

Article

Literature as Theological Heterology and Its Contribution to Liberation Theologies in the 21st Century: An Archaeo-Genealogical Approach Through a Brazilian Case Study

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Abstract

Within Latin American Liberation Theologies, socio-analytical mediation has been decisive for interpreting structures of domination, yet it does not exhaust the lived, affective, and symbolic dimensions through which subjects inhabit and transform those structures. This article examines how Theology and Literature can broaden the moment of *seeing* without replacing socio-political analysis. Methodologically, it combines Antônio Manzatto's anthropological approach with an archaeo-genealogical analysis of theological knowledge inspired by Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau. It argues that literature can function as theological heterology when alterity modifies theological language, its objects, and the position of the speaking subject. The analysis of Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Adélia Prado identifies two distinct movements: the critique of images of God associated with obedience, guilt, and the legitimation of suffering, and the emergence of corporeal, affectable, and solidaristic forms of subjectivation oriented towards the poor. The article concludes that literature does not substitute socio-analytical mediation but reveals its insufficiency when isolated from affect, imagination, memory, and subjectivation. By articulating genealogies of power and ethics, literary mediation can contribute to renewing the see–judge–act method within twenty-first-century Liberation Theologies.

Keywords: liberation theology; theology and literature; theological heterology; archaeo-genealogy; Michel Foucault; Michel de Certeau; subjectivation; theopoetics; Carlos Drummond de Andrade; Adélia Prado



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1. Introduction

The emergence of the field of Theology and Literature in the Latin American context must be situated within the very movement of methodological renewal promoted by Liberation Theologies. By placing the historical reality of the poor, subalternised subjects, and structures of domination at the centre of theological reflection, Liberation Theology shifted the understanding of faith from a predominantly doctrinal elaboration towards a praxis of historical discernment. In this process, socio-analytical mediation assumed a decisive role in the moment of *seeing*, making it possible to identify the economic, political, and cultural mechanisms that produce inequality, exclusion, and violence.

In this article, “Liberation Theologies” is used in the plural to acknowledge the internal differentiation of the Latin American liberationist tradition and its subsequent contextual

developments. The article does not claim to represent these trajectories exhaustively. Rather, it develops its argument through a Brazilian case study, taking the Brazilian reception of Liberation Theology and the emergence of Theology and Literature as its genealogical locus, and examining two Brazilian poets, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Adélia Prado, as literary cases through which the proposed concept of theological heterology is tested.

The purpose here is not to reconstruct the broader history of Brazilian Liberation Theology or its principal theological developments, but to identify a more specific methodological trajectory: the emergence of literature as a mediation of theological reflection within the liberationist horizon. Although literature and literary language occasionally appear within this broader theological tradition, they did not constitute a sustained methodological mediation comparable to socio-analytical approaches. It is particularly with Antônio Manzatto that literature becomes the object of an explicit methodological proposal within Brazilian theology, not as an illustration of theological concepts, but as a mediation of the human condition through which theology can broaden its perception of historical reality (Manzatto 1994; Villas Boas 2020a).

The dialogue between Theology and Literature emerges within this horizon not as an aesthetic alternative to social analysis, but as an expansion of theology's own perception of reality. Literature does not replace sociology, nor does it seek to offer competing knowledge concerning social structures. It does, however, occupy a specific function within the *seeing* of the Latin American theological method by making it possible to grasp reality as it is lived, narrated, imagined, internalised, resisted, and transformed by subjects. Through characters, conflicts, silences, memories, desires, and narrative forms, literature makes perceptible dimensions of historical experience that a predominantly structural reading does not always fully reach.

For this reason, the field of Theology and Literature should not be confused with a merely aesthetic approach to the theological problem, nor with the search for religious themes, edifying images, or literary illustrations for previously established categories. Its relevance lies in opening a new angle of perception of reality. Literature makes visible experiences, conflicts, sensibilities, memories, and forms of life that escape both conceptual abstraction and an exclusively structural reading of historical processes. It makes it possible to perceive how social reality is lived and contested in the density of everyday life, in its ambiguities, affects, languages, and forms of imagination.

Important precedents for this methodological development can already be found within Liberation Theology itself. Gustavo Gutiérrez himself developed a sustained theological engagement with the work of José María Arguedas, while Pedro Trigo brought Latin American literature into dialogue with the ecclesial and social transformations associated with Liberation Theology (Gutiérrez 1971, 1990; Trigo [1982] 2002). Indeed, Toutin identifies the works of Pedro Trigo, Antônio Manzatto, and Barcellos (2000, 2008) as significant milestones in the Latin American dialogue between theology and literature (Toutin 2009, pp. 119–24).

It is within this framework that Antônio Manzatto's contribution is situated, inaugurating the dialogue between Theology and Literature in Brazil. From his work onwards, literary narrative ceases to be treated as a simple illustration of theological contents and comes to be received as the configuration of a human universe. The starting point is not the application of a previously constituted theology to the literary work, but listening to the human experiences articulated by literature: conflicts, inequalities, affects, violence, desires, hopes, failures, and resistances. Literature thus becomes a mediation capable of expanding theological attention to the complexity of historical life, placing reflection on faith before concrete subjects and the plural ways in which they interpret, suffer, resist, and recreate the world (Manzatto 1994).

The significance of Manzatto's proposal was not restricted to an individual methodological contribution. It became part of the consolidation of Theology and Literature as a field of research in Brazil and subsequently in Latin America. This development acquired a continental institutional expression with the creation of ALALITE (*Asociación Latinoamericana de Literatura y Teología*) in 2006, bringing together researchers from Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, followed by its first Latin American Colloquium on Literature and Theology at PUC-Rio in 2007. Manzatto and others were among its Brazilian founding members, and the network subsequently expanded through colloquia, research collaborations, and publications, including the later development of *Teoliterária—Revista Brasileira de Literaturas e Teologias*, contributing to the consolidation of Theology and Literature as a Latin American field of inquiry (Villas Boas 2020b). Manzatto's work can therefore be situated not merely as a Brazilian case, but as one of the methodological starting points of a dialogue between Theology and Literature that subsequently acquired a broader Latin American configuration.

Moreover, the consolidation of this field in Brazil confirms that the dialogue between Theology and Literature did not remain restricted to an isolated methodological intuition. Under the broad designation of *Theopoetics*, the interfaces among literature, theology, religion, and spiritualities have, over recent decades, come to organise academic events, research groups, publications, dissertations, and theses. As early as 2018, a mapping carried out by Cantarela identified 129 researchers active in the field, generally coming from Theology, Religious Studies, and Literary Studies, with a bibliographic production of 1175 titles, including articles, books, chapters, and conference proceedings, in addition to more than one hundred dissertations and theses. These data reveal not only the quantitative growth of the field, but also its interdisciplinary and methodologically plural nature, marked by different models for reading the relationships among literature, the sacred, and human experience. Such expansion reinforces the relevance of thinking about Theology and Literature as a field capable of renewing the theological perception of reality, and not merely as a thematic or aesthetic exercise applied to the literary text (Cantarela 2018).

This development makes it possible to understand that theological *seeing* does not correspond merely to a preliminary stage of observing reality, but to an epistemological operation traversed by conflicts, interests, languages, institutions, and relations of power. Socio-analytical mediation was decisive in overcoming moralising readings of poverty and identifying the structural mechanisms that produce inequality, exclusion, and violence. However, historical reality does not present itself only as an objective structure, but is also constituted through the perspective of the production of a subjectivity that emerges from a process of genesis of a new ethical consciousness of reality, lived in its details in everyday life.

Subjects do not inhabit structures as abstract entities, but constitute themselves within memories, affects, images, habits, wounds, beliefs, and expectations. Literature does not replace social analysis, nor does it offer knowledge that competes with that of the human sciences. It expands *seeing*, and consequently also *judging* and *acting*, by making perceptible the experience of subjects within structures. By working with silences, hesitations, images of the body, interrupted temporalities, memories, and narrative forms of the imposition, deviation, or refusal of identities, literature makes it possible to grasp dimensions of reality that cannot be reduced either to conceptual abstraction or to socio-structural description.

The properly epistemological contribution of literature appears when the work modifies the way in which theology perceives reality, formulates its objects, recognises its interlocutors, and understands its own language. The literary encounter then becomes an experience of displacement and not merely of confirmation. For this reason, the field of Theology and Literature goes beyond an aesthetic analysis of the questions raised by Liberation

Theology, just as cannot be reduced to the search for religious themes, Christian symbols, or biblical figures in literary works. When literature is used merely to illustrate a previously established doctrine, the relationship remains asymmetrical and non-interdisciplinary, in which theology runs the risk of merely attempting to preserve a position of sovereign knowledge, while the literary text provides examples, questions, or ornaments.

The proposal of the present article is to analyse the field of Theology and Literature as a methodological proposal for Liberation Theology, as political theology and an important interlocutor of public theology, as a continuation of the task of an archaeo-genealogy of theological knowledge. Such a task entails a critique of theological self-referentiality, understood not as the legitimate internal consistency of a discipline, but as the closure through which a system validates its statements without making explicit the historical, institutional, and political conditions that make their production possible (Villas Boas and Candiottto 2025).

Literature occupies a strategic place in this method because it can make visible what the order of discourse cannot accommodate without being transformed. It is not external to relations of knowledge and power, but participates in institutions, markets, canons, and exclusions, and may reproduce colonial, patriarchal, racial, religious, or political-messianic imaginaries. However, literary form itself can also make the fissures of these orders visible, preserve unreconciled voices, expose the instability of identities, and produce new distributions of the sensible (Rancière 1999). Literature thus presents itself as an ambivalent artefact of epistemic deviation, by displacing categories, images, and narratives into other regimes of legibility, in which they may be reactivated as instruments of domination or reconfigured as critical resources.

Applied to the field of Theology and Literature, this approach makes it possible to understand literature as a space of theological heterologies. Heterology does not designate generic interdisciplinarity, nor the simple inclusion of new cultural objects in theological discourse. It concerns the encounter with forms of alterity that cannot be entirely absorbed by the categories of the same. Literature is theologically relevant because it exposes theology to experiences, languages, memories, and forms of life that resist conceptual reduction. It does not merely offer new contents for theological reflection, but displaces the conditions from which theology perceives its objects, constitutes its subjects, and formulates its questions.

The central thesis is that the dialogue between Theology and Literature can contribute to renewing the liberationist method by expanding theological *seeing*. Literature does not merely add a new cultural source to reflection on faith; it makes it possible to perceive the complexity of concrete lives, the ethical density of spiritualities, and the processes through which these may become political spiritualities. By exposing theology to forms of alterity that it does not entirely control, literature becomes a critical space for thinking about a theology committed to liberation, plurality, and the unfinished complexity of human history.

The hypothesis of this article is that literature can contribute to the methodological renewal of Liberation Theologies when it functions not merely as a cultural object interpreted by theology, but as a theological heterology: an encounter with alterity capable of modifying theological language, its objects, and the position of the speaking subject. Through an archaeo-genealogical approach, the article examines how this literary mediation can expand the moment of *seeing* by articulating the critique of structures and regimes of power with attention to processes of subjectivation and genealogies of ethics.

The article proceeds in four stages. First, it situates Theology and Literature within the methodological renewal of Liberation Theologies through Antônio Manzatto's anthropological method. Second, it develops an archaeo-genealogical approach to literature through Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, leading to the concept of theological

heterology. Third, it formulates literature as a practice for discerning genealogies of power and ethics. Finally, it applies this framework to Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Adélia Prado, examining how literary language can challenge theological apparatuses and foster alternative forms of subjectivation linked to solidarity and the option for the poor.

2. Liberation Theology in the Dialogue Between Theology and Literature by Antônio Manzatto

Although the dialogue between theology and literature has long-standing antecedents in the Christian tradition, as evidenced by the mythical, narrative, symbolic, and poetic traditions of the Scriptures, its systematisation as an academic field of research is relatively recent. In the Latin American context, this emergence must be understood within the horizon of the conciliar renewal promoted by the Second Vatican Council and, more specifically, by Liberation Theologies, which shifted the centre of theological reflection towards the historical experience of the poor, the oppressed, and subalternised subjects. By making social reality a fundamental hermeneutical locus, Liberation Theologies gave centrality to the moment of seeing, that is, to the analysis of the historical, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that structure human life.

This shift made it possible for literature to be progressively received not as a mere cultural ornament or aesthetic illustration of doctrinal contents, but as a mediation capable of expanding the theological perception of reality. Literature does not replace sociology, nor does it offer knowledge that competes with that of the human sciences; it makes perceptible the lived experience of subjects within structures. Through characters, conflicts, silences, memories, affects, desires, images of the body, and narrative forms, the literary work makes it possible to perceive how poverty, exclusion, violence, hope, and resistance are internalised, narrated, imagined, and transformed by subjects.

In Brazil, this sensitivity has important historical-methodological antecedents prior to the formal constitution of the field of Theology and Literature. One of them is the presence of Robert Garric at the University of São Paulo in 1934, as a professor of French literature in the *mission française* that participated in the inauguration of the teaching activities of the newly created USP. Garric was also one of the relevant figures of French social Catholicism and the creator of the *Équipes Sociales*, founded in France in 1921. His proposal articulated popular action and social education through the engagement of young Christian intellectuals in sharing knowledge with poor young people, aiming at their human and professional qualification. It was not simply a matter of social assistance, but of a pedagogy for rebuilding “social friendship” in the face of the “social discord” caused by war, inequalities, and the political revolutions of the interwar period. The experience of the trenches of the First World War, in which Garric had perceived forms of coexistence and mutual care among people from different social classes, became the core of his pedagogy: bringing separated worlds closer together, creating bonds between university and people, and transforming culture into a mediation of historical responsibility (Villas Boas 2022, pp. 118–19).

Garric’s importance for this genealogy lies neither in representing an endogenous Brazilian tradition nor in having created the see–judge–act method, which properly belongs to the Jocist tradition of Joseph Cardijn, but in having provided one of the historical mediations through which this pedagogical and spiritual framework was received and reworked in Brazil, while also planting the seeds of an articulation between literary formation, Christian spirituality, and the see–judge–act approach to reading and transforming reality. As the *Équipes Sociales* expanded into Belgium and drew closer to the Young Christian Workers, they incorporated the Jocist see–judge–act method. This articulation enabled the joint importation of the experience of the Social Teams and the YCW method into the favelas

of Rio de Janeiro, in dialogue with Catholic intellectuals connected to the Centro Dom Vital. In this way, Garric helped to create a passage between French social Catholicism, the university, literature, popular action, and the critical reading of reality. *Seeing* appeared as a pedagogical exercise of attention to the concrete world; *judging*, as discernment of this reality in light of a socially committed Christian consciousness; and *acting*, as a practice of encounter, formation, and solidarity capable of breaking down the distance between intellectual elites and the popular classes (Villas Boas 2022, pp. 119–20).

This mediation became relevant to the later history of Liberation Theologies because it anticipated a decisive intuition of the Latin American method: reality needs to be read before being theologically interpreted. Later, this pedagogy would be deepened by Dom Hélder Câmara as he articulated the Jocist method with the contribution of Paulo Freire, so that poor communities might learn to “read the world” in order also to read the book—including the Bible. From this convergence would emerge practices such as Bible Circles and Basic Ecclesial Communities, in which the reading of Scripture was linked to the reading of the political, social, and economic problems experienced by the communities (Villas Boas 2022, pp. 140–41).

Garric’s presence also makes it possible to connect literature and social commitment in a more nuanced way. His chair in French literature at USP was not merely an academic fact; it was situated within an intellectual environment in which literature, culture, and social action intersected. This presence seems to have contributed to what Antonio Candido called “tension and mystery” in authors such as Jorge de Lima, Murilo Mendes, and the early Vinícius de Moraes: on the one hand, the theme of the ineffable; on the other, fervour directed towards social action. Garric’s pedagogical experience also appears in the testimony of Simone de Beauvoir, his former student, who recalls the impact of his classes as a call to place one’s life “at the service” of others. Garric thus represents an early form of articulation between literary formation, spiritual experience, and historical engagement, preparing the cultural ground so that, decades later, literature could be theologically assumed as a mediation for reading reality (Villas Boas 2022, p. 120).

At the international level, this openness found programmatic expression in the issue of the journal *Concilium* devoted to the relationship between theology and literature, published in 1976. The editorial by Jean-Pierre Jossua and Johann Baptist Metz stated that literary form could offer a “new rigour” to theological thought, shifting it from systematic abstraction towards the lived experience of faith (Jossua and Metz 1976, p. 5). This movement engaged with the linguistic turn, hermeneutics, and the crisis of speculative theological languages, creating an intellectual environment in which authors such as Paul Ricœur and Adolphe Gesché would become important references for thinking about the relationship between language, experience, meaning, and revelation.

It is within this horizon that Antônio Manzatto’s contribution must be situated. His work does not inaugurate the relationship between Christian faith, literature, and social reality in a broad sense, since this relationship had been prepared by earlier experiences of social Catholicism, cultural formation, critical reading of reality, and reception of the *see–judge–act* method. What Manzatto accomplishes, however, is decisive: he transforms this historical-cultural sensitivity into an academic theological method. By publishing *Teologia e Literatura: reflexão teológica a partir da antropologia contida nos romances de Jorge Amado* (*Theology and Literature: Theological Reflection Based on the Anthropology Contained in the Novels of Jorge Amado*) in 1994¹, based on the doctoral thesis defended in 1993 at the Université catholique de Louvain under the supervision of Adolphe Gesché, Manzatto establishes the first Brazilian methodological landmark in the field of Theology and Literature. Literature ceases to be treated as a repertoire of religious images or an illustration of theological

contents and comes to be received as the narrative configuration of a human universe, from which theological reflection itself can be reworked (Villas Boas 2020a, pp. 25–27).

The originality of the proposal must be understood within the methodological transformations promoted by Liberation Theologies. By shifting the starting point of theological reflection towards the historical reality of the poor and subalternised subjects, Liberation Theology gave centrality to the moment of *seeing*: the analysis of the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that structure human life. Manzatto preserves this horizon but introduces a decisive inflexion. Literature does not replace socio-analytical mediation; it expands the capacity to perceive the concrete experience of subjects, that is, the way in which poverty, exclusion, desire, celebration, love, violence, and hope are lived, narrated, and symbolically elaborated.

It is in this sense that the choice of *Tenda dos Milagres*, by Jorge Amado, becomes methodologically significant. The work is not taken as a simple illustrative example of a previously formulated theology, but as the expression of a situated anthropology: that of the poor, racialised, discriminated Brazilian, subjected to structures of underdevelopment, but also capable of celebration, love, resistance, and the search for liberation (Manzatto 1994, pp. 180–220). Literature thus makes it possible to grasp the human not only as an abstract category or sociological datum, but as a sensible, historical, and contradictory existence.

Manzatto's contribution must therefore be read as a cultural reconfiguration of liberationist mediation. Instead of restricting *seeing* to a predominantly quantitative observation of social structures, literary narrative offers a qualitative analysis of the human condition. It reveals ways of feeling, imagining, and inhabiting the world that cannot be reduced to sociological explanation, although they remain inseparable from concrete relations of power and inequality. Literature thus becomes a mediation through which theology can listen to reality not only in its structural determinations, but also in its experiences, affects, conflicts, and forms of resistance (Villas Boas 2020a, pp. 36–38).

This shift is particularly important for the development of Liberation Theologies at the end of the twentieth century. Following the crisis of certain homogeneous uses of socio-analytical mediation, especially in the face of the exhaustion of the great totalising models of historical transformation, literature offered another way of thinking about liberation: not as the application of an ideological scheme to reality, but as listening to the plural ways in which subjects interpret their own condition. Manzatto's work thus opens a passage between literary anthropology and theological anthropology, preserving the concern for justice while shifting it towards the cultural and symbolic density of Latin American life.

2.1. From the Pioneering Initiative to the Consolidation of an Interdisciplinary Field

Manzatto's work did not remain isolated. It became a reference point for a generation of research that progressively constituted an interdisciplinary field among Theology, Religious Studies, Literary Studies, Philosophy, the Arts, and cultural studies. Still in the 1990s, Waldecy Tenório's research on João Cabral de Melo Neto emerged, *A bailadora andaluza: a explosão do sagrado na poesia de João Cabral* (1996), proposing a "theopoetic reading" from the perspective of Religious Studies. The coexistence of these two pioneering works already demonstrates that the Brazilian field did not develop under a single disciplinary framework: it emerged from the convergence of different ways of reading literature, religion, and culture (Tenório 1996; Villas Boas 2020b, p. 119).

In the following years, the expansion of the field occurred both through the establishment of institutional networks and through the multiplication of postgraduate research. Among the first initiatives registered in the CNPq Directory of Research Groups were LERTE—Literature, Religion and Theology, linked to PUC-SP and PUCPR—and the Theopoetics Group for Comparative Studies between Theology and Literature, linked to

UFSC and UEPB. In an earlier survey, at least twelve research groups were identified, distributed across different institutions and devoted, from diverse perspectives to the interfaces among religion, literature, art, mysticism, culture, and language (Villas Boas 2020b, pp. 116–17).

The creation of the Latin American Association of Literature and Theology—ALALITE—in 2006 constitutes another decisive milestone. Founded through collaborations among researchers from Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, the association promoted periodic meetings, encouraged the international circulation of research, and contributed to the creation of the journal *Teoliterária*, whose first issue was published in 2011. ALALITE consolidated an academic community that moved beyond dependence on individual initiatives and inserted Brazilian production into a Latin American network of theoretical and methodological dialogue (Villas Boas 2020b, pp. 118–19).

The data gathered by Antonio Geraldo Cantarela confirm the rapid expansion of this field in Brazil. In a survey conducted up to the first semester of 2017, the author identified 129 researchers linked to Theopoetics in Brazil, approximately 72% of whom held doctoral degrees. The mapped bibliographic production reached 1175 titles, including articles, books, chapters, and full papers published in conference proceedings. In addition, there were 62 master's dissertations and 49 doctoral theses devoted to themes situated within the field, amounting to 1286 publications considered in the research (Cantarela 2018, pp. 193–94, 200).

These data reveal not only quantitative growth, but also a change in the institutional configuration of the area itself. The researchers' academic backgrounds are distributed mainly among Literary Studies, Theology, and Religious Studies. However, Cantarela observes that only 16% of the researchers effectively moved between Literary Studies and the areas directly related to the study of religion, which indicates that interdisciplinarity, although constitutive of the field, still represents a methodological and institutional task to be further developed (Cantarela 2018, pp. 198–99).

The expansion did not, therefore, produce a single model of interpretation. On the contrary, Cantarela's survey reveals a plurality of approaches: readings that subordinate literature to theology; studies of religious themes in literary works; analyses of the literary form of biblical texts; research on the reception of biblical narratives by literature; perspectives that understand the literary work as a theological locus; readings of literature as a non-theoretical way of thinking about the *Theós*; and proposals that recognise a dimension of sacredness in poetic form itself (Cantarela 2018, pp. 210–18). Brazilian Theopoetics is thus constituted less as a homogeneous school than as a field of debate concerning the conditions, limits, and possibilities of the encounter between literature and religion.

This plurality also requires a conceptual distinction between Theopoetics and the theological heterology proposed in this article. Theopoetics designates here the broader and methodologically diverse field of relations among literature, theology, religion, and the sacred described above, whereas theological heterology designates a specific epistemological operation that may occur within this field. It takes place when literature does not merely provide theology with themes, representations, or aesthetic forms, but exposes theological discourse to an alterity capable of modifying its language, its objects, its criteria of intelligibility, and the position of the speaking subject. Not every theopoetic approach is therefore a theological heterology. The decisive criterion is whether the encounter with literature produces an epistemic displacement within theological discourse itself.

Within this context, Manzatto's legacy remains decisive, but not exclusive. His proposal inaugurates a line of interpretation in which literature is received as a mediation for knowledge of human reality. Subsequent methodological debate contributed to clarifying the conditions of this dialogue, particularly the need to hold together literature

as a mediation of human reality and the aesthetic, critical, and epistemic autonomy of the literary work.² Further developments have shifted the question from how literature can function as a mediation for theology to what happens to theological knowledge itself when it encounters a literary discourse that cannot be reduced to categories established in advance (cf. Villas Boas 2020a).

2.2. *The Anthropological Method: From Literary Anthropology to the Theological Reinterpretation of Reality*

Manzatto's so-called anthropological method should not be understood as a rigid procedure or a technique for extracting theological contents from literature. Rather, it is a hermeneutical orientation grounded in the affinity between literary anthropology and theological anthropology. Literature is of interest to theology because it configures ways of understanding the human being in the world; theology is of interest to literature because the experience of transcendence, images of God, religious symbols, and practices of faith likewise belong to the human universe that the literary work may represent.

For Manzatto, theology is not a reflection on an abstract God or one distant from history. It is a critical reflection on the relationship between God and human beings, situated within the concreteness of their social, cultural, and historical experiences. For this reason, a theology that does not allow itself to be challenged by the reality of the people runs the risk of becoming "logology", that is, a discourse of words about words, detached from the actual living conditions of those to whom it intends to speak (Manzatto 1994, pp. 40–41). Theology is a "second act": it arises from lived experience of faith and must help subjects respond to the concrete challenges of their time (Manzatto 1994, p. 53).

Literature, in turn, is not defined by Manzatto merely as a vehicle for ideas or a repertoire of themes. Its specificity lies in symbolically representing reality. Unlike scientific discourse, which seeks analytical precision, literature works with images, metaphors, paradoxes, and narratives. It does not simply describe reality, but refigures it, making perceptible human experiences that escape immediate classifications. In this sense, fiction can offer a deeper truth than simple empirical verification, because it reaches the way subjects live their expectations, failures, fears, desires, anxieties, and hopes (Manzatto 1994, pp. 22, 38).

The method therefore operates through three interconnected movements. The first consists of a careful reading of the work in its aesthetic and narrative autonomy. One does not begin by looking in the literary work for illustrations of doctrines or previously selected religious themes. Rather, one seeks to understand what human world the narrative constructs, what conflicts it exposes, what sensibilities it mobilises, what social relations it makes visible, and what forms of life it imagines or contests.

The second movement is the explicit formulation of literary anthropology. In the case of Jorge Amado, Manzatto identifies an anthropology marked by poverty, racial discrimination, underdevelopment, social exclusion, and the search for recognition. However, Amado's narrative does not reduce subjects to the condition of victims. It also presents celebration, love, corporeality, friendship, and struggle as experiences in which the characters anticipate possibilities of happiness and liberation (Manzatto 1994, pp. 180–220).

The third movement consists of the critical dialogue between this literary anthropology and theological anthropology. The trajectory does not move from the theological to the anthropological, as though doctrine merely applied its answers to an already known reality. The path is the reverse: it starts from the human in order to arrive at the theological. The humanity of Jesus, historically narrated in the Gospels, constitutes the path of access to the understanding of his divinity; therefore, the revelation of God cannot be separated from the concrete human condition (Manzatto 1997, pp. 8–9; Villas Boas 2020a, pp. 37–39).

It is at this point that the anthropological method is situated within the horizon of *see–judge–act*. Literature participates in *seeing* because it offers a qualitative mediation of reality. It allows theology to perceive what structural categories, by themselves, do not reach: lived suffering, social imagination, moral ambiguity, affects, modes of resistance, and the hopes that sustain everyday life. *Judging* is not reduced to applying dogmatic norms to this experience, but implies a Christological and liberationist reinterpretation of the human condition. *Acting*, in turn, follows from the understanding that theology is at the service of humanisation: it must collaborate so that faith becomes a practice of justice, dignity, and liberation.

Magalhães's critique proved important precisely because it made explicit the risk of transforming this dynamic into a fixed structure of question and answer, in which literature would formulate the questions and theology would already possess the solutions in advance. However, a closer reading of Manzatto's work, of its conciliar, anthropological, and Latin American foundations, makes it possible to perceive that his proposal is not guided by an apologetic logic. Literature does not appear as a catechetical resource, nor revelation as a closed answer; it constitutes a mediation through which theology is brought back to the concrete human condition. It is, therefore, a relationship of co-responsibility: theological reflection allows itself to be challenged by narrated reality and seeks to discern, in its conflicts and aspirations, richer ways of understanding the God who reveals himself in history (Villas Boas 2020a, pp. 42–44).

The anthropological method thus inaugurates a lasting contribution to Liberation Theologies.³ It expands theological *seeing* by introducing literature as a language capable of making the complexity of concrete lives perceptible. From this legacy, it becomes possible to develop an archaeo-genealogical approach that investigates not only the social structures of oppression, but also the discourses, imaginaries, practices, and forms of subjectivation through which subjects live, resist, and recreate their ethical and spiritual experiences. Manzatto subsequently extended this methodological approach to Brazilian popular music, exploring the relationship between theology, literature, and song (Manzatto 2015, 2019, 2022).

3. The Archaeo-Genealogical Task of Theological Knowledge and the Role of Literature

The dialogue with literature initiated within Liberation Theologies can be deepened through an archaeo-genealogical perspective on theological knowledge. Its purpose is to interrogate the historical conditions through which certain theological discursive practices came to be recognised beyond the normative self-referentiality of theology. Archaeology shifts the investigation away from the search for an immutable essence of theology towards the description of the rules that, in each historical configuration, determine who may speak (Foucault [1969] 2012, pp. 59–67), about which objects (Foucault [1969] 2012 pp. 49–58), through which concepts (Foucault [1969] 2012, pp. 69–79), and from which institutional locations (Foucault [1969] 2012, pp. 60–62). In this way, theology ceases to be examined solely according to the internal coherence of its doctrines and comes to be analysed as a historically situated discursive practice.

Foucauldian genealogy extends this task by showing that the conditions of production of theological discourse are not exclusively intradiscursive. They are traversed by relations of force or apparatuses of power operating in institutions, practices of government, and processes of subject constitution. This does not mean affirming that every theological discourse is merely a disguised expression of power, but rather investigating how certain formulations participate in apparatuses that guide conduct, distribute authority, establish regimes of truth, and define legitimate models of subjectivity, whether as discursive practices situated within processes of genealogies of power or situated within processes

of genealogies of ethics. Archaeology describes the conditions that make the emergence of a discourse possible, whereas genealogy follows the practices and relations of force through which that discourse produces historical effects (Foucault 1984, p. 43). The passage between the two makes it possible to analyse theological knowledge in its three inseparable dimensions: as a discursive formation, as a participant in apparatuses of power, and as a space for the production of alternative modes of subjectivation.

This approach does not establish a rigid succession between archaeology of knowledge, genealogy of power, and genealogy of ethics. Rather, these are different faces of the same field of intelligibility. Theological categories do not remain confined to treatises, ecclesiastical institutions, or faculties of theology. They circulate through political discourses, pastoral practices, educational forms, social movements, literary narratives, and artistic languages. In this circulation, they may preserve their previous meanings, acquire new functions, or be profoundly transformed. The archaeo-genealogical task seeks to follow these displacements, identify the discontinuities that make them possible, and discern the effects they produce on collective life and on the subjects' relationship with themselves, with others, and with truth.

It is at this point that the present article situates the role of literature as an interface between Foucauldian heterotopia and Certeauian heterology. In Foucault, literature can be understood as a heterotopic practice of language, that is, as another space constituted within the discursive order itself, in which incompatible forms of rationality are juxtaposed, habitual relations between words and things are suspended, and the historical limits of what a culture admits as thinkable, sayable, and true become perceptible. Literature does not simply represent an alternative world. It introduces an outside within language, disorganises established classifications, and exposes experiences, voices, and forms of existence excluded by dominant regimes of representation. In Certeau, this displacement takes the form of heterology. Although the term may initially mean *discourse on the other*, a discourse only becomes effectively heterological when the alterity about which it seeks to speak modifies its language, displaces the position of the one who speaks, and interrogates the institutions that authorise its claim to truth. The other is not simply included within an already constituted discursive order. Its presence alters the conditions according to which that order organises objects, distributes identities, and establishes the boundaries between the same and the other (Foucault [1966] 2010, 1986; Certeau 1986).

However, literature and heterologies should not be identified in advance with resistance or emancipation. The circulation of theological categories beyond their institutional locations is constitutively ambivalent. Images such as chosen people, sacrifice, providence, mission, conversion, redemption, martyrdom, or spiritual combat can be displaced into the political field and integrated into apparatuses that sacralise authorities, legitimise violence, construct homogeneous identities, or transform adversaries into absolute enemies. In such cases, theological heterologies are associated with a genealogy of power. The theological reappears outside formal theology, but continues to function as a technology of legitimation, government of conduct, and production of obedient subjects⁴.

In other configurations, however, literature can foster a properly heterological operation, through which theological categories are removed from their dominant uses and reinscribed in cultural practices that interrogate violence, expose silenced suffering, destabilise closed identities, and make possible other relationships with alterity. In such cases, theological heterologies become legible as part of a genealogy of ethics. The analysis no longer asks only which doctrines are represented, but begins to investigate which forms of subjectivation literature makes culturally possible, what relationship the subject establishes with itself, how it allows itself to be affected by the other, what truth it accepts to speak about itself, and which practices of care, solidarity, courage, resistance, or transformation

come to guide its way of living. The present article thus seeks to analyse the role of literature as theological heterology as an exercise in the ethical discernment of culture, carried out through the displacement of theological concepts that translate social practices associated with ethical agendas.

3.1. Literature from the Perspective of Michel Foucault

In Foucault, literature can be seen as a heterotopic practice of language, which does not mean affirming that every literary work possesses an absolute exteriority in relation to discourses, institutions, or relations of power. Rather, it means investigating certain operations through which literary writing brings together incompatible forms of rationality, interrupts the habitual relations between words and things, displaces positions of enunciation, and makes perceptible the historical limits of an order of knowledge. Literature is therefore relevant to the archaeo-genealogical task of theological knowledge not only as a cultural object to be interpreted, but as a practice capable of altering the field in which objects, subjects, concepts, and discursive strategies become recognisable.

The reception of the relationship between Foucault's work and literary studies can be organised into two main orientations. The first uses Foucauldian categories, such as discourse, discipline, normalisation, biopolitics, governmentality, regimes of truth, and subjectivation, to interpret literary works. From this perspective, Foucault provides conceptual tools for literary criticism. The second orientation, more directly relevant to the present article, investigates the function performed by literature within Foucauldian thought itself, especially during the 1960s, when it appears associated with madness, death, transgression, simulacrum, absence of work, the dispersion of the subject, and the thought of the outside. The difference between the two orientations is decisive: it is not merely a matter of using Foucault to read literary texts, but of understanding how literature participates in the formation of his archaeology and his critique of modern anthropological thought.

Machado (2005) offered the main systematic reconstruction of this second problem, when he showed that Foucault's interest in literature was not marginal, but formed part of his critique of philosophies of consciousness and the human sciences. While psychiatry, clinical medicine, and anthropological forms of knowledge constituted man simultaneously as subject and object of knowledge, modern literature made manifest a language that could no longer be grounded in the sovereignty of consciousness. It thus appeared as a contestation of philosophical humanism and as an alternative to a conception of language understood as the expression of an originary interiority (Machado 2005, pp. 9–13). Misse (2017) recognises precisely at this point the singularity of Machado's reading: literature allows Foucault to think a language that is not organised around the centrality of man.

Machado's reconstruction articulates three main nuclei: the experience of madness, death, and the being of language. To this reading were added studies on work and authorship (do Carmo 2013), the return of language and truth-telling (Ternes 2011), writing as an experience of transformation of the subject (Santos et al. 2018), the political continuity of literature in Foucault's later thought (Blanco 2020; Galantin 2021), and the relationship between the ontology of literature and subjectivation (de la Higuera Espín 2020). These studies prevent the Foucauldian trajectory from being reduced to a rigid opposition between a first moment, in which literature would have been privileged, and a second moment, in which it would have been completely abandoned.

The posthumous publication *La grande étrangère: à propos de la littérature* (2013), translated as *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature* in 2015, and *Folie, langage, littérature* (2019), translated as *Madness, Language, Literature* in 2023, substantially modified this state of the art. The first volume brings together radio programmes, lectures, and interventions

delivered mainly between 1963 and 1970, involving analyses of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Roman Jakobson, and the Marquis de Sade, and constitutes the most important corpus for the formulation of the historical ontology of literature. The second brings together thirteen texts, most of them previously unpublished, produced between the mid-1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, with the exception of *L'expérience phénoménologique—l'expérience chez Bataille*, which could be dated to the 1950s. It shows Foucault experimenting with methods of literary analysis and relating literature, structuralism, linguistics, theory of statements, ethnology, sociology, and the extralinguistic conditions of discourse (Foucault [2013] 2015, [2019] 2023; Revel 2023). Taken together, the two volumes confirm the centrality of literature in the critique of the subject, but also show that it was progressively understood as a historically situated discursive practice within the order of discourse. In this spirit, in the lecture on Sade delivered in Buffalo in 1970, it becomes clear that “every statement presupposes an obedient logic; or, on the contrary, denounces the criteria of identification and admissibility on which the categorisation and general organisation of knowledge are based in a given period” (Foucault [2013] 2015, p. 146). Literature is situated within this pendulum, without being completely co-opted, but neither positioned as a naturally transgressive exteriority.

3.1.1. Borges and Literature as an Archaeological Event

The archaeological function of literature is exemplarily manifested in the preface to *The Order of Things*. Foucault states that the book arose from reading a text by Jorge Luis Borges that provoked in him prolonged laughter, accompanied by a discomfort difficult to overcome. It is the essay “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”, in which Borges attributes to a supposed Chinese encyclopaedia a taxonomic series incompatible with the Western classificatory space (Borges [1952] 2011; Foucault [1966] 2010, pp. ix–xiii).

The force of the text does not lie simply in the fantastic or absurd character of its categories. What provokes Foucault’s laughter is the impossibility of finding a common space in which these elements could be placed side by side. The strangeness lies not in each category taken separately, but in the series that brings them together. Borges does not merely offer an alternative taxonomy. He disorganises the very place from which any classification could be carried out. It is in this sense that utopias can be distinguished from heterotopias. Utopias may present unreal worlds or different orders, but they preserve an intelligible space in which words find a place. Heterotopias, by contrast, corrode language, prevent things from being named in a stable manner, and undo the syntax that allows them to be held together. Borges’s classification does not construct a coherent alternative world. It momentarily ruins the familiarity of the grid through which a culture distributes identities, differences, similarities, and analogies.

Sabot (2006, pp. 11–12) conceives that this experience of language and thought through Borges’s text “in fact makes it possible to clarify the status of the archaeological perspective insofar as it functions as a proof by absurdity of the compelling necessity of order in order to make ‘words and things hold together (beside and opposite one another)’. [...] The alterity of Borges’s ‘Chinese Encyclopaedia’ only makes sense when referred back to the interiority of our Western culture, to its mania for order, for the search for a common place from which words and things can communicate. Borges’s original deviation consequently assumes a problematising function with regard both to the formal conditions of possibility and to the conditions of the concrete exercise of thought: what is thinkable, except against the background of an impossible to think, of an unthinkable possible?”

da Silva (2021) interprets Borges, in this context, as a catalyst of the archaeological procedure. Literature does not appear merely as an aesthetic reference used to ornament a philosophical exposition. It produces the astonishment from which it becomes possible to

ask on what “table”, according to what space of identities and differences, a culture is able to bring things together and separate them. Archaeology arises, in this gesture, from the experience that order is neither natural nor necessary. What appears self-evident depends on a historical configuration that establishes what can be thought, named, classified, and recognised as true.

This function also explains the presence of *Don Quixote* in *The Order of Things*. Cervantes’s character continues to seek similarities between the words of chivalric books and the things he encounters in the world. However, he lives within a historical configuration in which this correspondence has already dissolved. Signs have ceased to be inscribed in the texture of the world and have come to relate to one another within representation. *Don Quixote* thus occupies the boundary between two *epistemes*: it dramatises the exhaustion of the Renaissance order of resemblance and the emergence of the Classical order of representation (Bach 2016; Foucault [1966] 2010).

The character does not theoretically explain this transformation. He makes it visible through the failure of his adventures. Don Quixote is constituted by the books he has read, but encounters a world in which words no longer coincide with things. Literature functions, in this way, as a narrative archaeology of a discontinuity. It does not merely represent a particular *episteme*, but rather makes perceptible the moment in which one order ceases to function and another begins to organise the field of the thinkable.

Borges and Cervantes are exemplary in presenting literature not merely as one more document in the archive of an epoch. Such works occupy liminal positions in which distinct forms of rationality intersect and enter into conflict. It is in this capacity to produce an experience of discontinuity that literature assumes a heterotopic function. It introduces, within cultural language itself, a space in which order can be seen from its limits.

3.1.2. Madness, Absence of Work, and Excluded Language

The relationship between literature and archaeology was already present in History of Madness. Foucault does not consider madness a natural reality that psychiatry would have progressively discovered (Foucault 1972). He analyses the historical gestures of division through which certain forms of conduct and language were separated from reason, confined, medicalised, and transformed into objects of knowledge.

Literature occupies a singular position in this history because it preserves forms of language that do not fully conform to rationally authorised discourse. In Shakespeare, particularly in *King Lear*, madness can still speak from within its own tragic experience. In Cervantes, a distance is established between the mad character and the gaze that recognises his madness. In Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew*, deviant speech appears as pantomime, multiplication of voices, and disintegration of identity. In Sade, reason produces a discourse so meticulous and excessive that it ultimately exposes its own violence. In Artaud, madness is no longer simply represented: it manifests itself as the void of thought, the suffering of the word, and the impossibility of constituting a finished work (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 7–23; Machado 2005).

The notion of “absence of work” does not mean that madness contains a secret work that criticism should recover. It indicates the limit at which language can no longer organise itself as a totality endowed with meaning and attributable to a sovereign subject. Modern literature approaches this limit without simply identifying itself with mental illness. It traverses the distance between the constitution of a work and the possibility of its disintegration.

The texts published in *Madness, Language, Literature* (2023) broaden this problematic. Foucault describes the madman’s speech as socially ambivalent speech: it may be rejected as devoid of value and, at the same time, heard as involuntarily bearing a truth. The figure

of the court jester illustrates this ambiguity. He occupies a position without institutional authority, but can say what authorised discourses are unable to pronounce. Modern literature becomes, to a certain extent, the heir to this speech “from below” or “from beyond”, not because it has privileged access to a hidden essence, but because it alters the rules according to which something can be heard as true (Foucault [2019] 2023, pp. 25–42).

This dimension is directly relevant to the archaeo-genealogy of theological knowledge. The question is not only which images of God, faith, or religion a work represents, but which words have previously been disqualified as delirium, blasphemy, heresy, ignorance, or lack of competence. Literature can make these words circulate in new positions, transforming marginalised characters into operators of truth and exposing the contingency of the authorities that define who may speak.

3.1.3. The Historical Ontology of Literature

The lectures collected in *Language, Madness, and Desire* make it possible to formulate what may be called a historical ontology⁵ of literature. The French philosopher does not seek a universal and timeless essence of literature. On the contrary, he argues that literature, in its modern sense, constitutes a relatively recent event, situated between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 45–47).

Authors such as Euripides, Dante, and Cervantes belong to what may today be called literature, but their works did not necessarily maintain with the language of their own cultures the modern relationship that Foucault calls literary. Literature emerges when the relationship between language and work becomes reflexive, unstable, and problematic.

Foucault distinguishes three elements: language, work, and literature. Language is the system that makes speaking possible and, simultaneously, the accumulated murmur of everything that has already been said. The work is a configuration in which this flow condenses and acquires a relatively delimited form. Literature does not entirely coincide with either of these two terms. It occupies the distance between language and the work, forming the third vertex of a triangle. It is within this distance that the question “what is literature?” arises. The question is not external to the work, as though it were formulated only by the critic before an already constituted object. It belongs to the very mode of being of modern literature. Each work seeks to constitute itself as literature and, simultaneously, contests what has already been recognised as literary. Each word inscribed on the page both realises and violates literature, since no word is literary by nature (Foucault 2005, pp. 137–74; Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 47–51).

This displacement also raises the question of the author-function, through which the attribution of discourse to an author operates as a historically constituted principle of classification and regulation (Foucault 2006).

The ontology of literature is, therefore, an ontology of its non-coincidence with itself. The work does not realise a prior essence called literature. It traverses a distance that it can never abolish. For this reason, the history of literature does not present itself as a progressive development or dialectical overcoming of earlier forms. Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Surrealism do not represent reconciled stages within a higher totality. Each literary gesture emerges as contestation, repetition, and transformation of inherited language.

Machado identifies in this conception a problematisation of the limits of dialectics. This does not imply rejecting its capacity to recognise contradictions, conflicts, and historical mediations. The limit appears when dialectics becomes a totalising logic, in which difference is understood only as a provisional moment destined to be negated, incorporated, or overcome by a synthesis. In this configuration, the other loses its irreducibility and is recognised only insofar as it performs a function in the movement through which

the same returns to itself. Literature, by contrast, sustains the distances between reason and madness, presence and absence, life and death, work and absence of work without necessarily leading them towards reconciliation. There remains a remainder that cannot be integrated into a higher totality and a difference capable of continuing to transform the subject even after every attempt at conceptual closure (Machado 2005; Godzich 1986).

Foucault organises this ontology around three figures: transgression, death, and simulacrum. Sade represents transgression. His writing gathers the philosophical, moral, and novelistic discourses of the eighteenth century, repeats them, exaggerates them, and profanes them. Transgression does not consist in reaching an exterior absolutely free from norms, but in traversing the limit and revealing its contingency (Foucault 1963). Chateaubriand represents death and the library. His work seeks to speak from an already posthumous existence and to install itself within the continuity of books. While Sade seeks to destroy previous language, Chateaubriand attempts to survive within it. Modern literature emerges simultaneously as violence against the library and as a desire to be received into its murmur. Proust represents the simulacrum. *In Search of Lost Time* narrates the path that should lead to the writing of the work. However, when the work could begin, the book ends. The text actually read is the narrative of the approach towards a work that remains absent. The being of literature thus resides in the distance between existing writing and the continually deferred work (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 52–58).

3.1.4. The Death of God and the Void of Language

This historical ontology must be understood within the horizon of the death of God. In Foucault, the expression does not simply designate the sociological decline in religious beliefs. Under Nietzsche's influence, it indicates the disappearance of a transcendent foundation capable of guaranteeing the unity between language, truth, world, and subject (McSweeney 2013).

In the previous configuration, human language referred to an originary Word, identified with God, nature, truth, Scripture, or the book of the world. Human words were supposed to repeat, translate, or restore this first language. Rhetoric established the mediation between the opacity of words and the presumed transparency of a prior truth (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 61–63).

Modern literature is born when this originary Word can no longer be heard. In place of divine or natural language, it encounters the multiplicity of words already uttered, the repetition of books, and the materiality of the library. The space of rhetoric is replaced by the space of the book. Language can no longer legitimise itself through fidelity to a primordial presence.

Modernity sought to fill this place through the figure of man. The human subject became simultaneously the empirical object of knowledge and the transcendental foundation of the possibility of knowing (Foucault [1966] 2010). The human sciences transformed man into the epistemological successor of God. The relevance of literature lies precisely in its refusal of this substitution. It not only emerges after the death of God; it contributes to the disappearance of the man who sought to occupy the place left empty by the divine foundation (Machado 2005; Sales 2023).

Literature thus interrupts the continuity between “I think”, “I speak”, and “I am”. Language no longer appears as the instrument of a sovereign consciousness. It speaks in the space in which the subject is dispersed. In Mallarmé, when faced with the question “who speaks?”, the answer does not refer to the poet as the origin of meaning, but to the word itself in its solitude and precariousness (Ternes 2011).

Mallarmé's project of the “Book” expresses this event. The book was supposed to contain, repeat, and destroy all books. Its whiteness, however, does not manifest the silent

presence of a divine truth. It bears witness to the impossibility of recovering that presence. The modern book replaces the book of nature and of God only by recognising that no work will be able to restore its fullness (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 63–65).

For this reason, it would not be rigorous to claim that literature simply takes the place of God. It does not offer a new aesthetic foundation to replace the theological foundation; rather, literature inhabits and works within the void opened by the death of God. It fills it with narratives, images, characters, voices, and possible worlds, but does not close it. It is a lacunary filling: each work gives form to the void and, at the same time, preserves its openness.

This difference is theologically decisive. If literature were understood as a secular substitute for religion, art would come to perform the same function previously attributed to revelation. In the Foucauldian conception, however, literature prevents God, man, the author, consciousness, or language itself from being converted into a definitive guarantee of meaning. It transforms the absence of foundation into an experience of language, rather than into a new theology of foundation.

The constellation of authors mobilised by Foucault manifests different dimensions of this experience. In Mallarmé, the one who speaks disappears. In Raymond Roussel, the work emerges from procedures, repetitions, and minimal differences between words, rather than from the expression of an interiority. In Artaud, language becomes body, cry, suffering, and the threat of disintegration. In Bataille, experience traverses the field of the possible until it reaches the limit of the impossible. In Klossowski, the self multiplies into doubles and simulacra. In Blanchot, language turns towards the outside and exposes the disappearance of the subject who sought to control it (Foucault [1963] 1999, 2009, [2019] 2023; Machado 2005).

In *Madness, Language, Literature*, Flaubert and Balzac are included in this constellation. In *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* and *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, Foucault analyses literature as an assemblage of the “already said”. The work is formed by books, scientific discourses, religious images, commonplaces, heresies, philosophies, and classifications already in circulation. The characters do not sovereignly precede these discourses; they are constituted by them. Literature makes visible how religious, scientific, and social forms of knowledge are inscribed in gestures, bodies, desires, and ways of life (Foucault [2019] 2023, pp. 159–74).

In Balzac’s *The Quest of the Absolute*, Balthazar Claës seeks to reach the single principle capable of producing all of nature. At the deepest level, his project consists of occupying the place of God. The search for an absolute unity becomes an attempt to eliminate difference, dependence, and the relationship with the other. However, the narrative shows that the investigation depends precisely on what it seeks to render dispensable: family relationships, inheritances, debts, sexual differences, economic resources, and sacrifices made by other people. The novel thus displaces the absolute from self-referential unity towards the network of relationships that sustains existence (Foucault [2019] 2023, pp. 175–87).

This analysis offers a direct contribution to the critique of theological self-referentiality. Literature does not necessarily deny the absolute or transcendence. It can show the historical effects of a desire to possess them, to produce a unity without difference, and to occupy discursively the place of God. The theological question then shifts from the existence of the absolute to the practices through which subjects and institutions claim to represent it, administer it, or speak in its name.

3.1.5. From the Ontology of Literature to Forms of Genealogy

The passage from archaeology to genealogy prevents literature from being sacralised as a necessarily emancipatory counter-discourse. The lectures on Sade delivered in March 1970 in Buffalo, anticipating themes of Michel Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de

France in November of the same year, *The Order of Discourse*, already show this ambivalence. Sadean writing transgresses moral norms, but it also produces a meticulous rationality of desire, classifies bodies, organises practices, and legitimises relations of domination. A work may interrupt certain regimes of representation and, at the same time, institute other apparatuses of power (Foucault [2013] 2015, pp. 97–131).

Literature therefore does not possess an ethical value determined in advance. It can make excluded voices audible, destabilise identities, and open possibilities of subjectivation. It can equally naturalise violence, sacralise authorities, produce absolute enemies, or organise desires according to disciplinary rationalities. The genealogical question is not whether literature is essentially liberating, but what effects of knowledge, power, truth, and subjectivation are produced by its forms, characters, statements, and modes of circulation.

The texts published in English in 2023 also show that literature is not pure self-reference. The work internally produces the situations, objects, subjects, and positions of enunciation that make its statements possible. Foucault calls fiction the set of operations through which a work cuts out, shapes, and brings forth a part of the indefinite universe of what could be said. Fiction is not the opposite of truth. It is a practice of producing the outside that sustains discourse (Foucault [2019] 2023, pp. 129–51).

This conception makes it possible to specify the role of literature in the archaeo-genealogical task of theological knowledge. Literature is not limited to representing pre-existing religious themes. It produces the space in which certain words may appear as prayer, revelation, prophecy, blasphemy, confession, delirium, heresy, or silence. In doing so, it constitutes objects, subject positions, concepts, and discursive strategies that may displace institutional forms of recognising theological truth.

Literature functions as a heterotopic practice when it produces, within cultural language, a juxtaposition of incompatible rationalities that exposes the contingency of the dominant order. Its contribution to theology does not consist in providing another system of answers or in replacing revelation with a new literary transcendence. It consists of making visible the distance between the phenomenon of the disclosure of meaning identified as the Word and its historical appropriations, between truth and the regimes that claim to administer it, between alterity and the discourses that seek to capture it.

Literature participates in the archaeo-genealogy of theological knowledge when it interrupts the self-referentiality of discourse, exposes its historical conditions of production, and makes it possible to discern the effects of power and the ethical possibilities generated by the circulation of theological categories in culture. It does not offer theology merely new contents. It modifies the field from which theology perceives its objects, recognises its interlocutors, and interrogates its own claim to truth.

What this Foucauldian analysis adds to the liberationist method is therefore not another literary theory but a critical interrogation of seeing itself. If seeing is historically organised by regimes of discourse, then the preferential attention to the poor requires asking not only which structures produce poverty but also which languages render certain forms of suffering visible, intelligible, or invisible. Literature becomes relevant at precisely this epistemic threshold, by making perceptible the limits, exclusions, and historical conditions of theological seeing itself.

It is at this point that Foucauldian heterotopia encounters Michel de Certeau's heterology. In Foucault, literature disorganises the common space of classifications and reveals the void upon which a discursive order is constituted. In Certeau, it will be necessary to ask whether this opening allows the other to cease being merely an object of representation and effectively alter the language, position, and claims of the one who seeks to speak about it.

3.2. “By Means of the Fable”: The Reception of Foucault in Michel De Certeau

Michel de Certeau’s reflection on literature can be introduced through his reading of Michel Foucault in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, published in 1986 in the *Theory and History of Literature* series. It is a collection of essays, some previously published in French, brought together around the relationships between literature, history, psychoanalysis, mysticism, popular culture, and alterity. However, considering that Certeau taught literature at universities in California and that the volume organises different objects around a theory of discursive practices, *Heterologies* can be read, in an intellectual and pedagogical sense, as a course in literary theory on the ways in which the other appears, resists, and alters the discourses that seek to represent it (Godzich 1986; Certeau 1986).

The starting point for this trajectory can be found in the famous opening of *The Order of Things*. As already emphasised, Foucault states that his book arose from a text by Jorge Luis Borges, more precisely from the laughter provoked by the classification of animals attributed to a supposed Chinese encyclopaedia. The enumeration brings together beings belonging to incompatible orders and, in doing so, eliminates the common space in which things could be classified. Foucault observes that it is “through the fable” that not only the exotic charm of another system of thought becomes visible, but above all the limitation of our own system of thought. The fable does not offer positive knowledge of an alternative order. It interrupts the self-evidence of the existing order, revealing the contingency of the classifications that sustain the Western relationship between words and things (Foucault [1963] 1999, pp. IX–XIII).

Certeau takes up this event in the essay “The Laugh of Michel Foucault”. Foucault’s laughter is not interpreted as simple humour or mockery, but as a philosophical experience of dispossession. Faced with Borges’s classification, the philosopher ceases to occupy the position of one who already knows the rules of the object and becomes a reader surprised by something that disorganises the familiar surfaces of thought. In Certeau’s understanding, the fable therefore produces a displacement: it does not simply add new content to knowledge, but alters the position of the one who knows. The ship of fools, *Las Meninas*, the torture of Damians, and the encyclopaedia evoked by Borges perform a similar function in Foucault’s books. They do not illustrate concepts elaborated in advance; they are narrative scenes that trigger thought and modify the field of the visible (Certeau 1986, pp. 193–98).

Certeau’s reading of Foucault develops mainly in three essays: “The Black Sun of Language: Foucault”, “Micro-techniques and Panoptic Discourse: A Quid pro Quo” and “The Laugh of Michel Foucault”. These texts, written at different moments, form a trajectory that moves from the critique of *The Order of Things* to the analysis of *Discipline and Punish*, culminating in the recognition of Foucault as reader, cartographer, and experimenter. Certeau adopts the Foucauldian critique of the sovereign subject, the continuity of history, and the universality of the human sciences. He also recognises that each discursive order depends on historical conditions that make certain objects possible and exclude others. The expression “black sun of language” designates this negativity present within reason: language organises the world but remains traversed by an absence that it cannot completely represent (Certeau 1986, pp. 171–84).

At this point, Certeau takes up a question already implied in the archaeological procedure itself: if every discourse has historical conditions of possibility, it is also necessary to interrogate the position from which these conditions are described. The analysis of the human sciences thus leads to the consideration of the institutional, historiographical, and narrative operations that organise the archaeologist’s own work. Historical discontinuities, series, and the identification of *epistemes* are not simply found in the archives, but result from procedures of selection, juxtaposition, and composition of statements. The heterological

question therefore emerges as a deepening of this problematisation: how can one speak of the historical other while recognising the operations through which it is constituted as an object of knowledge?

The same critical appropriation occurs in relation to *Discipline and Punish*. Certeau recognises the importance of the microphysics of power, but questions the privilege granted to disciplinary procedures that became institutionally consolidated. Beyond the “monotheism” of the panopticon, he also proposes observing a “polytheism of practices”: dispersed uses, appropriations, deviations, and operations without a proper place. To the question posed by Foucault in order to show what apparatuses do to subjects, Certeau adds the question of what subjects do with what apparatuses do to them. From this displacement emerge the categories of strategy and tactics, the latter coinciding with the Foucauldian notion of bad obedience.

The critique, however, does not lead to a distancing from Foucault; rather, the French Jesuit perceives that Foucauldian writing itself exceeds the panoptic model described in his books. Scenes, images, unexpected quotations, and documentary montages function as a Trojan horse within scientific discourse. Foucault uses the codes of erudition and classification to disturb the self-evidences that these codes normally sustain. His theory is itself a narrative practice. It is at this point that the fable evoked by Foucault leads to Certeau’s heterology, namely, a discourse becomes heterological when it not only speaks about the other but allows the encounter with the other to alter the language, the procedures, and the position of the one who speaks.

3.2.1. The Influence of Certeau on Literary Studies: State of the Art

The reception of Michel de Certeau in literary studies is characterised by interdisciplinary expansion. Rather than constituting an autonomous critical school, his work offered categories appropriated by cultural studies, narrative theory, historiography, urban studies, postcolonial and feminist studies, theology, and, more recently, the digital humanities. The available bibliographic mapping organises this reception around the narrative production of space, everyday practices, reading, memory, belief, mysticism, and alterity.

A first line of research concentrates on the distinction between place and space. While place corresponds to a relatively stable order of positions, space is produced by the movements and practices that traverse this order. Literature, therefore, is not limited to representing settings: it produces spaces through the trajectories of characters, memory, narrative voice, and conflicts of belonging. This approach has become particularly relevant to urban literature, geocriticism, and studies on landscape and narrative mobility (Füssel 2013).

A second line develops the categories of strategies and tactics. The reader ceases to be conceived as a passive consumer and comes to be understood as a practitioner who cuts, combines, and reinscribes texts. Reading becomes a form of “poaching”, that is, a temporary appropriation of a territory organised by another. Huntsperger (2008) applies this perspective to the poetic form of David Antin, while Dennis (2015) uses Certeauian tactics to analyse style, occupation, and agency in Samuel Beckett’s narratives. Literature thus appears as a field of operations in which authors, characters, and readers alter the materials they receive.

A third line relates literature, historiography, and representation. Certeau showed that the writing of history does not transparently reproduce the past, but constructs it through archives, institutions, selections, and narrative procedures. This contribution provided the basis for investigations into the limits of historical representation, the relationship between science and fiction, and the return of excluded memories (Weymans 2004; Reekie 1996). In postcolonial studies, heterology became a tool for examining how Western writing

produces the other and how subalternised voices can modify the discursive space that seeks to capture them (Tan 1996).

A fourth line articulates language, belief, and mysticism. Highmore (2007) interprets Certeau's work as a critical epistemology of the writing of culture, in which the researcher must recognise that the object modifies the very procedures of investigation. Álvarez (2020) shows that Certeau's study of mysticism is linked to the problem of making Christianity intelligible after the fragmentation of modern religious language. Watanabe (2025), in turn, highlights Certeau as a reader and listener of the mystics, attentive to the murmur of an absence that cannot be converted into a fully available object.

However, the hypothesis that literature itself constitutes a heterological practice of knowledge remains less developed. The specific contribution of this approach consists precisely in reconstructing the unity between fable, alterity, and discursive production: narrative does not merely represent the other but can alter the epistemological and ethical position of the one who seeks to know it.

3.2.2. Fable, Heterology, and Theology in Michel De Certeau

The relationship between fable, heterology, and theology must begin from a non-pejorative understanding of fable. In Certeau, fable does not simply mean a false narrative opposed to true knowledge. It designates an operation of language that makes it possible to speak of what does not present itself as a fully available object. Fable organises traces, voices, absences, desires, and temporalities. Its truth does not reside in the direct reproduction of a presence, but in its capacity to make perceptible a relationship with what is lacking.

Borges's classification performs this operation in Foucault's preface. "By means of the fable", the Western order of thought is confronted with its limit. The narrative does not positively reveal what true Chinese thought would be. It produces a fictional exteriority from which our own order ceases to appear necessary. The other of the fable is not an additional object included within the same taxonomy; it is that which deprives the taxonomy of its ground of self-evidence. Fable performs, in this sense, an archaeological function: it makes visible the historical and linguistic conditions that make it possible to hold certain words and things together.

In *The Mystic Fable*, Certeau transfers this question to the history of Christianity. The emergence of mysticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is situated within a context of the fragmentation of Christendom, confessional conflicts, and the loss of a shared religious language. Theological language no longer immediately guarantees the presence of God within the social body. Mystical speech arises from this absence: it continues to address an other when institutions, symbols, and inherited words no longer assure his presence (Certeau [1982] 1992; Álvarez 2020). The passage from *corpus mysticum* to *fable mystique* thus corresponds to the passage from a symbolic order that sought to embody presence to a practice of language marked by desire, lack, and searching.

The mystical fable is not a doctrinal exposition about God. It is speech addressed to God, traversed by the impossibility of possessing him. It is organised through invocations, journeys, wounds, gardens, bodies, letters, poems, paradoxes, and oxymorons. The mystical subject does not precede this speech as a sovereign identity. It is constituted in the very gesture of addressing an unavailable interlocutor. Its word is simultaneously its own and received, personal enunciation and trace of an alterity. Mysticism is, for this reason, a heterological practice of language: discourse is constituted by what it cannot appropriate.

Heterology provides the epistemological structure of this relationship. Etymologically, it may mean "discourse on the other", yet Certeau radicalises the expression beyond choosing alterity as a theme. A discourse becomes heterological when the other modifies its language, its criteria of intelligibility, and the position of the one who speaks. Every

form of knowledge seeks to establish a proper place, distinguishing true and false, present and past, civilised and savage, science and fiction. In order to constitute itself, it excludes certain voices, bodies, and experiences. Heterology begins when what has been excluded returns and displaces the order that sought to dominate it (Certeau 1986).

The relationship with theology then becomes decisive. Theology always runs the risk of transforming God, revelation, and historical subjects into objects of an institutionally authorised discourse. It can speak about the other without allowing that other to alter its categories. A heterological theology, by contrast, does not renounce conceptual elaboration, but recognises that its object is not available as a possession. God appears as the one about whom one speaks because, first, one speaks to Him and from the traces of his absence. Theology ceases to be merely a discourse that administers presence and begins to recognise itself as a language traversed by the desire for the other.

Fable constitutes the literary operation of this displacement; heterology designates its epistemological and ethical condition, while theology is the discourse that must allow itself to be transformed by both. Fable interrupts classifications and makes perceptible experiences that find no place within dominant discourse. Heterology prevents these experiences from being reabsorbed as simple objects. Theology, when it accepts this displacement, ceases to use literature as an illustration of previously established concepts and allows literary language to modify its way of perceiving, naming, and discerning reality.

Literature does not, however, possess an automatic heterological or emancipatory value. It can also reproduce exoticisms, appropriate the words of others, conceal collaborators, and convert difference into spectacle. Certeau's essays on Montaigne, Jules Verne, and Alexandre Dumas show precisely this ambivalence. The heterological force of literature lies in the possibility of preserving within the text the fissures of representation, the traces of erased voices, and the opacity of what authorship does not entirely control.

For the present article, this relationship makes it possible to understand literature as theological heterology. It is not merely a source of religious themes, anthropological description, or aesthetic expression of experience. It constitutes a practice capable of displacing the positions from which theology perceives culture and produces its objects. *Through the fable*, experiences, bodies, memories, spiritualities, and forms of life that remained outside theological classifications can become perceptible. Through heterology, these experiences are not simply assimilated into existing discourse, but begin to challenge and transform its concepts. Certeau thus adds a second requirement to the renewal of the liberationist method: it is not enough to make excluded experiences visible; the encounter with those experiences must be capable of altering the theological discourse that claims to interpret them.

Literature as theological heterology can thus constitute an exercise in the ethical discernment of culture. Its function consists in displacing theological concepts by placing them before the social practices, forms of subjectivation, and ethical agendas that narratives make perceptible.

It is precisely through this capacity to act upon perception and sensibility that literature can participate in the consolidation of genealogies of ethics within culture. Forms of subjectivation are not produced only by explicit norms, disciplinary institutions, or doctrinal teachings. They are also formed through narratives, images, exemplary characters, collective memories, and affective repertoires through which subjects learn to perceive suffering, name injustice, imagine different relationships, and recognise the dignity of the other. Literature makes culturally perceptible certain forms of relationship with oneself, with others, and with truth. It does not necessarily prescribe a morality, but it can modify the perceptual field within which an ethical decision becomes possible.

4. Literature, Theological Apparatus, and Genealogies of Ethics in Carlos Drummond De Andrade and Adélia Prado

Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987) and Adélia Prado (1935–) are two of the central names of twentieth-century Brazilian poetry, both deeply connected to the cultural, religious, and social experience of Minas Gerais. Drummond, a modernist poet marked by criticism of institutions, forms of authority, and religious images incapable of responding to human suffering, develops a poetics of vulnerability, responsibility, and solidarity. Adélia Prado, in turn, writes from a Christian experience incarnated in the body, everyday life, the female condition, and the lives of poor subjects. Although neither of them can be reduced to the horizon of Liberation Theology, their works engage directly with its ethical agenda: Drummond, by denouncing images of God that legitimise passivity, obedience, and indifference; Adélia, by reinscribing Christian language within an affective spirituality effectively committed to the dignity, suffering, and hope of the poor.

Drummond and Prado are not presented here as representative of Brazilian literature as a whole, but as two cases selected to examine, through the archaeo-genealogical method, two distinct and related operations in the cultural circulation of theological language: refusal and reinscription. In Drummond, literature makes visible a discursive apparatus in which certain images of God are articulated with institutions, norms, educational practices, moral propositions, and forms of government of subjectivity. His reason for refusing God does not derive simply from a metaphysical position, but from the ethical discernment of the effects produced by a religious representation that legitimises obedience, justifies suffering, and transfers to providence what should be assumed as human responsibility. In Adélia, Christian language is not simply restored after this refusal. It is subjected to its scrutiny and reinscribed in the body, female experience, everyday life, and the option for the poor. The relationship between the two thus makes it possible to analyse the passage from a critique of the apparatus of power to the emergence of a genealogy of ethics, without converting this passage into a dialectical reconciliation that absorbs the difference between the two poetics.

4.1. Drummond and the Ethical Reason for the Refusal of God⁶

The archaeo-genealogical analysis of Drummond's poetry does not seek simply to determine whether or not the poet believed in God, nor to reconstruct a psychological evolution that would have led him from youthful religiosity to agnosticism. The question consists of identifying the historical conditions under which certain images of the divine became intelligible and socially operative, as well as the effects of subjectivation produced by their circulation among discourses, institutions, and social practices.

Religiosity was not external to the poet's formation. At *Colégio Anchieta* (Anchieta Jesuit School), Drummond even wrote: "I have already made up my mind: holiness is my destiny". His first published poem, "New Life" (*Vida nova*), celebrated the paternal goodness of God, faith, hope, and the flame of divine love. The later refusal does not therefore emerge from an original indifference towards the religious universe. It arises from the progressively perceived distance between the proclaimed image of a paternal God and the practices through which religious institutions administered discipline, truth, and the conscience of subjects (Cançado 1993, pp. 69–70; Villas Boas 2016, pp. 261–63).

The expulsion from the Jesuit School for "mental insubordination" condenses this contradiction. The episode does not in itself explain his poetic trajectory, but it makes visible the articulation among different faces of the apparatus: the spiritual discourse of obedience, the institutional authority of the religious school, norms of conduct, administrative judgement, and a particular conception of the subject. The institution claimed the capacity to speak in the name of truth and to form the student morally but converted formation into

submission and intellectual disagreement into a disciplinary offence. Recalling the event, Drummond stated that he had lost not only faith, but above all “confidence in the justice of those who judged me” (Cançado 1993, pp. 69–70).

The Brazilian context helps us to understand the cultural archive within which this experience is situated. Catholic formation in the first half of the twentieth century was not homogeneous. Within it coexisted apologetic Thomism, political integralism, French social Catholicism, university renewal, literary modernism, and different receptions of modernity. At the same time, a reading of history structured by the conflict between Christian civilisation and revolutionary threat became consolidated. Philosophical and theological categories were mobilised to interpret communism, liberalism, secularism, and the secular university as manifestations of a crisis of the Christian order. Although important differences existed among authors and groups, a discursive field was formed in which the name of God could circulate as a principle of moral order, foundation of authority, guarantee of national unity, and legitimation of discipline (Villas Boas 2022, pp. 116–43).

This contextualisation does not imply placing Drummond directly within Thomist or integralist controversies. It does, however, make it possible to understand the cultural environment in which his poetry was formed. The poet does not systematically discuss these currents. His literature makes perceptible the effects produced when theological discourses move from treatises and pulpits into the school, the family, politics, individual conscience, and the everyday experience of suffering.

The discursive formations of archaeology, with regard to their rules of formation, begin from the articulation among object, subject, concepts, and theoretical and strategic formulations. Their combination makes the statement possible and constitutes a discursive practice. Applied to Drummond’s critique, this framework prevents the image of God from being treated merely as a private belief or abstract idea.

The *discursive object* is God understood as the transcendent foundation of order. This is not simply the God of Christian confession, but a historically determined representation: sovereign, legislator, judge, providence directing events, source of authority, and guarantee that the existing order possesses a higher meaning. This image makes it possible to relate divine will to social hierarchies, moral discipline, and the acceptance of suffering.

The *subject of the statement* is the one authorised by an institution to speak in the name of God: priest, educator, preacher, spiritual director, theologian, or representative of a moral order. His authority derives not only from the content asserted, but from the institutional position he occupies. He claims the capacity to interpret divine will, classify conduct, and define normality and deviation.

The opposition between this authorised subject and the student accused of “mental insubordination” is decisive. The judgement does not fall merely upon a behaviour. It constitutes the student as a subject at fault and determines who may correctly interpret the event. Drummond’s literature later reverses this relationship: the one who had been judged assumes the position of the one who questions the justice of the judges and subjects the image of God to the ethical examination of its effects.

In “Seven-Sided Poem” (*Poema de sete faces*), this reversal appears explicitly:

“My God, why did you abandon me
if you knew that I was not God,
if you knew that I was weak.”
(Drummond de Andrade 2002, “Poema de sete faces”)

The reference to Christ’s abandonment does not lead to a theological explanation of suffering. God is questioned from the standpoint of human fragility, rather than fragility being judged from the standpoint of divine perfection. The subject refuses to be blamed

for not possessing God's strength. Vulnerability ceases to be a moral insufficiency and becomes a criterion of truth. The question is no longer why the human being failed, but why he was abandoned in his weakness (Villas Boas 2016, pp. 263–64).

The *concepts* that organise this discursive formation are providence, sin, obedience, guilt, sacrifice, punishment, merit, resignation, and salvation. Together, they constitute a grid through which suffering may be interpreted as a trial, deviation as guilt, submission as virtue, and the preservation of order as divine will. Providence attributes meaning to the whole, sin individualises responsibility, obedience determines the appropriate disposition, and salvation projects beyond history the resolution of present contradictions.

The *theoretical and strategic formulations* articulate these concepts into interpretations of history and society. Theologically, they may assume the form of a theodicy, according to which divine perfection and the order of the world remain intact despite evil. Politically, they may convert the defence of order into a struggle against those presented as a threat to Christian civilisation. Pedagogically, they may associate moral formation with surveillance and discipline. Pastorally, they may encourage the transfer of historical responsibility to an external intervention.

The resulting *statement* can be summarised as follows: to obey the legitimately instituted order is, directly or indirectly, equivalent to obeying God. This statement assumes different forms: God willed it so; it is necessary to accept His will; suffering has a higher reason; authority knows what is best; insubordination manifests moral disorder. When such propositions become stabilised in institutions, pedagogical practices, rituals, judgements, and forms of direction of conscience, they constitute a discursive practice.

The distinction between discursive practice and social practice is fundamental. Expulsion, censorship, school discipline, or support for a political order are not simply theological statements. They are social practices. Yet they function as a Trojan horse because they concretely reveal the non-discursive effects of religious language. The sanction shows what it means, in practice, to affirm that obedience is a virtue and that authority represents a higher order.

The metaphor of the polyhedron of intelligibility, proposed by Foucault in 1978, makes it possible to broaden this reconstruction (Foucault 2001, p. 843). It conceives knowledge as structured in the manner of a multiple bundle of geometric relations, without any of its faces being defined in advance or its complexity being reduced to a single point of view.

The polyhedron is not constituted by a single doctrine or institution, but by relations among polymorphic elements. The *discourses* include catechesis, preaching, apologetics, spiritual direction, devotional literature, and providentialist interpretations of history. The *institutions* comprise Church, confessional school, family, religious associations and, in certain alliances, the State. *Architecture* distributes bodies and authorities within the school, chapel, confessional, pulpit, and classroom. *Laws and regulations* transform religious values into codes of conduct. *Administrative measures* make the apparatus operative through warnings, censorship, suspensions, and expulsions. *Scientific and pedagogical statements* technically legitimise classifications of normality, discipline, and deviation. *Philosophical propositions* link God to perfection, causality, and the rational order of the universe. *Moral propositions* articulate guilt, purity, merit, resignation, and obedience. *Philanthropic propositions* may offer effective assistance but may also keep the poor in a passive position of tutelage.

The refusal in “The Machine of the World” (*A máquina do mundo*) directly strikes the philosophical face of the apparatus:

“I lowered my eyes, incurious, weary,
disdaining to take the offered thing
that freely opened itself to my understanding.”

(Drummond de Andrade 2002, “A máquina do mundo”)

The machine offers a total explanation in which everything finds its place. Its acceptance would produce a subject reconciled with the world because he would finally have understood the function of every suffering. Drummond prefers to preserve the enigma rather than accept a totality that neutralises responsibility. The machine accomplishes metaphysically what the apparatus accomplishes socially: it distributes positions and presents this distribution as necessary (Villas Boas 2016, pp. 271–74).

The polyhedron, however, is not monolithic. Its faces can be rearticulated. The social Catholicism of Robert Garric, Joseph Cardijn, Louis-Joseph Lebret and, later, Dom Hélder Câmara shows that Christian language could also shift from the defence of order towards the reading of reality, popular education, and commitment to the poor. The integration of the *see–judge–act* method with Paulo Freire’s pedagogy led to the conviction that it was necessary to learn to “read the world” before reading the book, including the Bible (Villas Boas 2022, pp. 118–20, 140–41).

It is precisely this dispute among different articulations of the polyhedron that prevents the apparatus of power from being identified with Christianity itself. Drummond’s critique is directed towards the historical composition that links God to impassive authority, explanatory totality, discipline, and passivity in the face of pain.

The deepest effect of the knowledge–power apparatus is the production of subjectivity. The subject formed by this composition tends to be obedient, guilt-ridden, dependent, resigned, self-surveilling, politically passive, and affectively anaesthetised. The truth of his life is administered externally; his fragility is treated as guilt; his hope is transferred to providential intervention; his conscience internalises surveillance; and his capacity for indignation is neutralised by a higher explanation of suffering.

In “Pilgrimage” (*Romaria*), Drummond critiques precisely the subjectivity that delegates historical responsibility to God. The poem presents a “Jesus already tired of so many requests” who “sleeps dreaming of another humanity” (Drummond de Andrade 2002, “Pilgrimage” (*Romaria*)). The target is not prayer itself, but its use as a technology for postponing action. Christ appears exhausted by a religiosity that transfers to Him obligations that should be assumed by human beings (Villas Boas 2016, pp. 264–66).

Drummond’s poetry does not, however, limit itself to denouncing subjection. It produces a counter-subjectivity. Instead of the obedient subject, the *gauche* emerges, whose inadequacy makes it possible to perceive the limits of order. Instead of guilt for fragility, shared vulnerability appears. Instead of providential dependence, responsibility is affirmed. Instead of resignation, historical solidarity.

The death of Neco Andrade makes this emergence explicit:

“I can no longer represent; for ever and before never I am responsible, responsible, responsible, responsible. As the stones are responsible and the angels.”

(Drummond de Andrade 2002, “Morte de Neco Andrade”)

Responsibility does not derive from possessing an explanation for death. It arises from the impossibility of remaining external to suffering. Pain ruptures previously organised identities and demands another way of responding for life (Villas Boas 2016, pp. 264–65).

In “Holding Hands” (*Mãos dadas*), this responsibility assumes a collective form:

“The present is so vast, let us not move apart.

Let us not move too far apart, let us go hand in hand.”

(Drummond de Andrade 2002, “Mãos dadas”)

The gesture does not replace the apparatus with another totality. It constitutes a situated ethical practice grounded in shared finitude. In “Feeling of the World” (*Sentimento*

do mundo), having “only two hands” does not exempt the subject from carrying “the feeling of the world”. Responsibility does not depend on omnipotence, but on the capacity to be affected by what exceeds individual strength.

In “Our Time” (*Nosso tempo*), the critique reaches normative formalism:

“Laws are not enough. Lilies do not grow from the law.”

(Drummond de Andrade 2002, “Nosso tempo”)

The sentence does not eliminate the need for law. It exposes its insufficiency for producing care, justice, and life. The lily does not bloom through normative imposition. The ethical relationship cannot be reduced to the external fulfilment of precepts, but concerns the way in which the subject positions itself in relation to itself and in its relationship with others.

In “Shoulders Bear the World” (*Os ombros suportam o mundo*), silence about God can be read as an ethical purification of an exhausted language. When the divine name no longer modifies the experience of suffering, its interruption prevents it from continuing to conceal the absence of a human response.

In “Rosary Clock” (*Relógio do Rosário*), the question of God is submitted to the universality of pain. A perfect and impassive divinity becomes incompatible with love, because to love requires being affected by the existence of the other. A God external to suffering may remain metaphysically perfect, but becomes ethically irrelevant (Villas Boas 2016, pp. 274–77).

The reason for the refusal of God does not simply affirm that God does not exist. It affirms that a particular divine image must be refused because it sustains forms of power, anaesthetises conscience, and legitimises distance in the face of suffering. In this sense, Drummond can be understood as an “atheist theologian”, provided that the expression designates a critical operation rather than a confessional classification. His poetry performs a negative theology by showing who God cannot be.

Drummond’s counter-subjectivity is finite rather than sovereign, vulnerable rather than guilt-ridden, responsible rather than dependent, solidary rather than resigned, critical rather than obedient, affectable rather than apathetic, and open to the enigma rather than reconciled through a total explanation. His spirituality, if the term is retained, approaches a mysticism of fraternal love.

From Literary Patronage to the Heterological Reception of Adélia Prado

Drummond’s public endorsement of Adélia Prado constitutes a decisive event of literary and theological reception. In presenting her, in 1975, as a “lyrical, biblical, existential” poet and as “God’s fire in Divinópolis”, Drummond did not abandon his reason for refusal nor adhere to the author’s religious confession. He recognised a biblical language capable of passing through the ethical criterion of his own poetry: a language that did not use God to justify pain, legitimise authority, or deprive subjects of their historical responsibility (Drummond de Andrade 1975; Villas Boas 2016, pp. 278–80).

This recognition indicates that Adélia’s poetry does not simply restore the religious universe refused by Drummond. It receives this refusal, allows itself to be modified by it, and reinscribes Christian categories in the body, everyday life, female experience, and the option for the poor. It is in this sense that her poetry can be understood as theological heterology.

The relationship becomes explicit in “With Poetic Licence” (*Com licença poética*), the opening poem of *Bagagem*, which takes up “Seven-Sided Poem” (*Poema de sete faces*):

“When I was born a slender angel,
one of those who play the trumpet, announced:

you will carry a banner.
 A very heavy burden for a woman,
 this still ashamed species.”
 (Prado 2007, “Com licença poética”)

Drummond’s “crooked angel” becomes a “slender angel”. The sentence of being *gauche* is transformed into the task of carrying a banner. Adélia does not reject Drummond’s legacy. She appropriates it and displaces it towards the experience of a woman who assumes the word within a literary and religious field marked by male authority.

The poem concludes:

“But what I feel I write. I fulfil my fate.
 [...]
 Woman is unfoldable. I am.”
 (Prado 2007, “Com licença poética”)

The unfoldable woman does not represent a feminine essence. She designates a subjectivity capable of inhabiting already organised positions and modifying their meanings. The poet appropriates received spaces, languages, and traditions without allowing herself to be entirely enclosed by them.

This operation approaches the tactics described by Certeau. Strategies depend on a proper place from which institutions organise discourses and identities. Tactics operate within the space organised by the other, appropriating its materials and producing unforeseen uses. Adélia uses the Bible, liturgy, dogmas, images of the saints, and domestic practices without limiting herself to the disciplinary purposes with which they had been associated (Certeau [1980] 1984, pp. 29–42).

Drummond’s endorsement, therefore, does not legitimise a doctrine. It recognises a religious language that has passed through the test of literature. Adélia’s poetry can speak of God because it does not use this name to explain the stone, justify suffering, or bring history to a close.

4.2. Adélia Prado: Practices of Resistance and Alternative Subjectivation

Adélia’s poetry can be analysed as part of a genealogy of ethics constituted by practices of resistance to the polyhedron of the theological-discursive apparatus. These practices are not situated outside Christian tradition, religious institutions, inherited morality, or cultural forms of organising the body, femininity, and poverty in any absolute sense. They emerge within this field, appropriating its languages and images in order to produce other modes of relationship with oneself, with others, and with truth.

Resistance does not consist merely in contesting a doctrine or refusing an authority. It consists of a task of subjectivation. In Adélia’s work, this operation focuses particularly on women and the poor. The woman ceases to appear merely as an object of morality, spiritual direction, and discourses about the body. She assumes the position of a subject who perceives, desires, interprets, writes, and produces language about God. The poor person ceases to be merely the recipient of assistance or an abstract category. Their presence challenges, modifies the gaze, and transforms the one who recognises them.

This subjectivation finds its matrix in an affective involvement with the character of Jesus. The expression does not designate private sentimentalism, but the way in which the narrative, corporeality, vulnerability, and way of life of Jesus affect the subject’s perception. Jesus appears not only as the object of a dogmatic affirmation. He becomes a character with whom a relationship is established that is capable of shaping desires, sensibilities, criteria of discernment, and practices of recognition (Prado and Boas 2011).

The option for the poor thus does not emerge as a moral principle added externally to religious experience. It arises as an effect of the affective relationship with Jesus. The memory of his proximity to the vulnerable, his exposure to violence, and his passion forms a sensibility capable of recognising socially abandoned bodies. The affective bond becomes ethically true when it moves from affect to effect, modifying the way one looks, consumes, relates to others, and responds to suffering.

The genealogy of ethics in Prado can be described through the four dimensions of the ethical constitution of the subject outlined by Foucault in the introduction to volumes II and III of his *History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1985, pp. 37–40). The *ethical substance* is formed by the body, desire, affects, memory, family relationships, and the capacity to perceive poverty. The *mode of subjection* is not primarily fear of punishment or external obedience, but the bond with Jesus as calling, compassion, and desire for proximity. The *practices of the self* include writing, prayer, memory, attention to everyday life, examination of affects, and recognition of forms of indifference. The ethical *télos* is the formation of a subject capable of being affected, responsible, solidary, and capable of recognising the dignity of the other.

The first characteristic of this subjectivity is the dimension of affect. In “Annunciation to the Poet” (*Anunciação ao poeta*), the poetic vocation is formulated as a radical openness:

“Hail, avid one.
Hail, insatiable hunger and enormous mouth,
eat.
[...]
you shall not rest and everything will wound you mortally:
the rubbish, the cathedral, and the shape of hands.”
(Prado 2007, “Anunciação ao poeta”)

The juxtaposition of rubbish, cathedral, and hands undoes the predetermined distribution between the noble and the contemptible, the religious and the profane. The cathedral does not hold a monopoly over what can affect the subject, and rubbish cannot be excluded from the field of ethical perception. Poetry forms someone vulnerable to what the cultural order distributes unequally between the visible and the invisible.

The second characteristic is corporeality. The female body, frequently converted into an object of surveillance, guilt, and normalisation, becomes a site of knowledge and spiritual experience. In “Sensory” (*Sensorial*), the poet writes:

“For the filling, I choose the yellow one.
Pepper and clove,
I chew them with my bare mouth and delight in them.”
(Prado 2007, “Sensorial”)

Tasting, touching, and desiring are not inferior dimensions that should be transcended. The body ceases to be merely matter governed by external norms and becomes a site of discernment.

In “Great Desire” (*Grande desejo*), this position is affirmed from within ordinary life:

“I am no matron, mother of the Gracchi, Cornelia,
I am a woman of the people, mother of children, Adélia.
I cook and I eat.”
(Prado 2007, “Grande desejo”)

The woman who cooks, eats, desires, and cares assumes the word. Domestic experience ceases to be a secondary setting and becomes a site for the production of theological intelligibility.

The third characteristic is attention to ordinary practices, recalling Certeau's analysis of everyday practices as sites in which subjects appropriate and rework the cultural forms they receive. Cooking, buying, eating, cleaning, sleeping, caring, and desiring are practices through which ethical subjectivity is constituted. The option for the poor does not take place only in extraordinary decisions. It manifests itself in the way the subject participates in economic relations, perceives the excluded, and recognises the violence present within normality.

Writing is likewise a practice of the self. In "The Poetic Mode" (*O modo poético*), the recomposition produced by poetry leads back to ordinary life:

"When everything is recomposed,
skipping we go
to tend the vegetable garden and the cage."
(Prado 2007, "O modo poético")

Poetic experience does not remove the subject from everyday life. It transforms the way of returning to its tasks. Ethical work does not consist in attaining a definitive identity, but in continually learning how to inhabit life after ruptures.

In "Band" (*Tarja*), poetry appears linked to hope:

"Poetry, even the smallest, is the servant of hope."
(Prado 2007, "Tarja")

Hope does not eliminate absurdity or explain suffering. It keeps open the possibility of meaning when explanations fail.

4.3. Archaeology of Prado's Language and Rearticulation of the Polyhedron

From this heterological function, the categories of the archaeological method can be applied.

The *discursive object* is God as He becomes perceptible in ordinary life. He is not primarily the distant sovereign nor the abstract principle of order. God appears in the body, the home, food, desire, pain, joy, poverty, and relationships. His presence remains lacunary and does not transform Mystery into an available object.

The *subject of enunciation* is the lay woman, poet, housewife, affected by the body, memory, religion, and inequality. Female experience does not appear merely as an object interpreted by a theology produced elsewhere. It becomes a source of language and discernment. In this sense, Prado's theological heterology also introduces a specifically female perspective into theological discourse: woman is no longer merely an object of theological anthropology or moral regulation, but occupies the position from which corporeality, domestic life, desire, suffering, and faith are theologically articulated. The poor also participate in this transformation, not as an abstract category, but as a presence that alters the gaze of the one who speaks.

The *concepts* are incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, Kingdom of God, grace, sin, salvation, charity, and hope. In Adélia, they are displaced towards concrete practices. Incarnation prevents God from being separated from corporeality and history. Crucifixion becomes a category for perceiving bodies exposed to deprivation. Resurrection keeps open the possibility of transformation without justifying pain. The Kingdom is discerned in the everyday resistance of concrete subjects.

The *theological and strategic formulations* articulate these concepts within an affective Christology. Jesus does not appear only as the object of dogmatic propositions. His character organises an ethical strategy of perception and conduct. The affective relationship displaces subjection founded on fear and guilt. The subject recognises in the vulnerability and compassion of Jesus a truth to which they desire to conform their existence.

The resulting *theological statement* can be formulated as follows: God becomes recognisable in concrete life when the relationship with Jesus produces attention to the vulnerable body, to the poor, and to the possibilities of resurrection present in everyday life. The criterion of truth is not only doctrinal coherence, but the capacity to form a subject who sees, allows themselves to be affected, and responds.

When these statements traverse poems, biblical images, memories, and social practices, they constitute a *heterological discursive practice*. Poetry does not use women and the poor to confirm a ready-made doctrine. It allows their experiences to transform concepts and the position of the one who speaks.

This practice rearticulates the faces of the polyhedron. *Biblical, liturgical, mystical, and poetic discourses* cease merely to transmit contents and become repertoires of ethical perception. *Religious institutions* lose their monopoly over theological enunciation, since the lay woman and poet publicly participates in the production of language about God. *Architectures* are displaced: cathedral, rubbish, home, kitchen, and supermarket become places of discernment. *Moral laws and regulations* are subjected to the question of their effects in terms of love, care, and justice. *Administrative measures* appear in the places socially assigned to women and in the restrictions imposed upon their speech. “With Poetic Licence” (*Com licença poética*) ironically appropriates the need to ask permission and occupies literary space. *Scientific and social statements* about femininity, normality, the body, and poverty are contested when the woman ceases to be an object and assumes the position of subject. *Philosophical propositions* cease to present God as an explanatory totality. *Moral propositions* are displaced from surveillance towards discernment. *Philanthropic propositions* are criticised when they preserve the distance between benefactor and beneficiary.

The rearticulation of these faces produces an alternative subjectivity. It is corporeal, affectable, unfoldable, attentive, solidary, responsible, and hopeful. It is not the effect of an isolated doctrine, but of the convergence of poetic language, Christological narrative, everyday practices, memory, corporeality, and social experience.

The option for the poor constitutes the political effect of this genealogy of ethics. Spirituality is already political when it modifies the distribution of attention, determines which bodies are recognised, and renders certain forms of indifference intolerable. Adélia’s poetics participates in the production of a political spirituality because it prevents the relationship with God from being separated from the relationship with vulnerable bodies.

The central passage is from affective involvement to effective commitment. The bond with Jesus forms a perception; this perception recognises social crucifixion; recognition transforms the subject and orients practices of solidarity.

4.4. Heterological Reception and Critique of Dialectics

The relationship between Drummond and Adélia should not be organised as a reconciling dialectic in which agnosticism would constitute the negative moment and confessional poetry its positive overcoming. Such a reading would reduce Drummond to a question whose answer was already available in advance to theology and would transform Adélia into an apologetic instrument.

The reception is heterological because Adélia allows Drummond’s reason for refusal to modify the conditions under which God can be named. The impassible, authoritarian, moralistic God who legitimises suffering must also be refused by confessional poetry. Faith can seek a meaningful language only after this refusal and while remaining continually exposed to it.

“Now, O José” (*Agora, ó José*) exemplifies this relationship. Adélia does not remove the stone or offer an explanation that brings anguish to an end. She preserves the weight, fini-

tude, and effort. The novelty does not consist in a total overcoming, but in a transformation of the way life is inhabited.

The bougainvillaeas in “In the Middle of the Night” (*No meio da noite*) perform a similar operation. Resurrection does not appear as accomplished, but as “being woven”. Joy remains subterranean. The promise does not eliminate absence, but modifies the relationship with what is not yet seen.

Drummond’s endorsement does not signify his retrospective conversion. It shows that confessional language can be received by someone who refuses theodicy when that language does not annul critique, but accepts being transformed by it. The encounter does not end in a common identity.

The critique of dialectics does not imply rejecting contradiction, mediation, or historical transformation. It is directed against the claim to resolve alterity within a total reconciliation. Between Drummond and Adélia there remains an unassimilable remainder: the unanswered question, the stone, pain, the silence of God, and the difference between naming and not naming Mystery.

Adélia does not eliminate this remainder. She writes from it. Her genealogy of ethics consists of transforming the relationship with what cannot be fully reconciled. The subject does not need to possess a total explanation in order to care, love, resist, and rejoice. Faith ceases to be a guarantee of order and becomes a practice of attention.

Adélia’s poetics thus constitutes a theological heterology because it uses Christian language without allowing it to remain immune to the body, female experience, inequality, everyday life, and Drummond’s reason for refusal. Her contribution does not consist in offering a synthesis between faith and atheism, but in showing that religious language remains culturally meaningful when it accepts being transformed by the experiences it previously sought only to classify.

Drummond refuses the image of God that sustains subjection and produces a finite, vulnerable, and solidary counter-subjectivity. Adélia receives this refusal and reinscribes Christian language within a corporeal, affectable subjectivity committed to the poor. The passage between them is not a reconciliation, but an ethical discernment of the languages of God. Literature becomes theological heterology precisely because it preserves this tension and compels theology to answer for the historical effects of its concepts, images, and practices.

5. Conclusions

The trajectory developed here has sought to show that the dialogue between Theology and Literature can form part of the agenda of Liberation Theologies by broadening the moment of *seeing*. Literature does not replace socio-analytical mediation, but makes perceptible how poverty, violence, exclusion, hope, and resistance are lived in bodies, affects, memories, imaginaries, and forms of subjectivation. Historical reality can thus be apprehended not only as structure, but also as experience.

Manzatto’s contribution remains decisive because his anthropological method situates literature as a theological mediation of the concrete human condition. By bringing narrated experience into the moment of *seeing*, literary mediation reveals that structural analysis, although indispensable, is insufficient to account for how subjects perceive, internalise, resist, and transform the conditions in which they live. Literature therefore complements socio-analytical mediation while exposing the limits of making it self-sufficient.

The archaeo-genealogical approach clarifies the epistemological implications of this displacement. Foucault’s analysis of discursive formations, epistemes, and apparatuses makes it possible to interrogate the historical conditions through which certain languages, subjects, and forms of knowledge become legitimate. Certeau’s heterology radicalises this

critique by showing that alterity cannot merely be incorporated into an already established system of knowledge. A discourse becomes heterological when the other modifies its language, criteria of intelligibility, and the position of the one who speaks. Literature can therefore challenge disciplinary, theological, and cultural classifications by displacing the conditions according to which experiences become perceptible and intelligible.

The analyses of Drummond and Adélia Prado make this movement concrete. In Drummond, the reason for the refusal of God exposes a religious language linked to obedience, guilt around fragility, resignation, and the justification of suffering. His poetry produces, by contrast, a finite, vulnerable, responsible, and solidary counter-subjectivity. In Adélia Prado, Christian language is received after this critique and reinscribed in the body, female experience, everyday life, and the option for the poor. Drummond's endorsement of her shows that confessional language can pass through refusal when it does not use God to neutralise suffering or deprive subjects of their historical responsibility.

The relationship between them makes it possible to understand literature as theological heterology: a practice in which alterity modifies language, the position of the one who speaks, and the theological concepts mobilised. The option for the poor thus ceases to function merely as a normative formulation and becomes part of a process of subjectivation produced through affective involvement, perception, memory, and practices of attention, solidarity, and effective commitment.

This also specifies the political relevance of literary mediation. Structural analysis can identify mechanisms of domination, but it does not by itself explain how subjects become affected by injustice, how suffering becomes intolerable, how alternative forms of life become imaginable, or how subjects constitute themselves as capable of responding. Literature operates within this perceptual, affective, and imaginative field. Its political relevance lies not in replacing socio-political analysis with aesthetic experience, but in connecting the critique of structures with the ethical formation of subjects capable of perceiving, judging, resisting, and acting.

For Liberation Theologies in the twenty-first century, the present article thus seeks to contribute to the field in three specific ways. First, it reframes literary mediation as an internal development of the liberationist *see–judge–act* method rather than as an aesthetic supplement to theology: literature broadens *seeing*, qualifies *judging*, and prepares *acting* by bringing social structures and discursive practices into relation with affective experience and processes of subjectivation. Second, it proposes theological heterology as a methodological category for distinguishing the mere representation of alterity from encounters in which alterity transforms theological language, its objects, criteria of intelligibility, and the position of the speaking subject. Third, by articulating genealogies of power and genealogies of ethics, it seeks to show how literary mediation can connect structural critique with the ethical formation of subjects capable of being affected by suffering and responding through attention, solidarity, resistance, and care. Literature, therefore, does not provide theology with a new guarantee of truth. As theological heterology, it challenges the closure of its epistemic and disciplinary boundaries, compels it to answer for the historical effects of its concepts, images, and practices, and requires it to be transformed by the lives it seeks to understand.

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Notes

- ¹ The research underlying this work was originally presented in French as a doctoral dissertation at the Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, and was subsequently published in Portuguese. To the best of our knowledge, no English translation is currently available. Its discussion here therefore also seeks to make this Brazilian contribution to the dialogue between Theology and Literature accessible to a wider readership and to examine its potential relevance for contemporary Liberation Theologies beyond its Portuguese-language reception.
- ² One important moment in this methodological debate was Antônio Carlos Magalhães’s questioning of the possible reduction in literature to an “anthropological question” for which theology would already possess an answer. Rather than constituting a simple opposition to Manzatto’s anthropological method, this debate helped to clarify the need to preserve the aesthetic and epistemic autonomy of the literary work within the dialogue with theology (Magalhães 2000; Villas Boas 2020a, pp. 28–30, 42–44).
- ³ The term “anthropological” should not be understood here as implying an essentialist conception of the human being. Foucault’s critique of anthropology is directed primarily against the constitution of “man” as a transhistorical essence or transcendental foundation of knowledge, rather than against every historically situated inquiry into human existence. His early engagement with Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* already situates the anthropological question within the critical horizon opened by Kant. This Kantian horizon is also decisive for Rahner’s anthropological turn, which reworks the transcendental question concerning the conditions of possibility of human experience within theology, asking how the human subject constitutes the historical condition for receiving God’s self-communication. Manzatto’s anthropological method inherits this Rahnerian trajectory but gives it a literary and contextual inflexion: the human being disclosed by literature is not an invariant essence but the concrete and situated subject constituted within particular social, cultural, and historical conditions (Foucault [1966] 2010, 2008; Rahner 1984; Villas Boas 2020a).
- ⁴ Literature may also operate as a theological heterology within a genealogy of power, when displaced theological categories are rearticulated through literary and aesthetic imaginaries that legitimise political authority. A paradigmatic case is the Napoleonic apparatus of political messianism, in which Polish Romanticism contributed to configuring Napoleon as a providential and soteriological figure, particularly in Mickiewicz’s *Cours de littérature slave* and Hoene-Wroński’s *Secret politique de Napoléon* (Mickiewicz 1849; Wroński 1853). In such cases, literary narratives may participate in the production of political subjectivities and the symbolic legitimization of power. The present article, however, limits its analysis to theological heterology associated with a genealogy of ethics and the emergence of alternative forms of subjectivation.
- ⁵ Ontology is generally considered a field of analysis delimited by the metaphysical structures of being. To undertake a historical ontology consists of bringing together two domains that are, in themselves, incompatible. However, it is worth recalling that Kant intersects these two domains when he situates himself between critical reflection on the use of reason and historical reflection on the internal purpose of time; it should then be emphasised that research in fundamental philosophy can be related to history, as occurs with Husserl’s expression “historical a priori”, taken up by Foucault in *Les mots et les choses*. The expression “historical ontology”, in the later Foucault, conceived in the context of the constitution of the subject, refers to a kind of critical ontology, to a historical mode of being of the subject through which the task of thought consists of “transforming the critique exercised in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique in the form of possible transgression” (Foucault 1984, p. 47). In this sense, the postulation of a historical ontology of literary writing is profoundly marked by a way in which the subject, through writing, ceases to be itself and transforms itself into another than itself. This distance between the one who writes and their work, allowing the statements themselves to speak for themselves, announces the twilight of man who is born in modernity identified

with his consciousness. The literature of authors such as Blanchot, Bataille, and Klossowski therefore announces a new space of knowledge, a new epoch, in which man, as subject and object of knowledge, will disappear “like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault [1966] 2010, p. 398).

- 6 All translations of excerpts from the Portuguese-language poems by Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Adélia Prado into English, including the titles of the poems, are free translations by the authors.

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