

“O pai provisório”

Fatherhood and New Masculinities in Cristovão Tezza's *O filho eterno*

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O pai exerce um papel fundamental na cultura brasileira em termos reais e simbólicos. Sua posição na família atinge a identidade de todos os seus membros e sua influência estende-se muito além dos limites da casa, moldando as hierarquias de poder e as dinâmicas de gênero, classe e raça. Dado o seu poder na cultura, talvez sejam inevitáveis as muitas e várias ansiedades paternas expressas na produção literária. Durante o período da ditadura militar, por exemplo, a figura do pai na produção literária não pôde deixar de ser identificada com o governo autoritário e paternal. Metaforicamente, o patriarca virou a autoridade contra a qual muitos escritores desenvolveram projetos de resistência e revolução e o progresso social tem sido caracterizado como uma derrota do pai e seus antigos valores. O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar a figura do pai e a masculinidade heterossexual no romance contemporâneo *O filho eterno* de Cristovão Tezza. De forma inusitada, este romance oferece um novo olhar sobre a masculinidade. Por um lado, o romance revela como o discurso patriarcal continua presente na cultura, mas por outro imagina e proporciona à masculinidade e ao pai novas formas de ser que não sejam autoritárias.

Social and political upheavals during the past thirty years have dramatically changed the domestic landscape of the Brazilian family and even led some social critics to call for the need to "pensar sobre relações filiais após a implosão da família" (Carpinejar 1). Others, however, are not quite ready to speak in terms of post-family identities, arguing that the effect of societal changes has not been so radical as

to eliminate the family as a social unit nor even to diminish its importance. Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, the current president of the Women's Leadership Center in Brazil and former president of the National Council on Women's Rights, notes, "As famílias não estão acabando: elas estão se reinventando [em] uma nova configuração" (3). Family structures and the relationships between parents and children continue to exist as profound markers of identity, yet the dynamics of new family configurations are unquestionably evolving in ways that challenge the traditional gender roles and sexual identities associated with patriarchal modes of behavior while simultaneously reinvesting those roles and identities with new forms of being and expression.

In these new family configurations, the changing roles of fathers and definitions of masculinity demonstrate in particular how patriarchal gender roles are evolving. The historical configuration of patriarchy in Brazil narrowly defined the gendered and sexual identities of both men and women based on strict hierarchies within the home that stemmed from authority centered in the father.¹ Contemporary Brazilian literature dealing with representations of the family has not only revealed the limits of patriarchal control but has itself worked to broaden societal conceptions of gender and sexual identities, especially regarding masculinity and male roles in and out of the home. Yet when speaking of how culture defines gender, David Glover and Cora Kaplan offer a word of caution: "'Gender' is now one of the busiest, most restless terms in the English language, a word that crops up everywhere, yet whose uses seem to be forever changing, always on the move, producing new and often surprising inflections of meaning" (1). They continue, stating, "gender is a much contested concept, as slippery as it is indispensable, but a site of unease rather than of agreement" (2). Furthermore, they argue that "gender is fragile, provisional, unstable,

¹ The evidence and examples of this point are numerous. Perhaps the two most classic treatises on the specific ways that patriarchy structured gender roles in the colonial family are Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's *Raízes do Brasil*. For an excellent recent review of Holanda's theory of the family and the state, see Pedro Meira Monteiro's "Uma tragédia familiar," in Sérgio Buarque de Holanda: *Perspectivas* (Campinas, SP: Editora da UNICAMP; Rio de Janeiro, RJ: EdUERJ, 2008), 349-61. Likewise, for an excellent collection of recent essays on the continued influence of Freyre, see Joshua Lund and Malcolm McNee, eds., *Gilberto Freyre e os estudos latino-americanos* (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Universidad de Pittsburgh, 2006).

the sum total of its appearances rather than the expression of a unifying core. Masculinity or femininity come in many transient guises, all of them in some measure unfinished or incomplete" (18).

In terms of contemporary Brazilian literary production that addresses masculine identities and roles, the "slippery" and "provisional" quality of these identities and roles could not be more apparent. More than ever before, the home is a "site of unease," a place of contested identities, and given the father's traditional authority and narrowly defined gendered identity within the home, it is no wonder that contemporary literature is returning home to challenge what Glover and Kaplan call "the expression of a unifying core"—the myth of masculinity, embodied in the patriarchal father.²

In dismantling cultural stereotypes regarding men and their roles as fathers, recent literary production in Brazil reveals that Brazilian stereotypes of masculinity are far more fragile and hollow than might be thought given the deeply rooted mores and expectations for men in Brazilian culture. Or, to state it in other terms, in spite of the restrictive roles traditionally given to men, Brazilian masculinity is far more fluid than might be expected. However, concerning some recent North American narratives that "'retool' existing masculinity, making it more 'sensitive and nurturing' than that which exists around them" (71), Glover and Kaplan do wonder, "What is the future of femininity and of humans, if men are the new women?" (72). Like their North

² Given recent social changes, it is perhaps not surprising to note the variety and number of contemporary novels that focus on families and the home as a site of both transgression and innovation for not only fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, but also men and women moving outside of their family and culturally assigned roles.

In a recent article, entitled "Escritores brasileiros estão voltando para casa," Fabricio Carpinejar states, "Os escritores brasileiros contemporâneos estão voltando para casa. Cintia Moscovich desenha a simbiose entre filha e a tutela materna em *Por que sou gorda, mamãe?* (2006), Luiz Ruffato narra em *O inferno provisório* a cartografia do lar operário no interior de Minas, Michel Laub flagra o fantasma da separação dos pais em *Segundo tempo* (2006) e Milton Hatoum refaz a parábola no Rio Negro de Cairn e e Abel em *Dois irmãos* (2000). Não é casualidade, há uma latência em entender o que seremos a partir das variâncias filiais" (2).

Likewise, in a similarly entitled academic essay, "A volta da casa na literatura brasileira contemporânea," Denilson Lopes writes about the increased attention given to the home and its role in the formation of identity in works like Adriana Lisboa's novel *Sinfonia em branco* (2001).

American counterparts,³ Brazilian men and fathers are adapting to new economic and social realities as the structures of families realign and become less hierarchical and more flexible. Indeed, as many sociologists have amply demonstrated, fathers are increasingly taking on more responsibilities at home or sharing home and child-care responsibilities with their partners just as mothers are more likely to work outside the home and in many cases have better-paying jobs.⁴ As Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira noted in 2009 interview: "A figura do homem provedor acabou. Se você chegar para um menino de 15 anos e falar 'provedor', ele vai pensar que é internet" (3). Yet, while some contemporary Brazilian narratives may in fact work to "retool existing masculinity, making it more sensitive and nurturing," recent examples from Brazilian fiction suggest that patriarchy's rigid hierarchies and narrowly defined roles continue to resist change (despite portrayals to the contrary in popular news media),⁵

³ See, for example, the recent online commentary published in the New York Times by David Brooks and Gail Collins, "Why Househusbands Are the Future," 17 February 2010. Other interesting entries from this series include the following, "The Other Home Equity Crisis," by Judith Warner (24 July 2008), "Glass Slippers? Old Hat," also by Judith Warner (10 March 2007), "Women Now a Majority in American Workplaces," by Catherine Rampell (5 February 2010), and a NYT editorial, "For Women, Redefining Marriage Material" (21 February 2010). Similar news items and opinion pieces are no less frequent in Brazil as the following assortment demonstrates: "Mulheres e jovens conquistam mais empregos em SP — O Estado de São Paulo (24 February 2010), "Com mercado aquecido, mulheres trabalham menos tempo em casa," by Verena Fornetti, *Folha de São Paulo* (18 February 2010), and "Mulheres têm maior participação no mercado de trabalho" *Jornal do Brasil* (28 January 2010). In fact a special article in the *Jornal do Brasil* even highlights as a notable development women who are choosing to stay home and be homemakers: "Dona de casa: a missão/Ao contrário da maioria, algumas mulheres escolhem cuidar da casa e da família," by Maria Vianna (29 October 2005).

⁴ Recent studies that corroborate this phenomenon throughout the Americas include the volume *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), and Jeremy A. Smith, *The Daddy Shift: How Stay-at-Home Dads, Breadwinning Moms, and Shared Parenting Are Transforming the American Family* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2009). See also *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*, ed. Matthew C. Gutmann (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003); Jessica Fischer, *Stay at Home Fathers: The New Gender Benders* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2012); Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2003).

⁵ Among the numerous news media articles addressing this topic, see "O homem frágil" *O Globo*, 15/04/2001; see also, "A sensualidade masculina," *Jornal do Brasil*, 06/05/2001. A recent dissertation on the topic is Edyr Batista de Oliveira Junior, "Masculinidades em cena: o modo de ser e de pensar o metrosssexual a partir das telenovelas," (2010) granted by the Universidade Federal do Pará.

insidiously reemerging at unexpected moments.⁶ At the same time, contemporary narratives work to broaden and bend heterosexual masculinity in new and unexpected ways, suggesting that in spite of Brazil's patriarchal cultural heritage, masculine identities—even the time-honored figure of the father—are far more unstable and provisional than stereotypes indicate.

An important contribution to contemporary Brazilian literature, a work that reveals the deep extent to which patriarchal stereotypes continue to condition masculine identities, but a work that nonetheless consciously resists those stereotypes, is Cristovao Tezza's *O filho eterno*, published in 2007. Tezza was born in Santa Catarina in 1952 but has lived most of his life in Curitiba.

Until recently, Tezza worked as a professor of Portuguese language at the Federal University of Parana (UFPR), and though he is the author of more than twelve novels and the recipient of various literary awards, including the Brazilian Academy of Letters best book award in 2004 for *O fotógrafo*, public acknowledgment of his work has been slow coming, due to the fact, according to some critics, that he is an author "fora do eixo," that is, one not part of the main literary establishment.⁷ Nevertheless, his novel *O filho eterno* has received significant recognition and was awarded the Jabuti award for best novel of the year (2008), the São Paulo award for literature (2008), and the Zaffari & Bourbon prize (2007/2008), among other notable honors.⁸

O filho eterno is a remarkable novel about a father (who remains nameless) whose first child, Felipe, is born with Down Syndrome. This fact deeply challenges the father's gendered sense of identity—that is, his masculinity—as well as his role as

⁶ There exists a variety of examples from recent Brazilian fiction that demonstrate the continued presence of patriarchal hierarchies and violence, including such disparate works as Paulo Lins' *Cidade de Deus* (1997), Chico Buarque's acclaimed novel *Leite derramado* (2009), and Patricia Meio's *O matador* (1999). Another interesting example is the collection of short stories organized by Luiz Ruffato entitled *25 mulheres que estão fazendo a nova literatura brasileira* (2004).

⁷ See Rosane Pavam, "O fio da razão," *Carta Capital* (26 November 2008): 52-53.

⁸ For a complete list of Tezza's literary awards, see the author's webpage: http://www.cristovaoorza.com.br/p_obras.htm

a father. The narrative begins with the child's birth and then follows the often turbulent emotional and psychological relationship between the father and his son. The novel has received significant national media coverage for drawing attention to Down Syndrome, which is also known as Trisomy 21, in a country where persons with Down Syndrome continue to experience widespread public stigma, and where there exists a significant shortage of public understanding regarding the condition. In fact, until very recently, that is through at least the 1980s, Down Syndrome was more commonly known in Brazil as "mongoloidismo," a term common in English in the early twentieth century but which has since been discarded. The publication of *O filho eterno* has unquestionably raised awareness in the Brazilian media about Down Syndrome, shedding much-needed light on members of the population who are regularly marginalized because of their difference.

Another frequently commented aspect of the novel is the biographical fact that Cristovao Tezza, who has been married to his wife Beth for over thirty years, is himself the father of a son named Felipe who has Down Syndrome. Likewise, he is the father of a second child, a daughter named Ana, just like the second child in the novel, who is also named Ana. The overlap between biography and fiction does not end there, as Cadão Volpato notes: 'Ele perdeu o pai ainda na infância [. . .]. Viveu em comunidade ainda adolescente, no interior do Paraná, como parte de um grupo de teatro. Esteve na Marinha Mercante, movido pelo sonho aventuresco de escritor nos moldes de um Joseph Conrad. Foi para a Europa, apenas com a passagem de ida, e morou em Coimbra no ano (1975) [sic]⁹ da Revolução dos Cravos. Foi relojoeiro.' (19)

These biographical details are all at one point or another revealed to characterize the father in the narrative as well and have led critics to describe the novel variously as a work that is part autobiography, part memoir, part essay and part fiction. As might be expected, the conflation of author, narrator, and character (the novel's narrator, the father, is also the novel's protagonist), has led some critics to turn

⁹ The correct year is 1974.

to biography to explain the novel, calling it "brutalmente biográfico" (Netto 1). Tezza himself has, to a degree, encouraged this type of reading by making statements like the following, given in an interview to Luciana Lana Ramos: 'Eu nao queria morrer sem de algum modo escrever sobre o fato mais impactante da minha vida" (36). Given the unsettling (initial) posture of the novel's protagonist towards his son, statements made by the author such as this might lead some to reduce the novel, its narrative expression as well as its characters, to the personal idiosyncrasies of Tezza himself. Yet elsewhere Tezza has cautioned against too closely conflating author and narrator, stating, "Eu só comecei a escrever quando nao tinha mais o problema que o livro apresenta" (Ramos 36). In another interview he states, "Memória, invenção e fatos reais transfiguraram na composic;ao do livro. O aspecto biografico do escritor, insisto, nao tem relevância—é o que é, uma realidade biográfica, e só isso, vivendo sua vida como todo mundo" (Netto 1).

Indeed, as will be explained later in detail, in several crucial ways the novel has a life of its own that works independently from Tezzas own biography, and on its own terms the novel stands as a moving reflection not of Tezza but more generally of fatherhood in Brazilian culture today.

Yet there is another essential contextual element that makes the novel particularly relevant to a study of fatherhood and culture in Brazil. At the novels opening, as the facts surrounding Felipe's birth are related, the narrator pauses to note the date: "Relembrou a data: madrugada do dia 3 de novembro de 1980" (21). Almost on the same page the narrator observes: "O Brasil esta nos últimos minutos de uma ditadura" (20). By explicitly identifying the narratives historical context with the end of the dictatorship, the novel implicates not only Tezzas own biography but also a broader social and cultural context as well. The ensuing drama of the novel's protagonist, a father whose fragile sense of identity rests on the insecurity of his professional failures as a writer and personal failures as both husband and father, and who is at times given to outbursts of violence and who fixates on authority and control, cannot but help be read through the shadow of the dictatorship. Or as the

narrator himself ponders towards the novel's end: "O Brasil vivia o pior momento do regime militar, e a sombra da ditadura tocava todas as coisas" (120). The dictatorship's paternalistic specter thus emerges in the novel's opening pages, a moment of birth and new beginnings. This has been duly noted by the Portuguese writer and critic Jorge Marmelo: "Sendo um exercício memorialista e de balanço existencial, *O filho eterno* tem também uma componente biográfica política e histórica. O personagem pai, como o autor, vive o Período pós-revolucionário português de 1975/76 e o avanço da democracia no Brasil, analisando amargamente o curso da história.

No Portugal de Abril percebe uma "gosma de Idade Média" e, no Brasil, um país que teima, década a década, em não sair do lugar—"quando se move, é para trás"—comandado por uma "elite tosca, com frequência grotesca, de uma ignorância assustadora, renitentemente corrupta e corruptora e instalada capilarmente em todos os mecanismos de poder do país, que por sua vez se fundem na outra ponta com a bandidagem em estado puro." (41)

Such explicit political commentary, while admittedly infrequent in the novel, nevertheless informs the political and cultural backdrop that has a priori conditioned the novel's protagonist, a man who is unsure of his own position in society and who is himself still a character in formation. As Ney Reis argues, the novel begins by tracing the character of a man, "quando ainda é um homem despreparado para ser um homem" (1). In this sense the character's potential in 1980 when the novel begins parallels the political and social potential about to take effect as the historical dictatorship was transitioning from authoritarian to democratic power.

And it should also not be forgotten that this historical context imbues not only the father with cultural significance but also Felipe, the child. It is not a coincidence that the narrator frequently describes Felipe's separation and difference with the word "alienação" (129), a word invested with political significance from the 1960s. The traditional patriarchal family, with its clearly defined roles, has long been a model for the nation, and during the military dictatorship as well as under the Vargas regime, the government appropriated the discourse of family values to justify and validate its

actions. Dissidents during this period, were cast as rebellious children in need of a strong guiding hand. By using this term to describe Felipe's marginalized position in both his own family and Brazilian society generally, the narrator simultaneously evokes the authoritarian systems of control that produced widespread resistance during the military dictatorship. In this context, however, the author reinscribes those tensions within the space of the home and in the family relationship between father and son, challenging the reader to reconsider this child, with all of his differences and so-called deficiencies, as not merely the idiosyncratic offspring of this particular fictional family but the product of the culture itself. In his own way, that is, by means of his difference, Felipe disrupts the established family system, causing the father to reflect seriously on the family system and his role in that system. Or as Andre Nigri writes, "Ao ativar esse painel memorialístico, no qual se descortina também o Brasil do fim do período militar até nossos dias, o pai passa a reconhecer o filho como um outro e a reconhecer a si mesmo" (1). The father's evolution during the novel thus resonates on a cultural level as he reconsiders the nature of family relations, the ways in which the family serves as a model for the nation, and the position of fathers and sons, parents and children, in Brazilian society.

Narrating fatherhood and masculinity *O filho eterno* evokes a series of literary forbears of Brazilian masters whose works are conditioned by the crucible of profound personal, political, and cultural forces: "[o livro manifesta] a crueldade auto-irônica de Machado de Assis e dos personagens de tensa vida emocional de Graciliano Ramos" (Pavam 52).¹⁰ Another point of reference for *O filho eterno* can also be identified in the work of Clarice Lispector because of the narrative's abiding concern with questions of belonging and displacement and the cultural constructions of

¹⁰ Another literary reference according to Luiz Claudio de Oliveira is Carlos Drummond de Andrade who experienced a displacement similar to the character Felipe in his poem, "Vai, Carlos, vai ser gaúcho na vida." See Luiz Claudio de Oliveira, "O pai, o tímido, o futebol e o tempo no Filho eterno de Cristovão Tezza." *Gazeta do Povo/Blog SOBRETUDO*, 27 de agosto de 2007. Additionally, beyond these Brazilian references, several reviewers have drawn connections between *O filho eterno* and two non-Brazilian texts, Kenzaburo Oe's *A Personal Matter* (In Portuguese, *Uma questão pessoal*) and Giuseppe Pontiggia's *Born Twice* (In Portuguese, *Nascer duas vezes*), which are both novels about the relationship between fathers and children who are not considered to be normal.

normalcy. Much like the protagonist Macabéa from *A hora da estrela*, who is described as both "desajeitada" and as "uma personagem provisória," the narrator of *O filho eterno* expresses deep-seated anxieties about not only his child as an abnormal and anomalous figure but also himself as "um homem distraído [...] alguém provisório" (9). These anxieties belie rigid cultural and patriarchal stereotypes regarding heterosexual men and fathers as dominant and authoritative identities, yet the unusual way in which the narrator addresses these anxieties deserves further attention here.

While the great majority of critical attention given to *O filho eterno* has focused on a public discussion of Down Syndrome and other genetic disorders, the novel also offers significant insights into the construction of masculinity and cultural definitions of fatherhood. In this respect, the novel's narrator is very important. The novel presents a first-person voice through which the narrator recounts his life from the birth of his son with the insights and comprehension of retrospection. For most of the novel, the narrator speaks in hindsight, from the future, and accordingly his narration has a sense of omniscience, given that as he looks back upon his life he is able to acknowledge his faults and weaknesses. The novel has "uma estrutura confessional" (Sérgio Silva 15), yet there is a curious distancing between the narrator and his earlier life, for while the narration is framed in the first-person, the narrator speaks of his earlier self in the third-person as though he were a different person. Leandro Oliveira argues that it is precisely this distancing between the narrator and his former self that endows the text with a certain frank honesty: "o afastamento do narrador [...] permite uma confissão tão franca" (1).

Yet this narrative complexity has also caused some confusion among both critics and readers. For example, in a survey of twenty-five reviews published within two years of the novel's release, twenty-three identify the novel as a third-person narrative, one interestingly characterizes the novel as having a second-person

quality,¹¹ and only one identifies it as a first-person narrative. Marisa Lajolo's initial assessment is typical: "É uma história em terceira pessoa" (1). But her analysis is more nuanced than most and deserves citing here: "o pai de Felipe nao tem nome e jamais usa a primeira pessoa. Narração sem eu. Trata-se de uma voz narrativa implacável: contando a história como sendo a história vivida por alguém—um ele e nao um eu—o narrador manifesta no entanto uma intimidade em relação aos pensamentos mais inconfessados da personagem" (2). Despite noting the narrators complex position relative to the story, Lajolo nevertheless concludes that the novel is composed as a third-person narrative.

In contrast to the majority of reviews written of the novel, Silviano Santiago submits the following analysis: "Habilmente escrito na primeira pessoa, *O filho eterno* se vale dos recursos retóricos dos relatos autobiográficos.

Quem narra a desdita paterna é um escritor frustrado, que sempre se sentiu muito aquém do potencial criativo: 'Penso que sou escritor, mas ainda não escrevi nada'" (1). In fact, far from being mere rhetorical flurry, the manner in which the novel draws upon the "rhetorical artifices of autobiographical accounts" relates directly to the underlying cultural issue at stake regarding how fatherhood and masculinity are defined and expressed. The narrative is not a simple first-person narrative firmly centered in a fixed patriarchal, heterosexual identity (The mere fact of the misreading by so many journalists testifies to that.) The narrator in fact feels ill at ease with how society would cast him, and his ("non-genetic") identity is instead in flux, transforming, and evolving—a quality that is facilitated by the narrators temporal posture.

As Lajolo notes, it is as though there are two "I"s at work in the text, one

¹¹ See Marisa Lajolo, "Urn autor, um narrador e nenhum herói," Revista Linha Mestra No. 5: December 2007: "Mas é uma história em terceira pessoa que em certos momentos trata o ele como tu, ou seja, o protagonista pai-do-Felipe desliza para uma segunda pessoa, interlocutora explícita, sendo nesta condição interpelado à queima roupa pelo narrador. Assim por exemplo: 'O problema é justamente o contrário: não há explicação alguma. Você está aqui por uma soma errática de acasos e de escolhas, Deus nao é minimamente uma variável a considerar, nada se dirige necessariamente a coisa alguma, você vive soterrado pelo instante presente, e a presença do Tempo—essa voracidade absurda—é irredimível, como queria o poeta. Vire-se. É a sua vez de jogar. Há um silêncio completo a sua volta'" (93).

existing in the present (the narrator and father of Felipe) and one in the past (the narrators earlier self), but it is the narrator in the present who reveals that a radical change has occurred and is occurring (is afoot). As he relates his experiences as a new father, these experiences are filtered through the understanding he has gained over time, and it becomes apparent that he is no longer the man or father he once was. To put it in another way, it is as though the narrative voice speaks through itself, through the overlap of old and new, and in this way the narration constitutes an interior journey by which the narrator strips away or at least interrogates the layers of socially and culturally bestowed identity and in so doing transforms himself.

Thus the novels form and preoccupation with narration should be read as a conscious effort to reconsider how patriarchal masculinity in Brazil shapes and endows particular modes of self-perception but also how the structures of patriarchy are themselves evolving. As Glover and Kaplan state, "Fiction can serve as a laboratory for the exploration of gendered modes of consciousness, including those we might imagine to be among its terminal forms" (24). *O filho eterno* works precisely in this way. While situating itself in a firmly patriarchal tradition—what could be more traditional than the novel's opening scene in which the family gathers together to congratulate the new father as he welcomes his firstborn son into the world and assumes his place of authority in the family and societal hierarchy—the novel works to undermine the authority of the straw man of the "patriarchal father" by introducing a child who seemingly in every way deviates from the fathers expectations and desires. And as the narrator begins to come to terms with the shock of his son's birth, he is forced to re-imagine and, to a degree, discard the cultural basis for his former sense of self. As the narrator states at the novel's opening, "Ele já começa a desconfiar dessas totalidades retóricas, mas falta-lhe a coragem de romper com elas—de fato, nunca se livrou completamente desse imaginário" (13). Rather than merely disregard patriarchy and the myth of a "unifying core" underlying patriarchal identities, the novel both acknowledges their permanence in Brazilian culture ("nunca se livrou completamente desse imaginário") while simultaneously working to demystify and

recast what patriarchal masculinity might signify. Hence, the narrative is motivated by the narrators desire to reinterpret his own life and name the person he is in the process of becoming: "Eu preciso começar, de uma vez por todas, ele diz a ele mesmo, e só escrevendo saberá quem é" (16). "Escrever é dar nome as coisas. Ele não pode dizer: dar nome as coisas tais como elas são—porque as coisas não são nada até que digamos o que elas são" (128).

The novel thus foregrounds the importance of language and narrative in the process of constructing and making sense of the world and ourselves.

Throughout the text, the novel's preoccupation with words and language reveals both the brutal and beautiful ways in which language divides and binds society. For example, Jerônimo Teixeira notes that we are reminded frequently in the text of how in the 1980s society defined persons with Down Syndrome as mongoloids and the syndrome was referred to as mongoloidism: "Nos anos 80, quando Felipe nasceu, os portadores da síndrome de Down ainda eram chamados de 'mongoloides'" (1). This usage also implicates the patriarchal structure of society in some important ways. Patriarchal cultures modeled on the family narrowly define what is normal and acceptable and are quick to marginalize individuals who in any way deviate from the family image. In the case of Felipe in *O filho eterno* and other persons with Down Syndrome, it is revealing that they are marginalized by the term "mongoloid" that derives not only from connotations of barbarism, uncivility, and a lack of intelligence, but it also suggests an ethnic and physical difference as well.

In this sense it is shocking but perhaps not entirely unexpected that Felipe is initially viewed by his father as a monster with a grotesque body.¹²

In *O filho eterno*, the narrator of the story is initially distressed by the idea that his son is not normal. He states: 'Recusar: ele não olha para a cama, não olha para o filho, não olha para a mãe, não olha para os parentes, nem para os médicos—sente uma vergonha medonha de seu filho e prevê a vertigem do inferno em cada minuto

¹² Glover and Kaplan ask us to consider the ways in which masculinity is defined by the body, noting, for example, "the opposition between the classical and the grotesque body" as theorized by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (94).

subsequente de sua vida. Ninguém esta preparado para um primeiro filho, ele tenta pensar, defensivo, ainda mais um filho assim, algo que ele simplesmente nao consegue transformar em filho. (32)

Unable to even look at his son, the father instead obsesses over the abstraction, that is, the culturally determined image, his child represents: “Crianças cretinas—no sentido técnico do termo—crianças que jamais chegarão à metade do quociente de inteligência de alguém normal; que não terão praticamente autonomia nenhuma; que serão incapazes de abstração, esse milagre que nos define” (34). “E são crianças feias, baixinhas, próximas do nanismo” (34). His repulsion and horror is such that he even finds hope in a scientific study indicating that children with Down Syndrome typically have short lifespans: “E há mais, entusiasmou-se: quase todas têm problemas graves de coração, malformações de origem que lhes dão uma expectativa de vida muito curta” (35). “Jamais partilhou com a mulher a revelação libertadora. Numa das fantasias recorrentes, abraça-a. e consola-a da morte trágica do filho, depois de uma febre fulminante” (39). The narrators unspoken desire for his son to die stems from a disturbed masculinity that yearns for fatherhood while simultaneously rejecting the very child whose existence endows that fatherhood. The narrator's fantasy of comforting his grief-stricken wife after the death of their son is one that reaffirms his role as protector while relieving him of having to actually protect, or in other words accept, his child, whom he views as abnormal and malformed.

The fathers fixation on normalcy stems from his insecurity at being a father, coupled with his feelings of failure as both a husband and a man.

His initial desire—shocking to the reader—that his child die is born from the belief however misguided that this will enable him to regain his sense of selfhood. He views his son not as a son, but rather a stranger, an alien body because his relationship to it destabilizes his place in society. He writes, for example, that his child is, “Um ser ainda estranho, a quem nós, os pais, demos a dádiva de uma presença, e mais nada. A idéia de uma criança: é isso que me falta, o pai talvez dissesse, se pudesse formular com mais clareza o que sentia. Esta criança não me dá nenhum futuro, ele se viu

dizendo” (65). In this instance, the specular image of father and son shocks the narrator because the anxiety he feels about his sons abnormality, his physical and mental deficiencies, is in reality an anxiety about his own inadequacies as a heterosexual man struggling to fulfill the expectations associated with the traditional role of the father—as provider and successful professional, as well as patriarchal authority—within the family system.

Felipe's birth thus foregrounds the father's self-centered insecurities, especially regarding his identity as a masculine subject. These insecurities originate well before Felipe's birth and are conditioned by specific cultural stereotypes about heterosexual men and fathers in Brazilian culture. For example, at the beginning of the novel, he feels insecure about the fact that he is unable to support his family. When asked by the hospital file clerks about his profession, he has to answer: "quem tem profissão é a minha mulher" (11). And he is forced to reflect about his wife: "A mulher que, em todos os sentidos, o sustentava já havia quatro anos" (9). This leads him to admit: "o fato de que jamais conseguiu viver do seu trabalho" (11). Because of his inability to provide for his family, he feels that he has failed, that he has not lived up to the social expectations for a man and husband to be successful professionally.

Consequently, he feels marginalized by the weight of society's expectations for patriarchs: "Ele vive à margem" (10). Of course, as a struggling writer, he is in fact occupying the peripheral position society routinely assigns to others: "Ele continua com dificuldade para falar do filho em público" (118).

Even towards the end of the narrative, many years later when Felipe is in his twenties, friends and colleagues from work will not know about Felipe: "passarão anos sem saber que ele tem um filho com síndrome de Down, o nome que agora, em definitivo, sinal do tempos politicamente corretos, desbancara o famigerado 'mongolismo'" (152). This lack of public acknowledgment is motivated, again, by the father's sense of shame and insecurity. And these feelings are based as much on his son's identity as they are on his own conception of masculinity. At moments, for example, he wallows in self-pity as he imagines his childhood schoolmates accusing

him: "Você é tao inteligente, e não conseguiu nem fazer um filho direito. Ele ouve uma risada, que ainda faz eco" (71). But it is essential to note the origin of these feelings—he is not literally accused by any specific individual but instead feels the weight of society accusing him: "A vergonha. A vergonha—ele dirá depois—é uma das mais poderosas máquinas de enquadramento social que existem" (44). The narrator later explains, "o filho sera sempre o fio de prumo de nossa competência, a medida implacável da qualidade dos pais. Sim, é claro, no caso dele há o álbi genético—coitado, ele nao tem culpa—mas é uma desculpa insuficiente, parece; o filho o diminui" (152). Felipe's existence thus threatens the narrator's sense of masculinity—in biological terms (since he asks himself how can a physically normal man produce such a deficient being) as well as cultural terms (Felipe's birth unsettles his role as father, even producing within him decidedly non-paternal feelings). This in turn causes the father to view Felipe not as a son but rather a setback—"Ainda não existe um filho na sua vida; existe só um problema a ser resolvido" (86). Unable to see his son as another human being, let alone his son, he views his son as a problem. Elsewhere he ponders: "Pensa também em como pode ser tentador o impulso de ele, o pai, se apoiar no filho, para ali se destruir. Fazer do filho a sua desculpa, o altar da piedade alheia. Sim, é um bom rapaz. Tinha muito futuro. Pena o filho—acabou com ele" (118). Here his son is not merely a problem but explicitly the scapegoat for his own failures. The wasted potential and lost future he mourns is not his son's but his own.

The structure of the narration reveals, however, that in spite of the manner that cultural stereotypes regarding masculinity and fatherhood have been deeply ingrained into the consciousness of this narrator, transformation does occur. For as the narrator recounts his earlier frustrations, insecurities, and desires, it becomes apparent that these have to some degree been resolved—though not entirely, but to draw upon Dominick LaCapra's term, the narrator achieves a sort of "empathie unsettlement" (41), that is, a provisional empathetic identification with his past that allows him to work through the trauma caused by his initial reaction to his son. For

example, the narrator realizes,

"E começa aqui, também, a montar a armadilha de que será tão duro de se livrar. O problema não é o filho; o problema é ele. Se o problema é o filho, ele, o pai, estará perdido, mas isso ele não sabe ainda" (69). In its context, this passage refers to the way in which the father begins to conceptualize his son, not as a person, not as a son, but as a problem—but because of the temporal fold of the narration, the passage simultaneously reveals that a transformation has occurred, in other words, that at some future point he will recognize the wrongness of viewing his son as a problem. This consciousness is a sign of the psychological distance between the narrator and his former self. His narration of his problems is one indication that he has moved beyond those problems. Furthermore, this narrative distancing points towards the fathers ultimate and transformative realization that the problem of his identity lies not with his son but within himself.

This transformation is both slow and arduous, for to reach it the narrator must work through the way he has been conditioned to think by society and distance himself from the cultural expectations related to both himself as a father and Felipe as a son. For example, as the father begins to come to terms with the fact that his son will not die but might live for a long time, he begins to view him differently: "Pela primeira vez, sente que seu filho é um indivíduo, o que o surpreende" (86). Acknowledging his son's individuality, i.e., his difference, is a first critical step in the fathers transformation. Though by seeing him as an individual, that is a child, the father simultaneously resurrects his hope that Felipe will be able to occupy the traditional role of a son: "Ainda nao é exatamente um filho. O pai nao sabe disso, mas o que ele quer é que aquela criança trissômica conquiste o papel de filho" (95). To help Felipe learn this role, the father decides to leave their native Curitiba and take his son to a specialized clinic in Rio where Felipe can receive individualized treatments to help him develop muscular dexterity and improve his linguistic abilities. The trip and the clinic itself, however, are a shocking experience for the father, who is deeply disturbed by the way children with special needs are treated: "[Foi] na clínica do Rio,

quando ele percebeu pela primeira vez que seu mundo de referências seria definitivamente outro" (167). This visit causes the father to realize his world, his reality, will be oriented by a series of reference points that are distinctly different than other peoples. The trip to Rio is enlightening, furthermore, because for the first time, the father becomes conscious of the way culture structures and gives order—for better or, in this case, for worse—to society. As they travel to the clinic, the father is struck by the poverty around them: "A pobreza em torno: deficiência é coisa de pobres, molambentos, miseráveis, retirantes, necessitados, na face aquela exigência crispada de alguma justiça e ao mesmo tempo os olhos que se abaixam a tempo antes que a borduna arrebente-lhes a cabeça, mendigos rastejando nas esquinas, ecos de uma pobreza imortal, de cócoras, reverberando pelos séculos a vergonha de estar vivo." (82)

Profoundly struck by the poverty he encounters in Rio, and more so by the way it is ignored, the father arrives at the clinic, where he is equally shocked by the similar way in which so-called *crianças deficientes* are also marginalized: "O pai não consegue tirar os olhos daquele purgatório em que absolutamente tudo esta fora da norma" (83). As he begins to contemplate the implications of having a "deficient child," the father simultaneously perceives that there is a culturally constructed morality that underlies the systems of society and the family.

This consciousness allows the narrator to step back from society and view himself in new and unexpected ways. Interestingly, Tezza has noted in an interview that this consciousness was also essential to the process of writing the novel: "Conquistei uma independência brutal, uma capacidade ou uma coragem de dizer as coisas que eu jamais teria se falasse de mim mesmo" (Rodrigues 1). This "brutal independence" is another way of referring to the consciousness expressed by the narrator towards his own fictional life. But, interestingly, it is a consciousness that is very much in the process of becoming realized. The narrator understands that he is no longer the same person he once was, but he does not yet know who he is or who he wants to become.

In this way, the narrators anxiety cited earlier gains new meaning: "Eu preciso começar, de uma vez por todas, ele diz a ele mesmo, e só escrevendo saberá quem é" (16). The narrative act thus emerges as an essential part of the process of self-realization.

One of the ways the narrator manifests his developing consciousness is through his understanding of how culturally determined family structures and gender roles have conditioned his sense of self and vision of the world.

From the beginning of the novel, the father expresses ambivalence and at times dread about what it means to be a father. He fears, for example, the onslaught of family descending upon him and his wife when Felipe is born: "As famílias. Família é um horror, mas um horror necessário—ou inevitável, o que dá no mesmo" (24). In fact he relates that for much of his life he has sought to avoid the constraints and obligations imposed on him by his family. As a young man he lives for a time in an artists community in the south of Brazil, and later he joins the Merchant Marines. Because of the pressures he feels at home from both his family and because of the political climate of the 1970s, he subsequently leaves Brazil altogether to experience true "freedom" in Europe, and he works (illegally) for a time in both Portugal and Germany.

Though he later returns to Brazil and marries, he still fears conforming to social and family expectations. The birth of his son, however, forces him more than ever before to face the stereotypes of the "family man." As he states early in the novel, he fears becoming: "Um homem do sistema. Família é sistema" (26). This fear may be the fear of being forced to grow up, to mature and accept the responsibilities that come with family relationships, but it is also a fear of the restrictions and rigid roles that come from family systems.

This observation is revealing because it is a step toward denaturalizing the primary relationships undergirding society. For the narrator, this revelation causes him to see himself and his family in new ways, and he begins to view the traditional patriarchal family system as a mode of behavior that extends outward beyond the

family. For example, he becomes conscious of how his own public silence regarding Felipe and his condition is replicated by his second child, Ana: “Como o pai nunca fala a ninguém do problema do filho, ela também, ao entrar na escola, não comentará jamais com ninguém a esquisitice do irmão—anos depois, a professora relembra esse silêncio estratégico, que fielmente reproduzia o silêncio paterno. Como se a educação fosse um processo inconsciente—o mais importante corre na sombra, antes na Didática dos gestos, da omissão e da aura que nos discursos edificantes, lógicos e diretos.” (163)

And it is precisely because of the way this silent system has conditioned and even structured society that it is so difficult for the narrator to change his own behavior. Another revealing example occurs when the father is out driving with Felipe who begins to fight over the steering wheel. The father tells him to stop, and Felipe continues to grab for the wheel—a symbolic gesture given that in a sense Felipe has already been “driving” his father. The argument escalates until the father ends up hitting his son to enforce “a ordem do pai” (137). This episode prompts the narrator to rethink the structure of power in the home and the way in which the patriarchal family system at times employs violence in order to preserve or impose order, perhaps an indication of the actual fragility of the patriarchal family system. A corollary moment occurs later when the father again is out driving and becomes so irritated by another driver that he exits his car to yell and berate the other driver. After losing his temper he turns and sees Felipe watching him: “É preciso esperar um pouco, olhar bem nos olhos dele, segurar sua face com ambas as mãos—‘Olhe para mim, filho’—e então repetir que ele não deve fazer assim. ‘O pai errou, filho’, confessa, em voz baixa. Repete várias vezes que ele não deve fazer assim” (148). Note that what prompts the change of attitude and behavior is the specular moment when the father sees that Felipe is observing him. Because Felipe imitates nearly everything he sees his father do without being able to interpret his father’s behavior, the father becomes hypersensitized to his own actions. As a mirror of the father, Felipe forces his father to view himself and see himself anew. And while such reflection is no guarantee, in and of

itself, of leading to transformational changes, in the case of the father, it does contribute to the evolution of his character and sense of being.

This hyper-sensitivity is made explicit in one of the novel's great ironic inversions, which occurs later in the narrative, as the father recounts the first time Felipe disappears. When they discover Felipe is missing, both father and mother become frantic and begin to search their apartment complex and surrounding area. The narrator relates, again from the vantage point of retrospection: "Só descobriu a dependência que sentia pelo filho no dia em que Felipe desapareceu pela primeira vez" (161). This is a significant transformation in the narrators attitude towards Felipe but also in the narrators conception of self. In this instance, Felipe's presence, that is, his existence, is no longer the problem for the narrator; rather, it is his absence that is upsetting.

The narrator states: "Aqui e agora: voltando para casa sem o filho, o mesmo filho que ele desejou morto assim que nasceu, e que agora, pela ausência, parece mata-lo" (169). Eventually, after turning to the police for assistance, Felipe is found and restored to his family. This is a key moment in the novel for it reveals the degree to which the narrators relationship to Felipe has evolved and become transformed. In an ironic turn, the narrator literally and symbolically embraces Felipe, acknowledges his dependence upon his son, and assumes his role as father. Yet this scene does not signal a return to the traditional image of the father as protector so much as it indicates the degree to which this father comes to define himself in terms of the idiosyncratic modes of wellbeing and happiness exhibited by his son. In this way, the novel reconfigures the dynamics of fatherhood. Here the father is neither a symbol of law and obedience, nor of origins and tradition. Instead, the narrator reimagines his relationship with his son as one devoid of hierarchy but one that is nevertheless conditioned by mutual need, that is, as much as Felipe depends upon him, he perceives that he too cannot exist without Felipe, that Felipe gives meaning to his life. Thus, unlike an earlier and more traditional conception of patriarchal masculinity that depended upon progeny but was nevertheless divorced from child raising, this narrator

expresses a psychological and emotional need and desire to be intimately involved in his son's life. Felipe's momentary disappearance is significant on another level as well, however, because over the course of the novel, Felipe gradually fades into the background as the narrator becomes more and more conscious that his problems and crises of identity are not the result of Felipe's problems but rather his own. At one point, late in the narrative, the narrator states: "O meu filho não é uma criança normal, e cada dia que eu mantiver na cabeça essa normalidade, uma sobra que seja, como modelo e referência, eu serei infeliz, muito mais do que ele próprio conseguiria ser; para meu filho, esse quadro de valor é radicalmente inexistente. Eu sou o problema, ele diria a ele mesmo." (199)

This passage is significant for two reasons: first, it demonstrates the transformation that has occurred in the narrator/father's own sense of self. In order to make this observation, the narrator has become acutely aware of the way a particular model of normalcy has conditioned his view of the world. At the same time, however, the passage—which comes quite late in the narrative—also indicates the way in which this "modelo e referência" continues to persist and affect him. The narration thus reveals a consciousness that is still very much in process, a provisional identity that is continuing to posture and reposture itself against the standards and structures of society and culture. Time and again, *O filho eterno* reveals the fallacies, prejudices, and restrictions of patriarchy in Brazilian culture, and in so doing, the narrator distances himself from the cultural formulation of the family and especially the stereotypical image of the patriarchal father. At the same time, however, the narrator unexpectedly also becomes more and more dependent on his relationship with his son—not the cultural abstraction of what his son, or by extension his family, represents—but the actual relationship he has with his son, until he reaches the point at which he re-embraces the role of the father.

Yet this role is not the stereotypical culturally inscribed role of fatherhood, but a new image of the father that is quite distinct from the traditional image of the patriarch, one that is defined by his sensitivity to emotions (both his and his sons), his

desire for an intimate relationship with his child, and his feelings of responsibility—not as a provider for his child, but rather to be present in his child's life.

Just as other forms of identity became more fluid in the late twentieth century due to the influence of the feminist movement, the queer movement, evolving notions of race and ethnicity, along with other changes and instabilities in the social and economic conditions of Brazil, this novel suggests that heterosexual masculinity is not as stable as conservative elements of society might wish to believe. The novel reinvests fatherhood with a series of new values, while working to divest it of others. This new identity is not based on the fatherhood of "systems" nor is it a fatherhood that is authoritarian or hierarchical, nor one based on competition or professional success. Nor is it fixed. To the contrary, it is a fatherhood that emerges from the self-conscious acknowledgement of provisionality. In this story, the father's heroism is defined by the acquisition of a double-consciousness—the ability to escape the blindness that so often afflicts patriarchal sight and see himself through a new perspective. His heroism resides in his willingness to turn away from the culturally inscribed and patriarchal role of fatherhood in favor of a role that, while nevertheless gender-bound, is based on the values of acceptance, inclusion, love, responsibility, and emotional vulnerability. Turning away from the stereotypical construction of fatherhood, the narrator/father reveals a willingness to relinquish control. Although the concluding scene, in which the narrator/father is left sitting on a sofa with Felipe while they watch a soccer game, is quintessentially masculine, it is not patriarchal, given that it turns away from hierarchy and control in favor of the sharing and open bonding between father and son. Furthermore, it is an unresolved scene because the narrator as well as his narration have both eschewed a teleological expression of identity in which the end is already known—an identity that might be found in history—in favor of one that has not yet been culturally inscribed with meaning.

O filho eterno, ultimately, offers a fascinating inversion of the traditional father-son metaphor that posits the father as unchanging and eternal and the son as adaptable and changeable with the potential of becoming like the father. The narrators

provisional posture as father is accentuated by Felipe's unique identity as an eternal son—an individual who will always be the narrators son. In doing so, the narrative reconfigures the fathers identity by revealing that the capacity to change is in the father and not the son. And in this case, the father does indeed experience a radical change as he resists the masculine gender role determined for him by patriarchy, a role that is fundamentally monological, and opens himself toward the possibility of a new mode of masculine being. Thus as much as Cristovao Tezza's novel should be recognized for the attention it has brought to individuals with Down Syndrome, the novel deserves equal attention for how it re-imagines fatherhood and heterosexual masculinity in Brazilian culture.

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