

UCLA

Mester

Title

The Hour and Turn of João Guimarães Rosa: Symbolic Discourse and Death in the Academia Brasileira de Letras

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0qr6m2m6>

Journal

Mester, 36(1)

Author

Enslin, Joshua Alma

Publication Date

2007

DOI

10.5070/M3361014662

Copyright Information

Copyright 2007 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

The Hour and Turn of João Guimarães Rosa: Symbolic Discourse and Death in the Academia Brasileira de Letras

Joshua Alma Enslin
University of Georgia

[A]qui é uma estória inventada, e não é um caso
acontecido, não senhor.

Guimarães Rosa
“A hora e a vez de Augusto Matraga”

For where a testament is, there must also of
necessity be the death of the testator.

Hebrews 9.16

João Guimarães Rosa's death—his moment of “absolute singularity” (Derrida 22)—took place on the 19th of November 1967. On the 16th of that same month, Guimarães Rosa finally accepted his chair at the Academia Brasileira de Letras (ABL), delivering a speech entitled “O verbo & o logos.” This speech (presumably the author's last “literary” work) would be the first of three commemorative speeches to take place over the course of the next four days. The second address, by Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco, was delivered immediately following Guimarães Rosa's speech. In his address, Afonso Arinos ceremoniously welcomed Guimarães Rosa into the Academy. Yet, less than seventy-two hours later, Rosa unexpectedly died of a heart attack in his apartment in Rio de Janeiro. As a result, only four days after the author's induction, a third speech would take place. On the 20th of November, Austregésilo de Athayde delivered his eulogistic “Discurso de adeus a Guimarães Rosa,” bidding farewell to the distinguished Brazilian writer and diplomat.

In the introduction to *Sobrados e mucambos*, Gilberto Freyre writes that “O homem morto ainda é, de certo modo, homem social” (xxxix). It is this sociality of death and its relationship to the writer

as a national symbol that is of interest in our analysis of these three ABL speeches. These speeches inhabit an exemplary “in between” space located at the crux of important cultural symbols, limits, institutions, and events which converge during the four day period that encompasses Guimarães Rosa’s induction into this society “ad immortalitatem” and his death. To borrow from the memorialist Maureen Murdock that “[a]n individual memory becomes the repository of a familial or cultural memory” (115), these three works dredge deep currents within Brazilian history, geography and identity as they seek to find suitable national symbols for representing death in the ABL. This article will analyze how Athayde’s eulogy of Rosa together with Guimarães Rosa’s own and Arinos’s speeches seek not only to bring national significance to the inductee’s life and work, but also serve as equally mythical readings of the entire nation in light of the death of one of its most celebrated authors.

The ABL was founded in Rio de Janeiro by Machado de Assis and others such as José Veríssimo and Joaquim Nabuco in 1897 with a mission to standardize the nation’s language while also canonizing its literature. The “Estatutos da Academia Brasileira de Letras,” written in the same year the institution was founded, clearly and concisely delineate this purpose. Originally modeled after its French counterpart, the ABL memorializes, through election, those Brazilian authors whose works have been perceived as being of national consequence: “Só podem ser membros efetivos da Academia os brasileiros que tenham, em qualquer dos gêneros de literatura, publicado obras de reconhecido mérito ou, fora desses gêneros, livro de valor literário” (Henriques 10). The ABL represented a sincere interest on behalf of late 19th century intellectuals to further the project of national integration by creating a society of Brazilian writers whose works had “reconhecido mérito.”

Although they were unable to predict the political turmoil that would characterize Brazil in the coming century, the ABL’s founders had already imagined, in counterpoint to the unstable politics of the First Republic (1889-1930), the importance of a steadfast literary establishment. The ABL envisioned itself as a society capable of classifying the parameters by which literature and language could accompany political and economic developments. Along with being founded contemporaneously with the organization of the First Republic, the early members of the ABL also witnessed the unprecedented economic growth of, and immigration to, southeastern Brazil.

By glorifying Brazil's preeminent historians, critics, and writers, the ABL helped to engender a sense of collective right to national self-determination, crucial for the definition of Brazilian identity among the elite. Accordingly, Machado de Assis, in his inaugural address, anticipated that the role of his institution would be to "conservar, no meio da federação política, a unidade literária" ("Na Academia" 926). Likewise, Joaquim Nabuco, at the same session, proposed that: "A formação da Academia de Letras é a afirmação de que literária, como politicamente, somos uma nação que tem o seu destino, seu caráter distinto" (par. 17). Thus, it was proposed by its founders that, although the ABL should be a function of the national project, it should not be subject to coeval political troubles. In his inaugural speech, Machado further reiterated that the ABL needed to follow the French Academy's example in order to "sobreviver aos acontecimentos de toda a casta, às escolas literárias e às transformações civis" ("Na Academia" 926).¹ Or rather, to borrow from Homi K. Bhabha, Machado suggests that the ABL should not be grounded in any specific literary school or political movement, but be grounded in the "nation as a symbolic force" (1).

This symbolic role of the ABL in proposing an immutable constancy in the face of political change is no more evident than in the manner by which the institution has glorified its deceased members while maintaining control over the admission of new ones. In the ABL, there is a constant membership of forty Brazilian writers, corresponding to an equal number of available chairs. In order for a new writer to be elected into one of the forty chairs, a current one must first pass away. The seat then becomes available for a successor to assume occupancy and take his place in the literary society.

In 1908, the ABL's first president, Machado de Assis, passed away and Lafayette Rodrigues Pereira was invited to take his place. Lafayette had, years previous, defended the work of Machado against the criticisms of Sílvio Romero by publishing four contestatory articles in the *Jornal do Comércio* (Montello, *O Presidente* 318). For this reason, he was deemed by the ABL as Machado's appropriate successor. Lafayette accepted the invitation, but for unknown reasons he refused to deliver the traditional "Discurso de posse" that would have praised Machado's life and work. Since Machado de Assis was, in the words of Josué Montello, "a mais alta glória literária do Brasil," he was denied by Lafayette's refusal to speak, "o louvor que

lhe era devido” (*O Presidente* 320). Years later in 1926, the Academy would still feel that too little had been done to memorialize their first president. That year, the then president Coelho Neto appealed to the nation for the construction of a monument that would venerate the memory of Machado de Assis. For Coelho Neto, this monument would represent the “glorificação devida a um dos maiores vultos da literatura pátria e um dos mais peritos lapidários da língua portuguesa” (Montello, *O Presidente* 333).

In the words of Jeffrey D. Needell, the predominant concept among the members of the Academy at its founding was that “national literature was the nation’s soul, memory, and conscience” (182). The role of death in creating this society “ad immortalitatem” reflects the elite’s impetus towards glorifying the nation by glorifying its literature. As demonstrated by this example with Machado, when a member of the ABL dies, the society attempts to affirm through symbolic discourse the assurance of that writer’s place within the national canon of literary “immortals.” When Lafayette refused to deliver his “Discurso de posse,” he frustrated this process.

With Guimarães Rosa’s death decades later, this process would be far from frustrated. Not only would Rosa be glorified through Athayde’s speech just after his death, the whole affair was shrouded in death—both symbolic and real. Even Rosa himself contemplated the subject in his speech praising his predecessor, the deceased fellow writer-diplomat João Neves da Fontoura. While speaking, Guimarães Rosa echoes Freyre’s core implication cited previously by stating that, “A gente morre é para provar que viveu” (85). Death, in this sense, instead of being the antithesis of life, represents the final step in a social process by which one’s life takes on collective significance for the survivors. In Guimarães Rosa’s case and in that of other “immortals,” it is left to the ABL to decide how to construe the “proof” of the deceased’s life in a way that depicts the institution’s own symbolic glory.

While proclaiming Guimarães Rosa’s work as “uma das conquistas mundiais da cultura brasileira” (100), Afonso Arinos’s speech deals with death on a literary level. He postulates that the death of Diadorim in *Grande sertão: veredas* symbolizes “uma espécie de expressão mais alta da humanidade” (103). Four days later, Athayde’s speech would be no less symbolic. He proposed that, through death, Guimarães Rosa became a part of “[a]queles que a morte revitalize,

sendo perene portanto o processo reintegratório do humus fecundo” (111). If Guimarães Rosa was culturally invigorated by death, as Athayde suggests, then this symbolic turn to life takes on monumental national significance within the Academy. Concerned not necessarily with Guimarães Rosa’s physical remains, but rather with his social ones, these ABL speeches configure death in a collective sense in order to consolidate and perpetuate an eternal national ideal linked with literature. Similar to Machado, Guimarães Rosa, as a canonized writer within the ABL, is articulated in these speeches as the cultural gatekeeper of the nation’s eternal narration.

In order to provide “proof” of the writer’s immortality, the commemorative speeches surrounding Rosa’s death align themselves with important national symbols. In his speech, Afonso Arinos compares Guimarães Rosa’s writing to Brasília: “Fizestes com elas [as palavras] o que Lúcio Costa e Oscar Niemeyer fizeram com as linhas e os volumes inexistentes: uma construção para o mundo, no meio do Brasil” (99). Although its construction is most directly associated with the Kubitschek presidency, Brasília is a national symbol that is greater than the period in which it was created. Brasília, similar to the empty chairs in the ABL, is a physical location continually (re)occupied by successive political representatives. Thus, Arinos proposes that Brasília and Guimarães Rosa represent, the former physically and the latter discursively, the empty space wherein the nation might be written “no meio do Brasil.”

If nations are at once finite and imagined as infinite,² the successful creation and articulation of national symbols through writing is necessary in order to affect the erasure of their finitude. Death brings to the forefront this paradox since, according to Derrida, it is an ambiguous cultural and biological event that imposes a limit (42). The limit imposed by death is reflected at the borders of nations and cultures. As those who write the nation cross the border of death, there is space for what Derrida calls the “possibility of the impossible” (11). The ambivalent spaces of death allow for proscription since “Dying is neither entirely natural (biological) nor cultural. And the question of limits articulated [. . .] is also the question of the border between cultures, languages, countries, nations, and religions” (42). Even if death, and specifically Guimarães Rosa’s death may be, as Derrida proposed, a phenomenon that “names the very irreplaceability of absolute singularity (no one can die in my place or in the place of the

other)” (22), within it rests a sufficient emptiness to allow for grounding its collective meaning in the nation.

In his speech “O verbo & o logos,” Guimarães Rosa contemplates the challenges of adequately remembering João Neves, the predecessor to his chair. He expresses a sense of obligation to portray João Neves’s “individual greatness” not as relative to his life, but rather in absolute terms: “Como redemonstrar a grandeza individual de um homem, mérito longuíssimo, sua humanidade profunda: passar do João Neves relativo ao João Neves absoluto? Sua perene lembrança—me reobriga” (59). In this way, with the advent of physical death, the relativity of João Neves’s life becomes transformed through its “perennial remembrance” into an absolute. Guimarães Rosa recognizes writing as an inexact, yet necessary operation of contextualizing an absolute. By remembering his predecessor as an entity not destroyed by death, but rather made absolute by it, Guimarães Rosa gives cultural and collective significance to the individual life of his predecessor. The next two sentences in the passage read: “O afeto propõe fortes e miúdas reminiscências. Por essa mesma proximidade, tanto e muito me escapa; fino, estranho, inacabado, é sempre o destino da gente” (59). In this way, writing becomes an “unfinished” act that, like death, has limitless rhetorical possibilities.

Although it is true that the relationship between death and the nation in the ABL reflects in a relative sense the ways in which death’s collective meaning may be symbolically inscribed within certain geopolitical borders, in the case of Guimarães Rosa, remembering or writing death also conversely demonstrates an erasure of borders between the physical and the metaphysical. This erasure of borders is needed to express a parallel between the “absolute” individual and the infinite nation. According to Guimarães Rosa, as he and Neves worked together as diplomats, they often referred to one another by substituting their proper names with toponyms. In Guimarães Rosa’s speech, this habitual occurrence between the two expresses a limitless metaphysicality that replaces not only Neves and Rosa’s limited individual mortality, but also the nation’s delimited geography:

Por mim, freqüente respondia-lhe topando topônimos.
 –“*Cachoeira concorda?*” –se bem que, no comum, o
 chamasse “Ministro.” Escuto-o: –“*E agora? Que há com
 Cordisburgo?*”

– Muito, Ministro. Muita coisa [. . .] (58)

Just as topographic dots and lines on a physical map represent the literal shape of the nation, the substitution of João Neves's proper name for his hometown of Cachoeira, Rio Grande do Sul and that of Guimarães Rosa's proper name for his hometown of Cordisburgo, Minas Gerais articulate these writer-diplomats as toponymic metaphors, capable of giving metaphysical form to Brazil. Through the articulation of this substitution, these dialogues between Guimarães Rosa and João Neves "induce the body to become a cultural sign" (Butler 522), erasing the borders between the individual and the nation.

By linking Guimarães Rosa's implication that within this toponymic metonymy there is "muita coisa," we can begin to consider the repercussions of his prior remark: "entendíamos juntos, do modo, o país entrançado e uno, nosso primordial encontro seriam resvés íntimos efeitos regionais" (58). As these writers transform themselves discursively into "efeitos regionais," Rosa's speech not only proposes an eternal connection between writing and Brazil, but also elides the political, cultural, and even geographic differences found within its territory. This elision is accomplished by implementing a mystifying homogenous discourse which casts Brazil's long history of struggles between regional cultures and politics as mere "efeitos regionais" in favor of the national consolidation of a "país, entrançado e uno" (58). As they become the loci for national metonymy, Rosa and Neves amass cultural weight transformed from writers of the nation into writers-as-the-nation, replacing Brazil's physical borders with a limitless metaphysicality. Or rather, as long as Rosa and Neves remain "perene," so does Brazil.

Drawing a parallel with the early years of the ABL, this metonymy is reminiscent of the words of Coelho Neto when he proposed that "AINDA QUE ELE PRÓPRIO, com a pena, haja construído o monumento perene do seu nome,"³ Machado, through the construction of a monument that would be a "preito nacional," could "tornar à superfície da vida ressurgido em glória" (Montello, *O Presidente* 332-333). Just as Neves and Guimarães Rosa were to be grounded in fixed geographic locations, Machado's monument was to affix his memory to a visible public space in Rio de Janeiro. Whether in the streets of Rio, in an empty chair of the ABL or in the sertão of Minas Gerais, the ABL transforms writers of the nation into writers-as-the-nation, providing the visible physical "proof" of literature's symbolic national role.

This transformation of João Neves, Guimarães Rosa and Machado de Assis from the “relative” to the “absolute” is ultimately only possible through death because it creates the discursive space wherein the appropriate symbols might be constructed. The toponymic metonymy found in Guimarães Rosa’s speech produces a powerful metaphor that inhabits the symbolic space associated with the traditions of writing, death and the nation in the ABL. Guimarães Rosa erases the borders of João Neves’s relativity to fictionalize an absolute “mundo mágico” (87) in which the writer and nation can symbiotically and symbolically coexist. Through death, João Neves’s relevance in the land of the living is guaranteed as he passes “para o lado claro, fora e acima de suave ramerrão e terríveis balbúrdias” (85) becoming a permanent fixture, like the “fortes gerais estrelas” and the “mugibundo buriti,” in the landscape of Guimarães Rosa’s “magic” Brazil (87).

Once Guimarães Rosa’s speech was concluded, he was, in keeping with tradition, ceremoniously received into the Academy with Afonso Arinos’s address. Concerning the new inductee’s literature, Arinos suggested: “Vosso poder criador foi descobrindo, na sucessão das obras-primas, um mundo de símbolos, que testemunham realidades insuspeitadas da vida e do espírito” (93). Correspondingly, the most expressive of these moments in which Arinos proposes the literary to not only “testemunhar,” but also actually transform “realidades” evolves around the death of Diadorim in Rosa’s *Grande sertão: veredas*:

Entre mar e céu surgem da vossa pena as figuras imortais dos homens e mulheres de um outro Brasil, que ambos conhecemos e amamos, o dos campos gerais das savanas do São Francisco. [. . .] Vossa representação simbólica desse homem e dessa mulher, em síntese, chegou ao ápice na figura de Diadorim, homem e mulher ao mesmo tempo. Há, para mim, outro símbolo na morte de Diadorim, que é uma humana transfiguração. Vivo, na luta suja da vida, ele era homem; mas morta ela se transfigura em mulher, sem sexo, neutra como na palavra alemã, elevando-se a uma espécie de expressão mais alta da humanidade. (103)

Arinos’s interpretation of the death of Diadorim proposes that writing has tangible social ramifications because it may “movimenta[r] e dirig[ir] a mutação incessante da realidade” (102). This mythical

narrative process is linked with the sociality of death to the degree that Diadorim's heroic yet violent death becomes capacitated to transform the living. According to Arinos, as the author creates some "outro Brasil" in *Grande sertão: veredas*, Rosa's "figuras imortais" begin a modal process of transposition that culminates with their articulation as symbols of all humanity, exemplified by Diadorim's death. Thus, for Arinos, writing death "unifica a diversidade e assegura a continuidade" (102). Erasing the inequalities not only between nations, but also between "men" and "women" everywhere, the symbol of death multiplies the image of Diadorim into an endless expression (however imaginary it may be) of the eternal solidarity of all humankind. While Guimarães Rosa's writing is described by Arinos as "a arquitetura do Planalto, uma das conquistas mundiais da cultura brasileira" (100), Diadorim's death likewise immortalizes Brazilian literature to the degree that it places the nation's inhabitants in sentimental concord with those of other nations. For Arinos, Diadorim's death and the "arquitetura do Planalto" form the interchangeable parts of a symbolic puzzle that superimpose themselves interminably over the image of Brazil in order to elevate the nation to universal glory.

Taking place just one day after Rosa's death and four days after his acceptance into the ABL, Austregésilo de Athayde's speech suggests that the actual death of Guimarães Rosa is no less unificatory than that of Diadorim. The symbolism of Athayde's "Discurso de adeus a Guimarães Rosa" attributes transcendental power to the deceased author through religious imagery.

[Ó] querido e breve companheiro, taumaturgo sertanejo, senhor de invenções inauditas, profeta do mundo que se desentranha, de culturas primitivas seculares, atrevido bandeirante de realidades ainda não sondadas, João Guimarães Rosa! São incontáveis os serviços à tua pátria, cujo renome e prestígio aumentaste entre as nações [. . .]. (110)

By evoking the image of the prophet, Athayde transforms Guimarães Rosa into a medium for the expression of a "divine" national will and destiny. The "prophet" Guimarães Rosa, instead of being in the service of God, is in the service of Brazil. Thus, something akin to Walt Whitman's conception of the poet-prophet,⁴ Athayde's representation

of Guimarães Rosa as one that has borne “incontáveis [. . .] serviços a tua pátria” takes on monumental significance.

In order to envision national “realidades ainda não sondadas,” Athayde constructs for the ABL a mythical image of Rosa connected with the nation’s dominant religious discourses. This relationship between the religious and the literary evokes a Romantic image of “artists as special people and art as sacred” (Kernan 27). In Brazil, imagining death through “símbolos de imortalidade” associated with mythical-religious power and authority, such as “figuras de dragões, leões, anjos, corujas, folhas de palmeira ou de louro, santos, da própria Virgem, do próprio Cristo” has long accompanied the memorial traditions of the elite (Freyre xl). As this politics of death manifests itself in the arena of national literature, Guimarães Rosa, as a writer, becomes an eternal symbol of what it means to be Brazil(ian).

Joaquim Nabuco, in his “Discurso de Posse” at the ABL’s inaugural session on the 20th of July, 1897, declared:

As Academias, como tantas outras coisas, precisam de antiguidade. Uma Academia nova é como uma religião sem mistérios: falta-lhe solenidade. A nossa principal função não poderá ser preenchida senão muito tempo depois de nós, na terceira ou quarta dinastia dos nossos sucessores. (par. 8)

The discursive space created by Guimarães Rosa’s death provides Athayde with a singular occasion in which he might reemphasize the ABL’s “mistérios.” By Athayde articulating Guimarães Rosa as a prophet of the “pátria, cujo renome e prestígio aumentaste entre as nações” (110), Rosa’s transformation is constructed at a temporal and cultural crossroads of Brazilian history. A pre-colonial history of “culturas primitivas seculares” and a colonial history of “bandeirantes” converge with the nation’s future “realidades ainda não sondadas” over a solemn, yet still fatidic, authorial and, above all, national body (110).

Another striking example of a connection with the religious is Athayde’s peroration that explicitly appendages itself to the Bible as it contemplates Guimarães Rosa’s newfound “eternal” glory:

E uma das tuas páginas flui a naturalidade desta reflexão consentânea com a sabedoria de Eclesiastes: “As coisas por si mesmas, por si, escolhem de suceder ou não, no prosseguir.”⁵ A escolha de suceder foi feita, feita por si mesma, nos desígnios da divina Graça, a qual te recobre com a Sua luz, neste derradeiro passo da eternidade que começa. Neste nosso adeus há muito de saudade, consideração e amor, mas o seu profundo sentido é o do testemunho unânime do País [. . .]. (111)

The appearance of three words in this passage that begin with the majuscule—“Graça,” “Sua,” and “País”—open the way for furthering a religious connection. The appearance of the first two—“Graça” and “Sua”—represents a typical expression of reverence for God. Yet, by allocating the majuscule also to the word “País,” Athayde shows that it is not only deity that is revered. The speech places Brazil on the same level as the “divina Graça.” Thus, in like manner to Guimarães Rosa’s sanctification as a prophet, this deified designation of the “País,” as it stands personified “[. . .] reclinado [. . .] sobre as aparências humanas [de Guimarães Rosa]” (111), reflects the religiosity through which an intellectual institution whose maxim reads “ad immortalitatem” is obligated to navigate in order to shore up its national designs. Thus, what is of note here is not the religiosity proper of Brazil or Brazilians, but rather the speech’s manipulation of religious and historical symbols to give “eternal” national relevance to Guimarães Rosa’s writing and death.

The ambivalence between “Graça” and “País” is further complicated in its relationship to the memorialized writer by such slippery and highly subjective phrases as “claridade do teu espírito,” “passo da eternidade,” “admiração universal,” and especially “[a] alvorada de tua bem-aventurança” (111). But, those who write the nation must articulate such ambiguities in an effort to guarantee a mythical rendering or, as Guimarães Rosa suggests, a rendering that is “enrançado e uno.” Even Guimarães Rosa, in his own speech, reflected on this relationship between “Graça” and “País.” Quoting Arthur da Silva Bernardes, Rosa self-referentially proclaims: “O fim do homem é Deus, para o qual devemos, preferentemente, viver. Eu, porém, vivi mais para a Pátria, esquecendo-me d’Ele” (83).⁶

In these three speeches, dissolution by death is no less an option for the culturally enfranchised members of the ABL than it is for the

nation. Thus, in order for the nation's scholarly dead to be transfigured into national symbols, these discourses must impose upon their bodies metaphysical attributes of religious, topographic and literary entities for which death poses no threat of dissolution. In Guimarães Rosa's speech, this turn to the metaphysical is constructed by using toponyms as substitutes for proper names. In this way, Guimarães Rosa creates an infrangible metonymy between the writer and the nation, simultaneously erasing the limits of the writer's mortality and the nation's finitude. Similarly, for Arinos, Diadorim's death becomes a means to universally glorify Guimarães Rosa's writing, arguing that it is a symbol of the solidarity of all humankind. In the last speech, Athayde connects Guimarães Rosa to religious imagery by consecrating him as a transfigured mythical prophet. As a prophet for the nation, Athayde expresses the author's "absolute" greatness while also embodying the infinite greatness of Brazil, depicted as a personified being mourning the loss of one of its most celebrated authors.

Years before the founding of the ABL, Machado de Assis had already contemplated the importance of writing in sustaining a national project when in "Instinto de Nacionalidade" he suggested how, through criticism, Brazilian literature "[. . .] se desenvolva e caminhe aos altos destinos que a esperam" (804). Death is an important mechanism by which the ABL has asserted the national importance of literature. Death in the ABL transforms Guimarães Rosa and other writers into mythical symbols capable of overtaking Machado's "altos destinos" while also allowing for the creation of Nabuco's institutional "mistérios." In the ABL, physical death enriches the writer's social cachet and provokes the cultural maelstrom by which the institution might emerge empowered to articulate the "solemnity" of its mission. Where the political borders provide the blueprint, these speeches surrounding Rosa's induction into "immortality" provide the suitable *magma* for expression. Indeed, at the time of Guimarães Rosa's death, Afrânio Coutinho would propose that, because of Guimarães Rosa: "O Brasil é realmente uma literatura já hoje brasileira" (132).

The national project of the ABL, not limited only to this episode involving Guimarães Rosa, is sustained by death because of the discursive space it creates within the ABL's process of election. In particular, these three ABL speeches set the nation into perpetual motion as they write and rewrite Brazil's eternal rejuvenation through symbolic discourse and death.

Notes

1. All antiquated Portuguese orthography has been modernized.
2. Although this article deals primarily with the articulation of death as it proposes the ABL's imagined infiniteness as a parallel with that of the nation, many of the ideas herein on the role of writing in constructing an "eternal" nation are indebted to *Nation and Narration* (edited by Homi K. Bhabha) as well as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.
3. Emphasis appears in the original.
4. Speaking of the religiosity of writing in association with "the advent of America, and of science and democracy," Whitman writes: "Only the priests and poets of the modern, at least as exalted as any in the past, fully absorbing and appreciating the results of the past, in the commonality of all humanity [. . .] recast the old metal, the already achieved material, into and through new moulds, current forms" (1061). English orthography has been modernized.
5. Athayde is quoting from Guimarães Rosa's short story "No prosseguir" found in *Tutaméia: terceiras estórias*: "As coisas, mesmas, por si, escolhem de suceder ou não, no prosseguir" (99).
6. The italics appear in the original.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London & NY: Verso, 1991.
- Athayde, Austregésilo de. "Discurso de adeus." *Em memória de João Guimarães Rosa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1968: 107–112.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Introduction: Narrating the Nation." *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. New York: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1990: 1–7.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40/4 (1988): 519–531.
- Coutinho, Afrânio, et al. "Sessão de saudade dedicada à memória de João Guimarães Rosa." *Em memória de João Guimarães Rosa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1968: 115–155.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Aporias*. Eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery. Trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Freyre, Gilberto. *Sobrados e mucambos*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1961.
- Guimarães Rosa, João. "A hora e a vez de Augusto Matraga." *Sagarana*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2001: 363–413.

- . *Grande sertão: veredas*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1972.
- . “O verbo & o logos: discurso de posse.” *Em Memória de João Guimarães Rosa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1968: 55–88.
- . “No prosseguir.” *Tutaméia: terceiras estórias*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio: 97–100.
- Henriques, Cláudio Cezar. “Entrelinhas.” *Atas da Academia Brasileira de Letras: Presidência de Machado de Assis (1896-1908)*. Ed. Cláudio Cezar Henriques. Rio de Janeiro: Academia Brasileira de Letras, 2001: 3–25.
- Kernan, Alvin. *The Death of Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.
- Machado de Assis, Joaquim Maria. “Instinto de nacionalidade.” *Obra completa, Vol III*. Ed. Afrânio Coutinho. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Aguilar Ltda., 1962: 801–809.
- . “Na Academia Brasileira: discurso inaugural.” *Obra Completa, Vol III*. Ed. Afrânio Coutinho. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Aguilar Ltda, 1962: 926.
- Melo Franco, Afonso Arinos de. “O verbo & o logos: discurso de recepção.” *Em memória de João Guimarães Rosa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, 1968: 89–106.
- Montello, Josué. “O Presidente Machado de Assis nos papéis e relíquias da Academia Brasileira de Letras.” Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1986.
- Murdock, Maureen. *Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory*. New York: Seal Press, 2003.
- Nabuco, Joaquim. “Discurso de posse.” *Joaquim Nabuco*. Academia Brasileira de Letras. 6 October 2007. < <http://www.academia.org.br/>>
- Needell, Jeffrey D. *A Tropical Belle Epoque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Whitman, Walt. “Darwinism—(then Furthermore).” *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose: Leaves of Grass (1855), Leaves of Grass (1891–92), Complete Prose Works (1892), Supplementary Prose*. NY: The Library of America, 1982: 1060–1061.