in October 2020, revealed that the then-president had made 299 attacks against journalism in just the first nine months of that year—an average of 33 attacks per month. Of these, 259 were classified as “discrediting the press,” while 38 were directed at specific journalists. This offensive stance toward the press continued throughout Bolsonaro’s presidency (2019–2022). In 2022, on World Press Freedom Day, he suggested that the Brazilian media should be “shut down,” specifically naming Globo and Folha de S. Paulo (Gomes, 2022).

If, on the one hand, the utterances voiced by Ruffato’s (2001), fictional *jesuscristinho* produce the effects and meanings inherent to what Rancière (2009a, 2009b) calls the “experiences of the sensible” and the activities of the “aesthetic unconscious”—the union of reason and emotion, vital for reflection and thought about the real—on the other hand, Bolsonaro’s discourses are deeply marked by an ideology that, beyond its influence on imagination, feeling, and action, as Pêcheux (2014, p. 35) warns, also operates as a “transformation of political practice” and, consequently, of social relations and the reformulation of social demands, since “every ‘measure’ in the political sense takes its place in political practice as a sentence in a discourse.”

For this reason, Bolsonaro’s behavior toward the press (particularly while serving as president) exemplifies what Pêcheux (2014) calls an ideological war—a concept he explores in his discussion of governmental propaganda and Tchakhotin’s “biopsychology of propaganda.”

Pêcheux (2014) summarizes the principles and practical results of the biopsychology of propaganda in three theses:

1- Human nature is constituted by drives, and two main ones are present in every individual: the rational or economic drive, oriented toward reasoned argument, education, and reflection; and the affective or aggressive drive, which results in a militant propaganda of reflexes and emotions, supported by an aesthetic-religious liturgy of signs and gestures.

2 - The objective process of these drives, once understood by modern science, can be controlled, instrumentalized, and placed at the service of any political project. As Pêcheux notes, the “techniques of propaganda are weapons, like the cannon, the tank, or Stalin’s war machine.” The language of propaganda is already embedded in journalistic metaphors such as “bombardment,” “heavy artillery,” or “trench warfare,” which we employ unconsciously: “we inhabit this metaphor that carries with it the idea of operational neutrality between opposing forces.”

3 - This metaphorical war engages the fate of millions of men and women, who, depending on the strategy of a “propaganda campaign,” may swing one way or another, follow this or that path, take this or that direction (Pêcheux, 2014, p. 78–79).

According to Pêcheux (2014, p. 87), such governmental ideological propaganda establishes the conditions for “political and ideological subjection,” articulated between the “rational” and the “irrational,” between “the objectivity of facts, empirical data, etc., and the subjectivity of experiences and testimonies,” between “the seriousness of expert discussions and the immediacy of ‘information’ distributed to the common man,” as well as between “the impersonal mechanisms of modern capitalist administration and the personalization of political life by the mass media.” As a result, although this “ideology of manipulation” fails to discern between what circulates among everyone and no one, between “each individual and others, between the rightful representatives and the ‘irresponsible ones,’” Pêcheux (2014, p. 92) remarks that “the art of anesthetizing resistance, of absorbing revolts into consensus, and of aborting revolutions has certainly made great progress.” Thus, when an elected president, in the exercise of his office, instead of addressing policies, projects, or factual arguments that might clarify or refute allegations made in the press, chooses instead to repeatedly attack certain media outlets and journalists, he amplifies his ideological appeal. His intent is to incite his supporters’ emotional drives against the press, mobilizing them to act in his defense and to reinforce engagement within his ideological sphere. By doing so, rather than offering rational justifications, he turns to pathos—stirring emotions—to obscure or redirect attention away from

³ Em nove [...], 2020.

factual scrutiny.

Since “discourse is an effect of meaning between interlocutors,” and meaning emerges both from what is said and what is unsaid (Orlandi, 2015, p. 20), Bolsonaro’s repeated efforts to discredit the press and journalists serve two purposes: (1) to persuade his audience that the media is “lying” and “an enemy of the government,” and (2) to divert public attention from the substance of the unfavorable reports he denies. This is an example of what Orlandi (2015, p. 81) defines as constitutive silence—a discursive context in which “one word erases others (to say, it is necessary not to say).” In Bolsonaro’s case, the systematic use of emotionally charged discourse implicitly favors pathos (emotion) over logos (reason), prioritizing affective mobilization over logical reasoning.

Thus, when *jesuscristinho* refers to the media as “all lies,” “dirty tricks,” and “disgusting” (Ruffato, 2001, p. 21), and Bolsonaro calls the press “terrible,” “without credibility,” or says “Folha is garbage” and “What positive coverage has Folha done of this government? None. Zero” (Ferro, 2020), both align ideological bubble⁴ by constructing a common “enemy”: the press, portrayed as dishonest and corrupt, to be held responsible for multiple perceived wrongs. According to Ab’Sáber (2021, p. 55), this logic operates

within what psychoanalysts call “schizo-paranoid structures of paranoia,” a worldview of total conflict, “in which there exists an absolute enemy opposing someone entirely pure, perfectly good.” The other is wholly evil, justifying “total attack up to the edge of delirium, for the enemy’s very existence threatens the paranoid.” Goebbels understood this well, asserting that “to make a people fight, one must convince them they are under attack.”

Indeed, as Sargentini and Carvalho (2021, p. 83) note, for Bolsonaro’s supporters who limit themselves to media sources aligned with him, journalism that adheres to factual reporting “spreads misinformation and becomes an enemy of democracy, just like Congress or the Supreme Court, which allegedly prevent the leader from fulfilling his ‘popular mandate.’” This method constitutes what Orlandi (2015), p. 120) calls the politics of the performative—when “to say is to do,” and politics “tends to become an imaginary activity resembling daydreaming.” By designating an enemy responsible for all the government’s ills, Bolsonaro gains political advantage by persuading his supporters to echo his discourse unconditionally—creating, as Piovezani (2021, p. 186) observes, a sense of belonging for whom “any bellicose or accusatory gesture suffices to feel integrated among the ‘good people.’” In general, this strategy—of reinforcing ideological bubbles through emotional appeal—serves both to maintain group cohesion and to weaken rational critique. As Kakutani (2018, p. 98) observed about former U.S. President Donald J. Trump, such tactics aim “to discredit journalism, label reports as fake news, and attack reporters as ‘enemies of the people’—a chilling term once used by Lenin and Stalin.” Within these bubbles, followers become unconditional accomplices, silencing contradiction and drastically narrowing rationality.

This “performative politics,” driven by affective impulses, leads to mass disinformation, hatred, and the discrediting of truth itself. At times, reality appears more fictional than fiction itself. The real—populated by individuals ruled by primitive impulses—seems to outdo the imagination of any novelist. The arts, in contrast, operate in addition to objective reality, enabling “experiences of the sensible” and other faculties (thought, emotion, affection, action) that develop within the aesthetic unconscious (Rancière, 2009a, 2009b). As the supposedly objective realm grows more ideological and irrational, the very idea of political reality becomes entangled in contradictions that fiction alone might struggle to represent.

Echoing this, Kakutani (2018, p. 14–15), reflecting on the U.S. under Trump, writes:

“If a writer had created a villain like Trump—a megalomaniacal and extravagant personification of narcissism, mendacity, ignorance, prejudice, vulgarity, and demagoguery

⁴ According to Kakutani (2018, p. 133), these are closed communities in which certain groups reinforce fixed ideas, with little or no openness to contradiction, usually oblivious to science and facts, finding a “sense of community in neighborhoods, churches, clubs and other organizations with ideas similar to their own” and isolating themselves in “bubbles of shared interests”.

with tyrannical impulses—he would be accused of having produced a character too fanciful, lacking any plausibility, less convincing than a mix of Ubu Roi, Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, and a discarded Molière caricature.”

It is a fact that both Trump and Bolsonaro (and similar leaders) would represent a difficult challenge for a fiction writer who ventured to reproduce/represent so many feats, hallucinations, and abjections, or even who tried to condense, in a single character, a jumble of adjectives, such as those used by Castro⁵ (2021) and Jorge⁶ (2021) about Bolsonaro. It is also difficult to imagine that, in *They Were Many Horses* (Ruffato, 2001), Ruffato would idealize a little Jesus-like figure who, in addition to belittling the press, would be capable, among other things, of: a) lamenting the fact that Brazil had not decimated the indigenous people (Guedes, 2022); b) scheduling a barbecue for more than a thousand people on the day that Brazil would reach 10,000 deaths from coronavirus (Bolsonaro [...], 2020b); and c) stating that Maria do Rosário (his then colleague in the Chamber of Deputies) “does not deserve to be raped because she is too ugly” (Ramalho, 2016).

Although it would be hard for fiction to capture such extremes, one could easily imagine Ruffato’s *jesuscristinho* sitting alongside Bolsonaro in the ministerial meeting⁵ of April 22, 2020, uttering equally sordid remarks against a press not aligned with the government. This ability to draw parallels between a fictional character and a real political figure exists not only because, as Candido (2000, p. 15) asserts, literature is “inscribed in the social fabric” and thus reflects “evident social dimensions,” but also because, like all art, it holds the symbolic power of representation—capable of producing effects and meanings that shape reality itself (Rancière, 2009a, 2009b). In short, the feasible approximation between *jesuscristinho* (Ruffato, 2001) and Bolsonaro, woven through Pêcheux’s notion of interdiscourse, Maingueneau’s (2005) theory of literary discursivity, and Mello’s (2005) concept of the real interface between literature and discourse, is justified precisely because, by operating within the “experiences of the sensible” and the “aesthetic unconscious,” art becomes essential to human thought and reflection on reality—as Rancière (2009a, 2009b) emphasizes. In this sense, art and life mutually shape and influence each other, as foreseen by both Wilde and Aristotle.

CONCLUSION

The current political reality in Brazil has imposed several challenges upon communication and social relations. Factors such as the discrediting of the journalistic press have been used as strategic weapons to secure political advantage—whether by attracting as many people as possible to sustain, reproduce, and disseminate a shared ideology, by diverting attention from particular issues or debates, or even by triggering human drives that pull individuals closer to emotion and further away from rationality. Enclosed within ideological bubbles and distanced from reason, the appeal to drives causes followers of certain political leaders to support them unconditionally—in both their actions and their discourse. Moreover, these followers often reproduce, generate, and spread extravagant narratives that seem to surpass any literary fiction in their attempt to recount stories ranging from the most sinister to the utterly unimaginable.

It was within this context that we articulated a connection between *jesuscristinho* (Ruffato, 2001) and Bolsonaro. Beyond the viable enunciative comparison—particularly in how both address the press and its members—we also identified that literature and discourse share a real interface, as Mello (2005) has observed. Furthermore, following Rancière (2009a, 2009b), we noted that the arts provide the very substance for establishing thought and reflection about reality, which is why literature and other arts, as highlighted by Chartier (2021) and Almeida (2013), play an essential role in the process of constructing history.

Finally, drawing upon Pêcheux’s notion of interdiscourse, we observed that the literary discourses of Ruffato’s *jesuscristinho*, conceived in 2001, were echoed some twenty years later in

⁵ Reunião [...], 2020.

the utterances of then-president Bolsonaro. In this case, ideology and political strategy enabled an approximation between the discourse of a literary character and that of a Brazilian politician. For this reason, even considering the low probability that Bolsonaro ever read—or was directly inspired by—Ruffato’s *jesuscristinho* (especially given the former president’s own public statements expressing dislike for reading⁶, disdain for intellectuals (Nunes, 2014), and criticism of textbooks for containing “too much written material”⁷), there exists a kind of shared commonality linking both trajectories in a specific respect—thus delineating a bridge between literary art and political discourse.

⁶ Marzullo (2023).

⁷ Bolsonaro [...], 2020a.

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