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**Undone Anatomies: Femininity, Performativity, and
Parody in Mário de Sá-Carneiro's *A Confissão de Lúcio***

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Abstract

2014 marked the centenary of the publication of Mário de Sá-Carneiro's novel *A Confissão de Lúcio*, a text defined by its complex articulations of sexuality, jealousy, and madness. While traditional analyses of the text underplayed the importance of sexuality and eroticism to the plot, more recent readings have revisited the novel to engage with the latent sexual tension between the novel's male protagonists. Sá-Carneiro's use of sexuality and gender as articulated through his two female characters, however, remains overlooked. This study explores the radical possibilities of these intriguing characters, using Judith Butler's poststructuralist theorization of gender and sexual categories to provide a starting point for the development of new perspectives on Sá-Carneiro's classic text.

For the modern reader, the disorientating erotic elements of Mário de Sá-Carneiro's 1914 novel *A Confissão de Lúcio* [*Lúcio's Confession*], set in the bohemian milieu of *fin-de-siècle* Lisbon and Paris, are difficult to pass over.¹ Charting the series of events that leads the eponymous narrator to first embark on an affair with Marta, the wife of his best friend Ricardo, and then to shoot her – only to discover that he has instead shot Ricardo himself – the text's relentless intensity and erotic charge serve to foreground the sexual body in a way that makes its pervasive presence and influence undeniable. Until as recently as twenty years ago, however, analyses of the novel were limited to modernist or decadentist readings that acknowledged Sá-Carneiro's use of eroticism but left its complexities overlooked.² Attempts to navigate the possibility of homoeroticism in the novel, meanwhile, were all-too-often concerned with discussing the supposed closeted homosexuality of Sá-Carneiro himself, a sexual-textual assimilation of author and work that Anna M. Klobucka has identified as a persistent trend within Lusophone Studies.³ The rapid expansion of queer theory in the 1990s, and its gradual entrance into mainstream academic discourse during the 2000s, served to provide and refine the critical tools and discursive space necessary for an exploration into the ways in which gender and sexuality operate in the novel, and more recent readings, most prominently those of Fernando Arenas, Ana Luísa Amaral, and Cláudia Pazos Alonso, have

¹ Mário de Sá-Carneiro, *A Confissão de Lúcio*, 9th edn (Lisbon: Nova Ática, 1945). Further references will be given in the text as *CL* followed by the page number. English translations are taken from Mário de Sá-Carneiro, *Lúcio's Confession*, trans. by Margaret Jull Costa (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1993).

² Mary Elizabeth Ginway, 'Transgendering in Luso-Brazilian Speculative Fiction from Machado de Assis to the Present', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 47:1 (2010), 40-60, p. 50.

³ Anna M. Klobucka, 'Was Camões Gay? Queering the Portuguese Literary Canon', paper delivered at the Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association, 28th December 2007.

made use of this space, identifying sublimated homosexual desire as central to the text's plot and narrative tension.

Such readings have focused primarily on the relationship between narrator Lúcio and protagonists Ricardo and Marta, positing Marta as triangulated within the matrix of Lúcio and Ricardo's repressed mutual desire. For Arenas, this triangulation is the dramatic locus of the novel, with gay desire at once ubiquitous throughout Sá-Carneiro's narrative and altogether absent from it: a paradoxical (non-)presence that is mirrored by the text's shifting portrayal of a homoeroticism that is both deeply repressed and persistently on the brink of exploding into polymorphous sensuality.⁴ This destabilization of gendered subjectivities, Arenas affirms, is achieved by means of the novel's consistent problematization of the notion of truth, 'tanto a nível ontológico como ficcional' [on an ontological as well as fictional level].⁵ Despite exerting this troubling effect on gender and sexual roles, however, for Arenas the text is nonetheless predicated on the misogynistic objectification of Marta, as she is reduced to nothing more than the means by which Lúcio and Ricardo negotiate and socially sanction their mutual attraction. In this way, Arenas affirms,⁶ Sá-Carneiro's characterization of Lúcio and Ricardo's relationship reflects Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of homosocial desire, which posits female objectification as the primary means by which male-male relations are reified and mediated.⁷

The fluidity of gender and sexual categories that Arenas sees as central to *Confissão's* subversive potential is a key element of Amaral's argument, which makes use of the contemporary poststructuralist theories of sexuality expounded by Sedgwick and by Judith Butler to elucidate the challenges to sexual normativity posed by Sá-Carneiro's poetry, prose

⁴ Fernando Arenas, 'Onde Existir? A (im)possibilidade excessiva do desejo homoerótico na ficção de Mário de Sá-Carneiro', *Metamorfoses*, 6 (2005), 159-68 (p. 159).

⁵ Arenas, p. 163.

⁶ Arenas, p. 165.

⁷ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Chichester, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985).

fiction, and personal letters. Particularly significant for Amaral is Sá-Carneiro's affinity with the feminine,⁸ a self-identification implicitly reflected by the tacitly feminized features of his male characters and poetic personae.⁹ For Amaral, this sliding of gendered signifiers works in tandem with the author's strategically ambivalent use of gender stereotypes to expose the performative roots of gender identity, thereby troubling the naturalized status of gender as a whole.¹⁰ These tactical reappropriations of binary gender constructs are intertwined, in *Confissão*, with the ambiguous relationship between Lúcio and Ricardo, which Amaral reads as displaying the hallmarks of Butler's concept of gender abjection: those forms of gender expression that are culturally unthinkable and subjectively repellent, and yet continue to menace the subject with their liminal presence, serving as an unpredictable reminder of the fragility of gendered boundaries.¹¹ In Pazos-Alonso's Freudian analysis, meanwhile, Lúcio's eponymous confession is read as a 'quasi-clinical "document"' in which these unthinkable desires are sublimated via the oneiric devices of displacement and condensation, which serve to both conceal and subtly betray the homoerotic narrative underlying the novel's ostensibly heterosexual central love triangle.¹²

These groundbreaking readings have without a doubt dramatically reframed conventional understandings of Sá-Carneiro's text, opening the door to fresh exploration of the characterization of his male protagonists and the enigmatic relationship between them. His women characters, however, remain excluded from examination as gendered and sexual beings in their own right, leaving a gap in the current critical literature that this study seeks to

⁸ Ana Luísa Amaral, "'Durmo o crepúsculo': Lendo a poética de Maria de Sá-Carneiro a partir das teorias contemporâneas sobre as sexualidades', in *Subjectividades em Devir: Estudos de Poesia Moderna e Contemporânea*, ed. by Célia Pedrosa and Ida Alves (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 7Letras, 2008), pp. 9-17 (p. 10).

⁹ Amaral, p. 12.

¹⁰ Amaral, p. 12.

¹¹ Amaral, p. 14.

¹² Cláudia Pazos Alonso, 'Displacement and Condensation: A Freudian Analysis of *A Confissão de Lúcio*', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 11:3 (2011), 65-76 (p. 66).

address. Building on the critical precedents outlined above, particularly that set by Amaral, and making use of Butler's extensively developed poststructuralist understandings of gender performativity, parody, and abjection, the study aims to foreground the intricate and complex contributions of the text's two women characters — Marta, and the unnamed woman known only as 'a americana' [the American] — to the novel's radical destabilization of naturalized gender and sexual constructs.

The first link in the fantastic chain of events that leads ultimately to the disintegration of Lúcio's stable sense of self, the American woman's party initiates a sharp turning point in Sá-Carneiro's text. Taking place a short way into the narrative, the party is figured as a dreamlike sequence, and is couched heavily in the opulent language of decadence, excess, and eroticism, centred around an abstract stage performance by the American woman herself that Ricardo later dubs the 'Orgia do Fogo' (CL, 45) ['Orgy of Fire' (36)]. The framing of the sequence as explicitly transgressive and overtly sexual perhaps explains why otherwise gender-focused studies have stopped short of deconstructing it in gendered terms. Richard Vernon, for example, characterizes the scene as transgressing normative heterosexual codification only in terms of the American woman's ability to control the audience with her beauty, a seizing of power he interprets as her 'usurping of masculinity',¹³ while Arenas suggests its synaesthetic blurring of sensory meanings might speak to a broader destabilization of naturalized categories.¹⁴ Despite their acknowledgements of the scene's subversive potential, however, neither study fully untangles the essential means by which the American woman incites this gendered disruption. The question remains: how exactly does Sá-Carneiro's depiction of the American woman and her performance act as the spark for the dramatic explosion of gender categories that ensues?

¹³ Richard Vernon, 'Demented Disclosures and the Art of Seeing in *A Confissão de Lúcio*', *Hispanófila*, 146 (2006), 37-48 (p. 42).

¹⁴ Arenas, p. 163.

The American woman, referred to in the original text only as ‘a americana’ [the American], ‘a mulher fulva’ (CL, 33) [‘the flame-haired woman’ (27)], or variations thereof, remains anonymous throughout Lúcio’s two brief but significant encounters with her. Her early identification as a lesbian, ‘uma grande sáfica’ (CL, 33) [‘a follower of Sappho’ (27)], is the only inner attribute Sá-Carneiro discloses to the reader; beyond that, his writing of her character is limited to tangible physical features, divesting her of personal narrative or subjective backstory. This singular emphasis on the corporeal is furthered by Lúcio’s repeated narrative references to fetishized body parts, particularly her bare feet and gold-painted toenails (CL, 30-43). Her sexually-charged performance of an unfamiliar abstract dance is made all the more striking by her physical appearance and dress, both somewhat anachronistic and exotic in the novel’s nineteenth-century European setting. Her tight metallic tunic reveals a nipple, her hair is full of jewels, and, as Pamela Bacarisse notes, there is specific narrative attention paid to painted body parts:¹⁵ as she strips, she reveals that her breasts and vulva, like her lips and toenails, are painted gold (CL, 44). The two dancers that join her onstage, their bodies at once muscle-bound, curvaceous, and painted with flowers, arouse unsettling sexual urges in the male audience members; the masculine appearance of one dancer’s legs in particular provoke in Lúcio ‘desejos brutais de as morder’ (CL, 41) [‘the violent urge to bite them’ (33)].

The American woman’s transparent embodiment of a corporeality specifically coded as female, illustrated by her breasts, vulva, painted lips and nails, and long embellished hair, frames her performance as manifesting an excessive hyperfemininity, a modality that can be located on Butler’s schema of gender parody. In her comprehensive deconstruction of gendered meanings and identities, Butler redefines gender not as a ‘being’, but as a ‘doing’, a ‘stylized repetition of acts’ that ‘constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ and are

¹⁵ Pamela Bacarisse, *A Alma Amortalhada: Mário de Sá-Carneiro’s Use of Metaphor and Image* (London: Tamesis, 1984), p. 6.

symbiotically circumscribed, controlled, and sustained by the maintenance of a strictly enforced system of compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁶ Gender is not consciously espoused by a prediscursive agent: on the contrary, Butler's framework precludes the possibility of a pre-gendered subject. Rather, it posits gender as ultimately performative, in that its existence as a fundamental marker of identity is constituted through its continual realization.¹⁷ It is by means of this repeated enactment that gender materializes, '*stabiliz[ing] over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface*'¹⁸ while nonetheless remaining 'a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time'.¹⁹ The very necessity of repeated affirmation can thus expose this ephemeral and contingent quality, revealing and expanding the 'gaps and fissures' in the naturalized illusion societally recognized as gender identity.²⁰

This initial premise acts as the starting point for Butler's inquiry into forms of repetition or reiteration that have the potential to destabilize gender constructs, rather than reproducing and consolidating them. She proposes two gendered modalities that present such possibilities, both figured as forms of 'gender parody': drag performance, and lesbian butch and femme aesthetics.²¹ Drag, by achieving its entertainment value through the hyperbolic displacement of the relationship between perceived anatomy, gender identity, and performed gender, brings into relief the dissonances and disparities between these categories; furthermore, as a conscious and literal performance of gender, it underscores the performativity at the heart of gender identities as a whole.²² Butch and femme lesbian identities and aesthetics, meanwhile, appear superficially to replicate heterosexual constructs

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 191-93.

¹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 34.

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. xviii. All quoted italics are present in original texts.

¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 22.

²⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. xix.

²¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 187.

²² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 186-88.

while ultimately refusing heterosexual desire, thus revealing the ‘utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original.’²³ In other words, such modalities parody ostensibly ‘original’ genders in a way that troubles the very notion of originality.²⁴

Elements of both these ‘disordering practices’ can be seen at play in the American woman’s performance, highlighting her role as an antagonist of gendered structures in the text and contributing to the scene’s unsettling qualities.²⁵ The sensuality and eroticism of the performance suggest a courting of male heterosexual desire, and hegemonic concepts of the enforced relationship between gender identity and sexual desire dictate therefore that this flamboyant display of overtly sexual hyperfemininity should work to reinforce the heterosexual matrix and the oppositional constitution of masculinity. The assumed provocation of heterosexual desire by means of feminine display, however, is ultimately displaced by the American woman’s lesbian identification, and by her dancers’ masculine excess of muscle. Like the femme aesthetics explored in Butler’s work, then, the American woman’s performance comes to instead enact a sudden rupture in the dominant framework of compulsory heterosexuality: a deliberate stoppage in the continuity between perceived gender identity and sexual object choice that upholds the cultural intelligibility of gendered categories.²⁶

Alongside an interruption of compulsory heterosexuality brought about by the slippage between assumed gender and sexual practice, the American woman’s performance troubles the association between anatomy and performed gender that forms a further axis of the gender matrix as theorized by Butler. In this way, the American woman can be seen as engaging in a Butlerian understanding of drag performance. While traditional drag artists achieve a sense of gendered dissonance by staging and playing with the incongruence

²³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 43.

²⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 168.

²⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 24.

²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 24.

between anatomy and performed gender, literally performing genders in exaggerated opposition to those societally assigned to them, the American woman achieves the same valuable disparity by espousing a version of femininity that so exceeds dominant demarcations of ‘the feminine’ that it is itself incompatible with female-coded anatomy. Through a staged performance of her assigned gender that goes so far as to render itself discursively unrecognizable, a status manifest in the attendees’ difficulties in articulating what they have witnessed (CL, 45-46), the American woman pushes at the boundaries of binary gender in the novel, threatening the assumed impermeability of its internal split and irreversibly disturbing the coherence of the other characters’ hitherto stable gender identities. Lúcio’s growing aversion to her sexed body, reaching a visceral peak with his description of her genitalia as a ‘terrível flor de carne a estrebuchar agonias magentas’ (CL, 44) [‘terrible flower of flesh moving in convulsive magenta spasms’ (35)], confirms the troubling influence of her monstrously excessive gender performance. His reaction, affective, uncontrollable, and confused, here anticipates the fundamental sense of personal and interpersonal disruption that come to dominate the protagonists’ narratives following the orgiastic scenes at the American woman’s party.

If the American woman’s party can be seen as the catalyst for the chain reaction that ultimately results in the explosion of fixed gender categories in the novel’s denouement, the character of Marta represents a further incendiary element. As the wife of Ricardo, Marta is initially presented as a flesh-and-bone character, a ‘linda mulher loira, muito loira, alta, escultural’ (CL, 78) [‘a beautiful woman, very blonde, tall and statuesque’ (61)] with a ‘rosto formosíssimo, de uma beleza vigorosa, talhado em oiro’ (CL, 78) [‘[a face that] was truly lovely, it had a vigorous beauty, as if carved out of gold’ (61)]. Following a tumultuous sexual affair with Lúcio, however, she is revealed to be nothing more than Ricardo’s phantasmic creation, his ‘fantástico Mistério’ (CL, 157) [‘fantastic Mystery’ (115)] that

vanishes before Lúcio's eyes 'como se extingue uma chama' when he fires his gun at her (CL, 157) ['like a flame being extinguished' (115)]. Past critical readings of Marta have defined her as the conduit for Ricardo and Lúcio's closeted mutual desire, the necessary third point of their homosocial triangulation.²⁷ For Arenas, Marta is a chimera through which the male protagonists strengthen this homosocial bond, resolving homoerotic desires while precluding the emergence of gay panic or the disruption of sexual categories.²⁸ Pazos-Alonso, in a similar vein, sees her in Freudian terms as a 'dream vision, into which socially prohibited desires can be channelled in a more acceptable form'.²⁹ Both critics thus read Marta as an ephemeral being who stabilizes sexual and gender identities in the novel by resolving the threat to compulsory heterosexuality posed by the sexual tension between Ricardo and Lúcio. Further deconstruction of Marta's specific attributes as a figure of fantasy, however, can in fact produce an alternative reading, recasting her as destabilizing hegemonic gender categories through her very embodiment of objectified femininity.

Even prior to Marta's appearance as his fantastic creation, Ricardo's imagining of womanhood fits squarely into the concept of femininity outlined by Butler as merely a set of 'acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires [that] create the illusion of an interior and organising gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory framework of reproductive heterosexuality'.³⁰ In a revealing conversation with Lúcio early in the text, he confirms that the element of femininity most attractive to him is not beauty, but 'outra coisa mais vaga — imponderável, translúcida: *a gentileza*' (CL, 65) ['something imponderable, translucent: *kindness*' (51)], an attribute that arouses within him '*uma ânsia sexual de possuir*' (65) ['*a sexual longing to possess*' (51)]. Ricardo's verbal display of a singular and intense attraction to the element of femininity that

²⁷ See Bacarisse, p. 8; Arenas, pp. 164-66; Pazos-Alonso, p. 70.

²⁸ Arenas, pp. 164-66.

²⁹ Pazos-Alonso, p. 70.

³⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 185-86.

he appears to perceive as encouraging the exertion of male sexual dominance exemplifies his mental reduction of femininity to those performative aspects that work to consolidate hegemonic masculinity and to thereby confirm men's superior position in the hierarchy of gender. This implied affinity with hegemonic masculinity, however, is troubled by Ricardo's frequent corporeal identification with those same excessively submissive feminine traits; Lúcio describes a conversation with his friend in which he describes his envy of 'uma mulher admirável, estirada sobre um leito de rendas; olhando a sua carne toda nua... esplêndida...' (CL, 68-69) ['a lovely woman, stretched out on a coverlet of lace, contemplating her own naked flesh... splendid' (54)], before putting himself in her place, filled with 'um desejo perdido de ser mulher' (CL, 69) ['a mad desire to be a woman' (54)]. Implicit within this juxtaposition of sexual attraction to exaggerated female submission and a secretive, quasi-autoerotic identification with it is the heavy presence of masculine crisis, a menacing fissure in Ricardo's sense of gendered internal coherence that can only be affectively resolved through an equally exaggerated performance of masculine domination. On this schema, Marta becomes the intended object of that performance, the submissive surface upon which Ricardo can steady his sense of self.

When Marta is examined in light of her status as Ricardo's creation, this role as hypersubmissive object seems increasingly to define her as a character. In Lúcio's narration of his first encounter with her, he mentions that her hands are so slender and pale — implicitly weak — that they are 'inquietantes' (CL, 78) ['disquiet[ing]' (61)]. In spite of displaying 'uma finíssima inteligência' (CL, 79) ['a sharp intellect' (62)], she has no opinions or ideas of her own, merely mirroring those of Ricardo; neither, it transpires, does she appear to have any memories (CL, 79-84). This inexplicable lack of narrative or independent personality acquires a more fantastic and horrifying gloss when Lúcio witnesses her visibly fading out in front of his eyes, her very physicality disintegrating 'até que desapareceu por

completo' (CL, 87) ['until she had disappeared completely' (67)]. During their affair, Lúcio begins to experience the disturbing and uncanny sensation that Marta does not exist when he is not with her (CL, 108). Later, as the novel's grip on the fabric of reality loosens, Lúcio discovers Marta's infidelity with their mutual acquaintance Sérgio Warginsky, and bites her breast in rage. He bruises and breaks her skin until he tastes blood, but Marta does not cry out, pull away, or even appear to 'notar essa carícia brutal' (CL, 124) ['to notice that brutal caress' (92)].

Marta's unstable corporeality, her lack of personal narrative, and her unwavering adhesion to Ricardo's desires suggest that rather than the autonomous 'being' she appears, she can instead be defined as a specifically gendered 'doing': her ephemeral 'existence' is constituted exclusively by her performance of femininity, one that seeks only to confirm and uphold compulsory heterosexuality through the courting of masculine desire. She is a fantasy figure reduced purely to gendered performance, created to resolve Ricardo's sexually dysphoric crisis, and thus lacks any appearance of subjective interiority. But rather than contributing to any successful reinforcement of heterosexual desire or the gendered categories it entails, this very failure to maintain the appearance of an cohesive interior selfhood is what renders her an ultimately destabilizing presence. Her transparent lack of interior essence, of any illusion of substance, only troubles the foundations of selfhood in the novel, showing the notion itself of an abiding gendered interiority to be nothing more than a fictive construct.

Lúcio's references to an indefinable feeling of unease or instability, which increase in both frequency and intensity as the novel progresses, provide evidence of this interpretation of Marta, reflecting the mounting pressure her presence exerts on his internal stability. After their first meeting, Lúcio feels himself to have been in 'um mundo de sonhos' (CL, 77) ['a world of dreams' (60)], and later, on recalling their illicit sexual activity, he is hit by a wave

of ‘incompreensíveis náuseas’ (CL, 105) [‘an incomprehensible feeling of nausea’ (80)]. As the novel progresses, this vague unease is supplanted by a near-constant state of internal torture (CL, 115). Ricardo’s sense of self is likewise gradually destroyed by Marta’s presence, a slow disintegration that manifests physically when he looks into a mirror and cannot see his own reflection (CL, 100). Finally, as the novel closes, each man is revealed to have lost his subject status: Lúcio is incarcerated by the state and thus divested of autonomy indefinitely, and Ricardo dies, mysteriously, at the precise moment that he shoots Marta and she vanishes (CL, 157-58).

Sá-Carneiro’s writing of both the American woman and Marta can thus be seen to destabilize fixed gender and sexual categories in the novel by bringing the fundamental performativity of all genders into relief. While both characters ultimately realize these subversive ends, however, their means are highly divergent, with the American woman’s staged performance of an excessive femininity contrasting sharply with Marta’s reduction to a set of meticulously reiterated and idealized feminine acts. The apparent paradox at play in the seemingly symmetrical eventualities of these two very different women becomes more coherent when the characters are understood as occupying the novel’s sphere of gendered abjection. Appropriating Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject as at once within the subject and necessarily disavowed to maintain the subject’s ongoing integrity, Butler demonstrates that key to the continuity of the gender binary is the production of an adjacent domain of abject, unintelligible bodies, wherein reside those ‘gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined’.³¹ While the emergence of the gendered subject relies on the repudiation of the abject, however, the abject sphere continues to trouble the subject, presenting a persistent threat of disruption and destabilization to the subject’s base integrity. In order to maintain his

³¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 23.

or her sense of internal stability, the subject must therefore repeatedly disavow the abject realm; in turn, it is because of this need for perpetual disavowal that the abject takes on a mercurial changeability, perpetually unmade and redefined.³²

Lúcio's narrative treatment of the American woman and Marta clearly points to the location of both characters within the novel's abject sphere. The refusal of Lúcio and his companions to discuss the American woman or her party beyond their conversation immediately after the event indicates a tacit collective agreement to exclude her from the domain of the thinkable, rendering her abject, in order to resolve the threat to their individual subjectivities posed by her subversion of gendered and sexual norms.³³ Lúcio's growing sensations of unease, repulsion, and finally agony during his affair with Marta can likewise be understood as resulting from his growing efforts to fix her position in the abject realm, continually reinscribing a boundary that by its very definition is fundamentally permeable and thus readily transgressed. The marking of both women characters with this abject status despite their clear differences further posits their exclusion from the subjective sphere as part of Lúcio's increasingly desperate efforts to stabilize his sense of gendered self through the consolidation of internal coherence and disavowal of troubling elements. Significantly, however, this obsessive attempt to stabilize and restabilize selfhood by repeatedly circumscribing the boundary between subject and abject is ultimately revealed as futile, resulting only in Lúcio's exclusion from the subjective domain. Over the course of Lúcio's narrative, then, the very notion of the stable gendered self becomes radically problematized, as the coherence, integrity, and stability of each character, including the narrator himself, is called into question.

The application of Butler's understandings of sex and gender to Sá-Carneiro's novel creates a starting point for the development of a new perspective on the ways that the author

³² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 181-82.

³³ Sá-Carneiro, p. 46.

utilizes gender and sexuality, providing the potential for queer readings that challenge critical assumptions not only of the text's representation and use of heterosexuality, but also of its subscription to any fixed categories of gender and sex. With this study, I have sought to expand on one such reading, highlighting the importance of the American woman to the text's gender narrative while challenging the interpretation of Marta as a stabilizing presence by redefining her as a source of gender trouble. *A Confissão de Lúcio* is ultimately shown to expose the fragility and contingency of gender constructs, making complex use of performativity and parody to demonstrate the means by which gender can be recast, as Butler would have it, as 'thoroughly and radically *incredible*'.³⁴

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³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 193.

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