
Conversations in the Garden: The Fantastic and the Postmodern in *The Centaur in the Garden*, by Moacyr Scliar

Boessio Ana^{1, *}, Dos Santos Rafael²

¹Department of Literary Studies, Federal University of Pampa, Jaguarão, Brazil

²Secretariat of Public Administration, Jaguarão City, Brazil

Email address:

anaboessio@unipampa.edu.br (B. Ana), rafael.schneid@hotmail.com (D. S. Rafael)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Boessio Ana, Dos Santos Rafael. Conversations in the Garden: The Fantastic and the Postmodern in *The Centaur in the Garden*, by Moacyr Scliar. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 9, No. 6, 2021, pp. 384-391. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20210906.28

Received: April 25, 2020; **Accepted:** May 15, 2020; **Published:** December 29, 2021

Abstract: From a comparative approach between literature and cultural studies, this paper aims at analyzing the image of the centaur in *The Centaur in the Garden*, by Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar, which becomes a reading key to analyze the human condition and their dichotomy reason-instinct. A well elaborated and involving narrative that, starting from Greek mythology, allows us to make a journey between the real and the imaginary; in which the presence of a fantastic being is inserted in daily relationships, causing uncomfortable impacts in a conservative society that struggles to keep its traditions alive. In the game of intertextualities present in the work, the centaurs are configured as a representation of the postmodern subject, marked by conflicts between tradition and modernity, and above all, by the fragmentation of identity, which has materialized in the physical hybridism of the characters. Throughout the work, their diverse condition causes the centaurs to face prejudice and intolerance, bringing to light some of the most relevant issues of postmodernity: issues of belonging and exclusion, recognition and social invisibility, highlighting the cultural marks of a traditional society exposed to constant conflicts as to the acceptance of the diverse, as to the universal condition of the Subject. Thus, understanding the text as an example of the fantastic real as defined by Jorge Luis Borges, and considering the text as a game between author and reader, where the text is the board and whose rules are launched by the author, Scliar's work is a complex game with multiple layers, which uses the fantastic as the main strategy for the unveiling of its interpretative possibilities. For this, in dialogue with the aesthetic proposal of the real fantastic, it will be used as theoretical reference the it will be used as theoretical reference the works by Alejo Carpentier, Irleamar Chiampi, Italo Calvino, Wolfgang Iser, Stuart Hall and Zygmunt Bauman.

Keywords: Brazilian Literature, Cultural Studies, Fantastic Realism

1. Introduction

Through a comparative approach between literature and culture, this paper aims at analyzing the image of the centaur in *The Centaur in the Garden*, by the Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar [1], based on the character-narrator, Guedali, as a representation of the identity fragmentation of the postmodern subject, in dialogue with the aesthetic of fantastic realism, defined by Jorge Luis Borges as "a type of fiction that makes the unusual breakthrough in immediate reality" [2]. Thus, as theoretical references, there will be used the works by Beatriz Weigert, Irleamar Chiampi, Wolfgang Iser, Stuart Hall and Zygmunt Bauman.

As well known, literature in its social and cultural dimension, as pointed out by Antonio Cândido in his article "O Direito à literatura" [The Right to Literature], constitutes a fertile field to problematize the contemporary fragmented human condition: a subject tormented by constant conflicts of identity. These conflicts are provoked by the game of cultural forces marked mainly by intransigence to the diverse. It is in this cultural context that Scliar's narrative takes place, having as main character the mythological figure of a centaur inserted into everyday life. Such presence causes constant uncomfortable impacts in a conservative society that struggles to keep its traditions alive, leading readers to a journey through the real and the imaginary. Guedali Tartakovsky was born within a family of Russian Orthodox Jewish immigrants, who

were forced to deal with the unexpected fact that their first-born son presented a birth peculiarity: Guedali was half man, half horse. After the initial astonishment, the family ends up accepting the new member, whereas the society closes itself to the "new one", offering him since his early days nothing but exclusion.

By pointing out the various conflicts generated by the *sui generis* condition of the main character, Scliar highlights also the cultural drama experienced by Guedali, who almost obsessively questions himself about his origin and his place in the world, aware of his different condition, having feelings and needs that distinguish him from the others – feelings that gain prominence as he grows up and expands his awareness of the world. As Zygmunt Bauman states, if the "spirit" was "modern," it was so to the extent that it was determined that reality should be emancipated from the "dead hand" of its own history [3]. This could only be done by dissolving whatever persisted in time and was infested with its passage or immune to its flow. This intention, in turn, called for the "desecration of the sacred", for the repudiation and dethronement of the past, and, first and foremost, of the tradition, that is, the sediment or residue of the past in the present.

2. Literature and Culture: Fragmented Identities in Question

Who am I? Why am I different? Why are the parts of an equine present in my body if I am the son of two human beings? Am I an aberration? Do I not belong here? These are some of the questions that permeate the universe of Guedali, Scliar's main character. In this pursue of his (non)place in the socio-cultural arena, the characterization of space as announcer, and sometimes denouncer, of the "difference" reveals itself as a strategy of which the author makes recurrent and effective use. The reader is not only informed about where Guedali was born and lives – in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Southern Brazil, in the city of Quatro Irmãos and, later, in the State capital, in a neighborhood called Teresópolis – but also about the social and cultural value of these geographic spaces. The neighborhood, for example, is described as a sparsely inhabited place, difficult to access at the time: "[...] it was the only house within a radius of hundreds of meters. At the border of the land, a kind of ditch or trench surrounded the house, creating a natural obstacle to the approach of strangers. And there was also a high wall. I would be protected from prying eyes" [1].

The physical space in Scliar's work transcends the geographical condition, unveiling the subjective social, cultural and psychological dimensions. Here, it is worth noting that, even after the surgical intervention that supposedly would allow him to insert himself in society, the character continues with the same internal conflicts, the same state of estrangement, tormented by the prejudice demonstrated in several passages of the work. This conflict points to the crisis of identity suffered by the postmodern subject, which triggers a state of social, cultural and

psychological fragmentation, a reflection of what Zigmunt Bauman will call liquid modernity.

Bauman points out to conservatism, to cultural and religious traditions that follow a hereditary rite, thoughts, customs and beliefs of our ancestors, which are kept alive even with the advance of time and the change of spaces, and they are strongly present in the work. This is, in fact, one of the main dramas experienced by Guedali throughout the narrative, when faced with various embarrassing situations and people who give him the attribute of "monstrous". The first challenges arise right after his birth, when his own father plunges into guilt and doubt to try to understand why his wife would have given birth to a centaur: "What did you do wrong for God to have punished you in this way? No matter how much you ask yourself, you cannot attribute sins – serious sins at least. Minor faults perhaps....] "And even if it wasn't, from what father could such an exotic creature be born?" [1].

And so goes on the character-narrator, describing the impressions that his birth condition causes in his family and the community in general, showing their fictional load representative of the new spaces. In-between spaces of melting codes and social and cultural traditions to which Bauman and Hall refer, which bring to light issues such as adultery and abnormality, problematizing the resistance of orthodoxy of human thought to the possibility of postmodern liquefaction: "There are perverted women, he knows, capable of making love to any creature, with a horse too; but his Rose is not like that. She is a good, simple woman who lives only for her husband and children" [1].

In *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman presents five basic concepts that support the orthodox narratives of the human condition and undergo successive transformations of their meanings and practical applications; among them, the concept of time/space [3]. These concepts serve as the basis for Scliar's narrative, which from the beginning contains strong references to time and especially to the closed physical, social and cultural spaces where Guedali was born and grew up. His father was a strong man, a peasant farmer, and the family lived more surrounded by animals than by people. This fact used to provoke certain comments in the neighborhood about very common practices among the ancients and that have their origin in the classic Greece, the zoophilia, sexual practices of humans with animals: "it is your fault, Leo. You brought me to this end of the world, to this place where there are no people, only animals. From so much looking at horses, my son was born that way" [1].

The contrast between the family, immersed in a restricted world and sustained by tradition, and the subject (Guedali) who breaks with it, problematizes not only the difficulty of a society in accepting the new, the different, but also the conflict suffered by the one who breaks those codes, a subject constantly questioning himself, who faces the inevitability of a state of fragmentation of his own identity. The embarrassing situations faced by that Guedali, who initially needs to live hidden and later ends up submitting to a process of transformation in his body with the hope of being able to live in community and being socially accepted, becomes a strong

representation of what in Bauman's view is configured as a wall of conservatism, a closed society that cannot open up to acceptance of the new. According to the author, there is a problematic situation that needs to be faced, which is to free man from a society still attached to cultural and material issues of another time [3]. A society that lives on labels to please a growing portion of the population, as the Tartakovsky family who continued to hide their "different" son with the excuse of protecting him, when in reality their intention was somehow pleasing their social group. Yet, the Centaur was growing and so developing the need to know the world outside the walls where he lived; he finally wanted to fly. Being aware that he was different and that he might find it difficult to establish relations with regular, normal people, he knew that he would run the risk of not being accepted. He was also an "inheritor of culture", carrying within the preconceptions established by his family, which made him a subject tormented by the ghosts of rejection, of exclusion. Guedali felt tortured by reality, he saw himself as a piece excluded from society: "No, he wasn't ugly. Beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, straight nose, well-drawn mouth. [...] I was really a handsome teenager. Up to his waist naturally. Then down – centaur, centaur, hopelessly centaur" [1]. Guedali wanted a normal life, he wanted to interact and relate to people, release his instincts and desires. However, when falls in love with a woman, he has to face his first love disappointment. He used to observe her through a telescope and was able to see her in every way, which aroused strong desires in him, but they were repressed by the negative image that was already part of his own self-portrait: "How could she avoid perceiving paws and hooves and tail? How can we ensure that she did not run away in horror screaming monster, monster?" [1]. Faced with this perspective, Guedali decided to run away from home and gallop around the world, where he would certainly seek other opportunities to relate to people, and even find love. In fact, after touring various places, the lonely centaur finds a circus, and he comes up with the idea of presenting himself as a new performer, using his image of centaur as a fantasy composed by him and a fictitious brother who would be at the bottom of the "garment". In the midst of the success experienced in the circus, as one of the main attractions, a new woman appears, a new love, a new desire – the tamer of the circus: she was a fiery woman, and Guedali could feel her desire for him, she wanted him madly, and then one night he takes her to the trailer, where the woman quickly undresses and calls the "Centaur" to her arms. When everything seemed to be heading towards the satisfaction of Guedali's first sexual relationship, his secret is discovered: "[...] She jumps out of bed and runs away, always shouting: it's a horse! A real horse!" [1].

In this and other passages of the work, it is possible to realize Guedali's hope that each new experience might be the opportunity to finally belong, to interact and relate to people as equals, to express his instincts and desires. Thus, even without a direction, he goes galloping through the fields of Rio Grande do Sul State, until he arrives at a ranch, where he meets a female of his species – Tita, a centaur. She tells him a little of her story, where and with whom she lives, how she

was born that way, and invited him to go home with her. When they arrived at the ranch, surprised and incredulous eyes identify another Centaur besides Tita. "They surround me, they examine me, they're curious. What a thing, says one, I thought Tita was a unique case. Luckily, he's beautiful, says another one, he'll make a nice pair with our daughter. [...] What can a centaur and a female centaur do together, except live together?" [1]. The speculations of these women who raised Tita as a daughter, traced Tita's and Guedali's destiny, the fact of having another centaur nearby did not scare them, because they were already accustomed to Tita; what called their attention was the opportunity that Tita, the "centaurette", was having to find a similar one, the possibility of resurrecting one of the strongest marks of status quo in traditional society, marriage: "But you're going to get married, warn a third party, you don't have any of this bastard stuff to get together, you're going to get married in church. She laughs, imagining the priest's face, Tita laughs, so do I. I can't get married in church, I say, still laughing, I'm Jewish" [1].

In this discursive and imagistic construction, the unusual simple and naturally fits into reality. Ms. Cotinha's ranch and its multiple dimensions of space can be seen as the representation of postmodern liquidity in its initial phase, spaces where people show openness to the new, to the diverse, but still carry in their psychosocial structure the weight of tradition, of the values established in another historical, social and cultural time. In this traditional context, invaded by a different one, Tita begins to review her beliefs, she also wanted to be part of the society she knew only through magazines, radio soap operas that she listened to, which generated some questions: "Why can't we get married and live in the capital? – she asked. Why can't I go to the market and the shops like all women, why can't I buy vegetables, cheese, eggs, tablecloths [...] why can't I meet my in-laws and have lunch with them on Sundays? Why don't you let me have children?" [1]. Guedali, however, knew that he had to be cautious to respond to Tita's restlessness. He was more experienced, his need to seek freedom had awakened earlier, he had already lived with members of that conservative and prejudiced society, and he had already felt the most embarrassing and humiliating situations on the skin. Guedali understood that it was necessary to situate her on her condition, but he should measure the words so as not to cause an uncomfortable impact, as the following passage of the work shows us:

I forgot I was a centaur. Why can't I be like the others? Why not, I should answer; because you have a tail, you have a loin, hooves and even a little mane. But I didn't want to be brutal with her, I didn't want to shock her or disappoint her. And even her questions moved me, and even sneaked tears out of me. I also wanted to lead a normal life. I'd also like to live in Porto Alegre in a three-bedroom apartment, large living room, garage. I also wanted to have my family. And my business (since I couldn't graduate at all). And friends with whom I could play football on Sundays. But football, a quadruped? Impossible. Polo, maybe. Never football" [1].

So, one might ask: what is the limit of renegotiation of

codes and values of a society for the acceptance of the diverse? To what extent is what is different "palatable" in a society of strong adherence to tradition, such as Porto Alegre or the rural areas of Rio Grande do Sul in the middle of the 20th century? In many situations, the diverse is apparently seen as acceptable, contained by a limit that is sometimes quite narrow; that is, until the moment when the comfort zone of those involved is not affected, until the moment when it does not cause strong negative impacts on personal relationships. As Bauman states, "Modern society exists in its incessant activity of "individualization", as well as the activities of individuals consist of the daily reformulation and renegotiation of the network of interlacing called "society" [3].

Guedali's questions shed light on one of the brands of the traditional consumer society, where inclusion in the norm becomes a fundamental condition for the feeling of social belonging and self-recognition. Faced with this impossibility, the subject finds himself at a crossroads: either he cancels, erases his personal identity marks contrarily to the main objective of critical theory – the defense of autonomy, freedom of choice and human self-assertion, the right to be and to remain different – or he accepts his marginal condition of social surplus. Once the rigid frames of the estamentos were broken, the task of "self-identification" put before men and women of the beginning of the modern era was summed up in the challenge of living "according" (not falling behind others), of actively conforming to the emerging social types of class and models of conduct, of imitating, following the pattern, not going out of line or deviating from the norm, of "acculturation" [3].

In this bias, the centaur characters, aware of their impossibility of adapting to the social environment, seek a radical alternative, the suppression of difference, understood as anomaly, through surgery, through the mutilation of their identities. "What if we tried something, some kind of treatment? Science had progressed a lot in those last few years. Tita showed me in a magazine an article about a Moroccan surgeon who did wonders, turning women into men, and vice versa – and why not, she asked, centaurs into normal people?" [1].

The choice of the characters for a radical solution de-constitutive of their identities, in the pursue of the dream of social and cultural belonging, evokes the concepts of Stuart Hall [4], regarding the so-called "identity crisis". The author states that these social and cultural transformations are also changing our personal identities, shaking the idea we have about ourselves as integrated subjects. This loss of a stable "sense of self" is sometimes called displacement or decentralization of the subject. This double displacement – the decentralization of individuals both from their place in the world and from themselves – constitutes an "identity crisis" for the individual.

Through the figure of the Centaurs, Scliar brilliantly manages to problematize one of the crucial issues of postmodernity, the condition not only of the migrant Jew, but of any contemporary subject who perceives himself as unique, misadjusted by the difference in beliefs, values, social codes, ethnicities, etc. And the price that this subject pays to achieve

this insertion is the identity itself. According to Stuart Hall, this process produces the postmodern subject, conceptualized as not having a fixed, essential or permanent identity [4]. Identity becomes a "mobile celebration": formed and continually transformed in relation to the ways in which we are represented or challenged in the cultural systems that surround us.

As Guedali himself intuited, they were about to have their bodies deformed and, with them, their identities: "To me it seemed an impossible enterprise. I did not believe that we could survive such an operation" [1]. However, faced with the constraints experienced, there was no other alternative but to give in to the paradigms established by society and submit to its rules. They decided then to accept the financial resources of Mrs. Cotinha and embark for Morocco in search of a specialist doctor who could reverse the condition of Centaurs through surgical intervention. In this regard, Bauman affirms that not only is there no contradiction between dependence and liberation; there is no other way to seek liberation than to "submit to society" and follow its norms [3]. Freedom cannot be won against society. The result of the rebellion against the norms, even if the rebels have not become beasts once and for all, and therefore lost the capacity to judge their own condition, is a perpetual agony of indecision linked to a state of uncertainty about the intentions and movements of others around, which makes life hell.

The cultural universe proposed by Scliar, the challenges to which the Centaur characters were submitted and which caused in them the feeling of not belonging to the environment, emphasize their condition as fragmented subjects before a society that presents difficulty in negotiating and/or renegotiating roles that allow peaceful and respectful relationships with the different. In this way, the drastic solution sought by the centaurs denotes an oppressed and weakened subject, incapable of finding any other solution than to give up his own identity.

Through literary strategies that mix the real and the fantastic, with the insertion of mythological figures, Moacyr Scliar, in [The Centaur in the Garden] offers to the attentive reader an unlimited game of interpretations. Among them, a sharp and still contemporary critique against a society that is struggling between the new inter and multicultural paradigms, and the preservation of a tradition whose permanence presents only one way: mutilation, the violent fragmentation of the subject in multiple levels. And, in this metaphorical game, nothing better than the contrasting presence of myth in the garden of a suburban house in Porto Alegre in the 1940s.

3. The Myth in the Garden: Conversations Between Real and Fantastic

As the title itself indicates, Scliar's work has in the figure of the centaur his main character, a well-known creature belonging to a class of monsters of Greek mythology who had half of the body man, half horse. In the mythological universe, the horse had admirable virtues; therefore, this mixture also

had positive aspects [5]. In fact, several mythological narratives talk about the relationship between men and centaurs, showing a capacity for socialization. From the mythological allegories, the centaur can be defined as a metaphor of conflicts between reason and instinct, where the upper part of human body holds the ability to reflect on their actions, while its lower part represents the grotesque force of the animal, physical violence and sexual drive. The Centaur is the only one of the mythological monsters of Antiquity to whom good qualities were attributed. They were admitted in the company of men and says the legend that they were among the guests at the marriage of Spirits to Hypodamia. At the feast, Eurathion, one of the Centaurs, having been drunk with wine, tried to rape the bride; the other Centaurs followed his example, provoking a terrible conflict, in which several of them were killed. Not all Centaurs, however, were like the gross guests of spirits. Chiron received lessons from Apollo and Diana, becoming famous for his skills in hunting, medicine, music, and the art of prophecy. Thus, the Centaurs, in their mythological origin, can present very diverse characteristics, ranging from extreme brutality to sophistication and intellectualization, as was the case of Chiron, the most famous of the Centaurs, son of Cronos and Filira, and that represented the force allied to intelligence and goodness. However, it is worth noting that, with regard to the myth of the centaur, there is no certain story and the best known hypothesis is that the Thessaly mountaineers of the pelagic era were already excellent riders when the use of horseback riding was not known in the rest of Greece [6]. They were considered by their amazed neighbors as monsters, and because they liked wine, mythological legends immediately classified them in the Bacchus parade.

In view of the divergent opinions, it is appropriate here to establish some limits, however tenuous, between magical realism, marvelous realism and fantastic realism. According to Weigert, it is Jorge Luís Borges who first speaks of Fantastic Realism, defining it as a type of fiction that makes the unusual erupt in everyday life, permeating the known world with the irrational and the dreamlike [2]. As for the expression Magic Realism, this was coined by the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, being the Wonderful Real the way Alejo Capentier defines the "unusual reality of the American world", narratives in which the mythical, legendary and magical universe of indigenous civilizations are integrated into ordinary fictional actions and environments [7]. Menegusso, however, defines Magic e Fantastic as synonyms, emphasizing that it was with the characteristics described above that, in the 1960s, Magic Realism or Fantastic Realism emerged in Latin America and gained strength through writers such as Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, and Alejo Capentier [8]. An aesthetic proposal that breaks with traditional realism, merging reality and fantasy, myth and history.

According to Florence Dravet, the myth is a "narrative of uncertainties" through which the reader is confronted by two levels of reality, the factual reality and what emerges as a possibility behind the fact itself, which materializes and gains meaning only in the subjectivity of the reader [9]. It is this dual

reality that, by reflecting the facts, allows the reader to activate his sensitivity, emotion and wisdom, and transcend the singular fact, such as, for example, the birth of a centaur child, and take him to a universal dimension. It is the universality of the work that triggers these reading skills; that is what expands the communicative power of Fantastic Realism. The author says: the real as a possibility makes the human spirit become a creator, a playwright, a demiurge [9]. It makes the impossible possible. In Scliar's narrative, we are faced with this fusion of reality and fantasy, myth and, one may also say, history. It remains, then, to make a terminological choice. In the same approach as Menegusso, given the proximity of characteristics, the term Fantastic Realism is the one chosen here. The presence of the fantastic will inevitably generate states of discomfort in the reader once facing the novelty of the poetic image for which it is not possible to prepare, even when the image is supposedly known [10]. Guedali, as poetic image created by Moacyr Scliar, will always be the first in his reader's literary experience.

Alejo Carpentier, still on this subject, states that the marvelous arises from an unexpected alteration of reality, from a singular illumination that hyperbolizes unnoticed aspects from this reality, enlarging its dimensions [7]. And so it is in Scliar's work: the fantastic is carefully placed to illuminate unnoticed dimensions of reality that, for many of us, remain ignored or denied. This aspect transcends the issues related to the social and cultural displacement of the Jew in the world. It touches the anguish of contemporary man, the issue of "difference" in general, including the persecution and prejudice towards immigrants, often considered as surplus, and which Guedali and Tita personify through their various migrations in pursue of belonging. A game marked by the dichotomy between the banal and the unexpected which, instead of alienating the reader, pulls them into reality. As stated by Carpentier, "the fantastic can live harmoniously with the real", and it is precisely this harmony that gives Scliar's fiction a multifaceted dimension. The marvelous becomes part of reality and in literature the fantastic, the supernatural, the unreal, the unusual can coexist harmoniously with the real, the union of disparate elements, coming from heterogeneous cultures, configures a new historical reality that subverts the conventional patterns of western rationality [7].

Italo Calvino [11], in this regard, quoting Tzvetan Todorov [12], defines the "marvelous" as distinguished from the "fantastic" in that it presupposes the acceptance of the unbelievable and the inexplicable, as occurs in the fables of the "Thousand and One Nights". This distinction is applied to French literary terminology, in which the fantasy almost always refers to macabre elements, such as the appearance of ghosts from beyond – Italian usage more freely associates "fantastic" with "fantasy". Thus, in the marvelous, there is a type of work for which the reader is already prepared to receive, since the convention adopted by the narrative is available to them, making the supernatural perfectly acceptable, since there are fables and fairy tales, for example, in which the appearance of impossible things becomes natural. Regarding the "fantastic", Todorov states that what

distinguishes the "fantastic" narrative is precisely a perplexity before an unbelievable fact, a hesitation between a rational and realistic explanation and the observance of the supernatural [12]. However, the character of the positivist unbeliever who frequently appears in this type of narrative seen with pity and sarcasm because he must surrender to what he cannot explain, is never contested in depth. According to Todorov, the extraordinary fact narrated by the tale must always leave a possibility of rational explanation, even if it is that of hallucination or dream" [11].

In "The Centaur in the Garden", we see this perplexity before the unbelievable, especially in the family's posture with the advent of their Centaur son, whilst Guedali embodies this search for a rational explanation for his condition, eventually resigning himself to it. In Scliar's work as a fantastic literature, doubt is constant, the fictional game causes in the reader a feeling of mistrust: is Guedali really a centaur, or is it a delirium of the protagonist? The surgery that eliminated the equine parts of the characters and made them normal human beings really happened or was it a nightmare? It is a fun game with the reader's imagination, invited to problematize these aspects of the work, as codes to be deciphered, because the greater the mistrust between the natural and the extraordinary, the greater the success of the fantastic intention of the work.

Despite the fictional dimension, there is also a historical one: the marvelous or magical or fantastic realism that emerged in Latin America from the second half of the 20th century during one of its most politically and culturally troubled periods, made use of the magical, fantastic element, as a form of reaction not only against the dictatorships but against all the cultural discrepancies of that time, including between the new emerging technologies and the typically Latin American culture of superstition. It is this fusion between fantastic and real, this presence of the "stranger" as something usual and commonplace going through the text without explanation that can be identified in [The Centaur in the Garden], synthesizing in the figure of the centaur the "strange" and yet current condition of anyone who feels somehow for any reason expatriate. The false hypotheses, the arbitrariness of the author, are evident but no less "possible" in their improbability; the fact that the main character is a centaur becomes irrelevant in the face of the psychosocial drama and the conflicts he experiences. Guedali's physical anomaly, which causes him embarrassment and discomfort, does not exclude some specific virtues of equines, which he loves so much to enjoy, such as strength, agility and sexual voracity. His equine condition is, in fact, the great metaphor of the work. Thus, it is necessary to question here what are the reasons for the fantastic insertion of a centaur to represent the human conflicts of identity, their existential crises and social and/or cultural exclusion. One aspect is the hybrid condition of the centaur as a cross between two distinct species, representing the reason/instinct dichotomy.

According to the Brazilian poet and literary critic, Carlos Nejar, to Scliar what matters is that the human beats the animal and that individual differences are respected [13]. Thus, what seems to be an anomaly survives and imposes itself, the

anti-hero becomes the hero; a renewed fantastic without dependence on any tree, be it that of Borges, Cortázar, García Márquez or Rulfo, Fantasy is unmeasured in truthfulness. In this context, it is up to the reader to ask: in the narrative game created by the author, what strategies are in action? How many layers of reading can be identified? Which poetic images are in fact an access to the deepest levels of representation of the text and which of them are set as traps that divert the reader from his search for a supposed "truth of the text"? Is the centaur Guedali a kind of sphinx, ready to devour the reader who approaches quickly, inattentively and, therefore, incapable of deciphering it? In the case of "The Centaur in the Garden", we have an interpretative game that begins with the author in the interrelations he builds between various fields and knowledge that are processed and insinuated by his half-hidden voice throughout the work, which the reader will have the task of identifying. A narrative plot that is built by the game of words apparently simple in their humanity, which yet shaped a personal revolution in contemporary fiction from the inside out, setting the transfiguring imagination in the subtle, astonished or cunning aspects of human beings and of the world, looking for gaps in the human soul [13]. In other words, we are facing a complex narrative, carefully constructed, whose depth can only be accessed through the unveiling of all the intertextualities underlying the text. But, then, we must ask: where can we find a reader capable of such an achievement, when neither the author himself is fully aware of the game of influences to which he is subjected?

Scliar's fictional construction is complex and unique, once at the same time that it uses an intertextual circularity between his other works and characters, it also makes use of imagination to look at the world and human beings, all of which is mixed with a sense of reality to addresses issues of social and cultural order. Scliar makes use of a strategic mixture of components that make reading more intriguing and curious, marked by strong poetic charge, a reflective power and, at the same time, loaded with humor, facing human condition, which involves the reader in a constant whirlpool of ideas and interpretative possibilities. Initially, he introduces the image of a fantastic being, a mythological creature in the everyday life of Porto Alegre of the years of 1940s and 1950s [13]. With this choice, he certainly achieves the objective of impacting the reader and calling attention to the issue of prejudice and difference in general. The author summons his reader to walk a path rich in descriptive force, especially the scenes that involve the dilemmas experienced by Guedali, and whose detailing of information dissolves in the reader the feeling of strangeness in relation to his "diverse" condition, reinforcing its human attributes and the sympathy of the reader.

Another relevant aspect is that, throughout the work, there is a rotation of information that causes certain disorientation in the reader, requiring them to be re-situated in the textual plots created by the author. As stated by Wolfgang Iser, the text itself is the result of an intentional act by which an author refers and intervenes in an existing world, but, although the act is intentional, it aims at something that is not yet accessible to consciousness [14]. Thus, the text is composed of a world that

has yet to be identified and that is sketched out in order to incite the reader to imagine it and, finally, to interpret it. This double operation of imagining and interpreting makes the reader engage in the task of visualizing the many possible forms of the identifiable world. With similar approach, Dravet states that the writer has the ability to extirpate people from their known and predictable daily lives, to immerse them in new worlds, universes described with such mastery that reading is more like a journey to other times, other places, other realities [9]. The mythical dimension of the fantastic makes the reader remain in their reality, but looking at it from another angle, making use of their social, political and historical repertoire. The fantastic in Scliar's work is conditioned to the occurrence of "strange events", which present themselves in their own reality, occurring an integration of the reader to the world of the characters. It is the reader who inserts himself in that reality and, by doing so, has the possibility of violating the natural laws subtracted from this new universe. The fantastic has the power to interact with the reader's emotional dimension, generating an ambiguous form of perception of the narrated fact. In Scliar's work, the fantastic realism produces a mixture of the world known, the irrational and the imagination, which illuminate other discursive dimensions of the text. This is a consequence of a society immersed in a solid conservatism, which does not allow a respectful approach to difference, whatever it may be. The image of a Centaur as a representation of the diverse destabilizes the corpus of values of the reader, usually accustomed to a single way of interpreting themselves and the world. The fantastic element, in Scliar's work, operates as a shock treatment, taking away the reader from a condition of indifference to (re)read the reality around them.

The fantastic requires a playful projection of two external and unattainable probabilities of explanation [7]. This projection, in the work, occurs both on the part of the characters, as is the case of Guedali's father, who raises several hypotheses for his condition – that it was temporary, or even that the centaur was not his son – and on the part of the reader who is constantly invited to decipher the strategies of the author and the multiple layers of the text. The figure of the centaur seems to have the function of "giving sight" to the soul of any subject who, faced with a condition of "diverse", lives the drama of rejection, of not belonging. We can be indifferent, unconscious before many things in the world, but facing the literary image, carefully described, it is impossible to remain indifferent and not be thrown into a labyrinth of reflections, entangled in the plot of doubt. The process of corporal transformation that Guedali and Tita go through, provoking a reversal of their condition of birth, far from resolving the issue of strangeness, highlights more the difficulty of inter-relational negotiation, previously mentioned, characteristic of traditional societies, and that makes the acceptance and inclusion in the social and cultural environment unviable. Therefore, we can say about Moacyr Scliar what Leyla Perrone-Moysés [15] says about Roland Barthes: More than a psychological, ideological subject, whose added characteristics would give a unity, the writer is a voice, a certain way of imposing his enunciations, a certain unmistakable tone.

It is this voice that assures the "personality" of a writer and his power of imposition, of seduction.

4. Conclusions

Marked by a carefully elaborated narrative, Scliar's work makes possible to the reader several paths that transcend the biographical elements and the possible (anti)semitic issues present in the work. The mythological figure of the centaur, the contrast that its fantastic dimension generates in the narrative, far from disconnecting the reader from the world, from his life, allows him to establish a more accurate and critical view of the reality surrounding them. Guedali's questions take on a universal dimension, representing a human dilemma still far from being overcome: the "I versus the Other".

In a first moment, as readers, we are faced with the crises, conflicts, dramas and restlessness that plague Guedali. These allow us to draw a parallel with equally striking conflicts in our post-modern times and spaces, and which has as its root social and cultural inclusion/exclusion. The work refers to the issues of prejudice, intolerance towards everything or anyone who does not follow certain previously established standards, showing the strength of the tradition still dominant in our society, and which can be identified in the work through the embarrassing situations experienced by the Centaur characters. This feeling of strangeness and non-belonging grows in such a disturbing way in the characters that ends up leading them to adopt extreme measures to seek the possibility of social framing – a mutilating surgery of their body that could result in their death. The drama of Scliar's centaurs is then a great metaphor for those individuals who cannot stand the intolerance they suffer due to their peculiarities, or rather, their identities. As for many of us, what most disturbs the Centaurs is not their different appearance, but rather the desire for psychosocial belonging. Tita and Guedali incarnate the identity fragmentations and existential crises characteristic of our moment and, as it happens in the real world, conflicts arise from contrasts in the social and cultural context. That is, when the characters become aware that their condition of "different" makes impossible a natural relationship of conviviality in public places in society; a game of forces that highlights the confrontation between the postmodern and the traditional. The mutilation of their bodies can be seen as an acute criticism of society that resists to new paradigms, preserving traditions and submitting, thus, the subjects to a violent fragmentation at the social, cultural and/or psychological level. Like the centaurs in Scliar's narrative, we, as subjects in crisis, often end up giving in to previously established codes, giving up our "right to be and remain different" [3], which convenes a retaking of past identities. As is evident throughout the work, cultural and national identity are one of the issues that subliminally permeate the fantastic in the book – the Centaur in his condition as an expatriate Jew is not only different, he has a different origin and lives in Porto Alegre in the 1940s and 50s in a group closed in its difference in a different culture.

Therefore, Moacyr Scliar's fiction, far from being a simple reading, of quick answers, reveals itself as a chessboard of a thousand pieces, assembled for attentive players; and one of the author's main moves is the insertion of the fantastic. Through literary strategies, the use of mythological figures, symbols, the text is built on the intertextual plot, revealing the interpretative game of the author himself in relation to the world – another aspect that highlights the brilliance of Scliar's fiction. In front of the reader, then, a labyrinth of interpretative possibilities. Among them, concepts of wonderful realism and fantastic realism circulate with ease. As already mentioned, in the marvelous realism, the reader is already prepared to receive the poetic image, as is the case of the fable or fairy tale, for which the reader already has enough cultural subsidies, and within the context agreed, will not be surprised or question the unrealistic. the fantastic realism, on the other hand, has doubt and uncertainty always present; the fantastic elements enhance the game of interpretations, illuminate a tangle of readings that reinforces the doubt in the reader. In this subtle game, the reader is invited to deconstruct his own reading and re-signify the facts presented earlier in the text, a strategy whose harmonious mixture of wonderful and fantastic turns the text into a palette of infinite shades of interpretation, demanding from the reader an excavatory work in search of textual traces. Here, to enter the centaur gardens, it is necessary for the reader to become an archaeologist. It is this journey, these (re)readings of the world that Moacyr Scliar's fantastic realism offers us. As well defined by Coelho, Moacyr Scliar is a writer seduced by the lack of definition of boundaries between concrete and imagined reality intuited or predicted, but which escapes the objective knowledge of men; one of those writers who have stood out as highly active in the process of expansion and maturation of contemporary Brazilian literature [16]. About the nature of his writing, he is considered a magical realist, a creator of atmospheres, a tamer of the fantastic, and his favorite technique is the ultra-short tale, written with simplicity and clarity, in which the mystery is never clarified.

References

- [1] Scliar, Moacyr. "O Centauro no jardim" ["The centaur in the garden"]. São Paulo: Companhia das letras, 2011.
- [2] Weigert, Beatriz. "O fantástico e a narrativa no Brasil." ["The Fantastic and the narrative in Brazil"]. *Cenários Journal* volume 1 (5), 2012. <http://seer.uniritter.edu.br/index.php/cenarios/article/view/732>. Accessed June 5, 2019.
- [3] Bauman, Zygmunt. "Modernidade líquida". [Liquid modernity]. Translated by Plínio Dentzien. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2001.
- [4] Hall, Stuart. A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade. [Questions of cultural identity]. 11 ed. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A PUBLISHING, 2011.
- [5] Bulfinch, Thomas. "O livro de Ouro da Mitologia: Histórias de Deuses e Heróis" [The Age of Fable]. Translated by David Jardim. – 2 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Harper Collins Brasil 2016.
- [6] Ménard, René. "Mitologia greco-romana III [Greek-Roman Mythology III]. São Paulo: Opus, 1991.
- [7] Chiampi, Irlemar. O Realismo Maravilhoso: Forma e Ideologia no Romance Hispano-americano. [The Marvelous Realism: Form and Ideology in Spanish American Romance]. São Paulo: Perspectiva. (Debates Collection), 1980.
- [8] Menegusso, Gustavo. 2010. Da Literatura para o Jornalismo e do Jornalismo para a Literatura: Encontros (Im)possíveis. [From Literature to Journalism and from Journalism to Literature: (Im)possible Encounters]. Monography. Final Course Paper for Journalism Course. Federal University of Santa Maria. <http://decom.cesnors.ufsm.br/tcc/files/2010/10/gustavom.pdf>. Accessed June 5, 2019.
- [9] Dravet, Florence Marie. 2013. "Por um Jornalismo Latino-Americano Realista, Literário e Mágico: Uma Leitura das Crônicas de Gabriel García Marquez." ["For a Realistic, Literary and Magic Latin American Journalism"]. *Logos: Comunicação e Universidade* 10 (1). <http://www.epublicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/logos/article/view/7710>. Accessed June 5, 2019.
- [10] Bachelard, Gaston. 2003. "A poética do Espaço". [The Poetics of Space]. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003.
- [11] Calvino, Italo. "Contos Fantásticos do Século XIX: O Fantástico Visionário e o Fantástico Cotidiano". [Fantastic Short Stories from the 19th Century: The Visionary Fantastic and the Daily Fantastic]. Various translators. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004.
- [12] Todorov, Tzvetan. "Introdução à Literatura Fantástica". [The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre]. São Paulo: Editora Moraes, 1970.
- [13] Nejar, Carlos. "História da literatura brasileira: da carta de Caminha aos contemporâneos" [History of Brazilian Literature: from Caminha's letter to the contemporary]. São Paulo: Leya, 2011.
- [14] Iser, Wolfgang. O jogo do texto. In: Jauss, Hans Robert et al. "A Literatura e o Leitor: Textos de Estética da Recepção". [The Literature and the Reader: Texts of Reception Theory]. Selected, coordinated and translated by Luiz Costa Lima. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 105–118, 1979.
- [15] Perrone-moisés, Leyla. "Texto, Crítica, Escritura". [Text, Criticism, Ecrittura]. 3ª ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, Reading and Criticism Collection, 2005.
- [16] Coelho, Nelly Novaes. Dicionário crítico da literatura infantil e juvenil brasileira. 5 ed. rev. Atual. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 2006.