

**Notes on the Elements that Constitute an *Escrevivência*
[Writing-living] / *Considerações a respeito de elementos constituintes de
uma Escrevivência***

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *Escrevivência* [Writing-living] was first used in 1996 by Conceição Evaristo. From that moment on, there has been an effort to systematize said concept, both by Evaristo and by other researchers. In this paper, we join these researchers, seeking to find some of the key aspects in cultural products considered to be *Escrevivências*. To this end, we draw on the reflections of Conceição Evaristo and relate them to the thoughts of other black people, such as Bell hooks and Grada Kilomba. We also make use of the French Semiotics to support thoughts and brief analyses of texts such as Maria Felipa, *cordel* literature written by Jarid Arraes. The research has allowed us to point out the following as key or recurring aspects in *Escrevivências*: black authorship, (re)creation through fiction, black characters taking on the roles of subjects, an internal point of view, and an ideological consonance.

KEYWORDS: *Escrevivência*; Enunciation; Black Literature

RESUMO

O conceito de Escrevivência foi utilizado pela primeira vez em 1996 por Conceição Evaristo. A partir de então, nota-se um esforço de sistematização do conceito tanto por parte de Evaristo, como por outras pessoas pesquisadoras. No presente artigo, juntamos a essas pessoas, buscando verificar algumas das características essenciais em produções culturais escreviventes. Para tanto, partimos de reflexões de Conceição Evaristo e as relacionamos com ideias de outras pessoas negras, como Bell hooks e Grada Kilomba. Também nos valem do ferramental analítico da Semiótica discursiva para embasar reflexões e breves análises de textos como o cordel “Maria Felipa”, de autoria de Jarid Arraes. Nossas investigações nos permitiram apontar a autoria negra, a (re)criação por meio da ficção, a ocupação do papel de sujeito por parte das personagens negras, o ponto de vista interno e o alinhamento ideológico como elementos essenciais ou recorrentes em Escrevivências.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Escrevivência*; Enunciação; Literatura negra

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Introduction

The idea for this paper has arisen from the powerful interactions and learnings to which we had access during a postgraduate course taught by Conceição Evaristo with the assistance of Calila das Mercês and Ludmilla Lis at University of São Paulo. The course – which focused on the concept of *Escrevivência* [Writing-living] – was itself a (vivid) example of *Escrevivência*. For over four months, we gathered weekly to listen to the enriching reflections of Conceição Evaristo, Calila das Mercês, the members of *Escrevivência* Study Group and other colleagues. We could also listen to other black women, avid producers of *Escrevivências*, who inspire(d) us greatly: Ana Bispo, Eliana Alves Cruz, Iléa Ferraz, Juh Almeida and Preta Rara. The discussions moved us both intellectually and emotionally and were always centered on the concept of *Escrevivência*. This concept first appeared in Conceição Evaristo's master's dissertation (1996) and has been thought about by Evaristo and several other people. This collective reflection on the concept is evidenced by publications, such as the book organized by Constância Lima Duarte and Isabella Rosado Nunes; the book is called *Escrevivência: a escrita de nós* [Writing-living: the writing of us] and was published by Mina Comunicação e Arte in 2020, and it carries papers on the concept of *Escrevivência*, and on the works of Conceição Evaristo.

Based both on the suggested readings and the discussions we had in class, we started asking ourselves what the essential and/or usual characteristics of *Escrevivências* might be. With the investigations hereby reported, we seek to contribute to the understanding of the elements which are important for cultural productions to be considered *Escrevivências*. In order to achieve our goal, we are going to rely on the words of Conceição Evaristo, who coined the term, commenting on her statements, and reflecting on them with the help of other black thinkers; we are also going to use part of the theoretical tools of French Semiotics, which will help us analyze the roles played by black characters in some works. The importance of this research is attested by the always effervescent disputes over racial issues; such disputes are also waged in the world produced by literature, and they reach the world that discusses literature.

Our research has allowed us to establish a series of elements that are essential – or at least common – to *Escrevivências*. Nonetheless, we are aware that this list of

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characteristics is far from exhaustive, and there is still plenty of room for reflections on the concept coined by Evaristo, as well as for studies that apply said concept as a key to reading cultural productions. It is only through such applications that it could be possible to confirm the observations we and other researchers make about the common characteristics of *Escrevivências*. It is also through the applications of the concept, as well as the considerations about it, that researchers could discover other frequent or common aspects of *Escrevivências*.

Our investigations are divided into three main sections. In the first section, we discuss the importance of black authorship to *Escrevivências*. To this end, we look at how black people participate as a subject who enunciates, and no longer just as an object observed and portrayed. We also address the possibilities that fiction offers to constructing new meanings about past, present and future. We then move on to the second section, in which we discuss the role black characters play within cultural productions. In order to address the subject, we first lay the conceptual foundations, defining the notions and concepts we are going to use; these notions and concepts come from French Semiotics. Afterwards, we discuss the actantial roles played by black women in works such as *The Slum* (2000),¹ by Aluísio Azevedo, and in a piece of *cordel* literature named *Maria Felipa*, taken from the book *Heroínas Negras Brasileiras em 15 Cordéis* [Brazilian Black Heroins in 15 Cordels] (2020), by Jarid Arraes, making comparisons between what is found in these two creations. To conclude the second section, we discuss the *meaning effects* arising from the point of view adopted, as well as the (con)fusion between the enunciator, narrator and characters. In the third and last section, we address the importance of an ideological alignment for a cultural production to be considered an *Escrevivência*.

1 About the Importance of Authorship in a Story that Concerns Us (the Enunciation)

By taking control of ‘the pen,’ an object that represents white phallogentric power, female black writers seek to inscribe images of

¹ AZEVEDO, Aluísio Tancredo Gonçalves de. *The Slum*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

self-representation in the Brazilian literary corpus (Evaristo, 2005, p. 54).²

This act of black women taking control of the pen, which Conceição Evaristo talks about, represents the act of taking control of the words about one's own history. Controlling the pen, black people – and, more specifically, black women – take themselves to the position of a Subject, overcoming the position previously imposed on them by those who have historically been the owners of pen and letters. By taking control of the pen, these women change the roles they play.

1.1 Formerly an Object, Now a Subject

The importance of existing as a Subject and not just as an Object has been highlighted countless times and by people whose work is widely recognized. This is the case of Grada Kilomba, who dedicates the introduction of *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (2010)³ to dealing with the importance of overcoming the role of Object and becoming a Subject through the writing of her book. Let it be noted that the introduction is entitled “Becoming the Subject.” Kilomba states that the “passage from objecthood to subjecthood is what marks writing as a political act” (2010, p. 12).⁴ If we paraphrase Kilomba, we could say that the passage from objecthood to subjecthood is one of the requirements – and perhaps the most important one – that mark black a writing as an *Escrevivência*. In this sense, we might be able to realize that the goal announced by Kilomba goes hand in hand with the desire to produce an *Escrevivência*, that is, to write-live. Bell hooks also emphasizes the value of producing a text as a way of becoming a subject and no longer occupying the position of an object, defining what the act of speech means: “It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back,’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice” (Hooks, 2015, p. 9).⁵

² In Portuguese: “Assenhoreando-se ‘da pena,’ objeto representativo do poder falo-cêntrico branco, as escritoras negras buscam inscrever no corpus literário brasileiro imagens de uma auto-representação”

³ KILOMBA, Grada. *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*. Münster: Unrast Verlag. 2. Auflage, 2010.

⁴ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁵ HOOKS, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

In order to understand the similarity between Conceição Evaristo's concept of *Escrevivência* and what both Grada Kilomba and Bell hooks want, judging by the aforementioned quotes, it is important to continue reading the Introduction to *Plantation Memories*: "This book represents this double desire: the desire to oppose that place of 'Otherness' and the desire to invent ourselves new" (Kilomba, 2010, p. 13).⁶ Let us address the two desires mentioned by Kilomba, starting with that of opposing the otherness, which means ceasing to be *the other* in order to become *the one*, in order to become the *self*. On this subject, Conceição Evaristo says:

Placing the other as the one who deviates from the norm, as the one who does not conform to the standard, as the one who is even allowed to live their exoticism, is just the continuation of a racist comparative discourse, in which the other continues to fulfill their role as object, being denied the role of subject, of agent of their own history (Evaristo, 1996, p. 3).⁷

As we can see from Conceição Evaristo's words, 'opposing' otherness is strictly related to becoming a subject; the identification between the person who tells something and the person who appears as a character in the story begins to emerge as an important element towards this process of overcoming otherness. It is worth noting that, although that is an extremely important element, having a black person in the role of the subject who enunciates is no guarantee of fully overcoming otherness. We point that because there might be cases in which the black subject is convinced – by white subjects – of black inferiority, what causes them to reproduce the clichés of whiteness, yearning for access to the white world and not realizing that they are working for a project that excludes them. This is what Fanon points out, telling us that there are cases in which "the racialized social group tries to imitate the oppressor and thereby to deracialize itself. The 'inferior race' denies itself as a different race. It shares with the 'superior race' the convictions, doctrines, and other attitudes concerning it. (Fanon, 1967, p. 38).⁸ We do not

⁶ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁷ In Portuguese: "Colocar o outro como o desviante da norma, como aquele que foge ao padrão, como aquele que até pode viver o seu exotismo, é apenas a perduração de um discurso comparatista racista, em que o outro continua apenas cumprindo o seu papel de objeto, sendo-lhe negado o papel de sujeito, de agente de sua própria história.."

⁸ FANON, Frantz. *Toward the African Revolution*. Translated by: Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

intend to blame the black subject who has internalized the discourse of whiteness; we simply wish to highlight something that we are going to address in more detail in the last section of this paper, that is the fact that “ideological alignment” plays a central role for a text to be considered an *Escrevivência*.

1.2 Fiction as a Way to Create New Meanings

We are now going to address the second desire mentioned by Kilomba on page 13 of her *Plantation Memories*⁹ and which we mentioned above: the desire of inventing ourselves new. This goal is also included in the project of *Escrevivências*, as we note by the excerpt below.

Escrevivência, in its first conception, takes place as an act of writing made by black women, as *an action that aims to blur, to undo an image of the past*, in which the body-voice of enslaved black women had its power of emission also under the control of slavers, men, women and even children (Evaristo, 2020, p. 30, emphasis added).¹⁰

In accordance with what Conceição Evaristo says, we can discuss how the act of producing literature based on *Escrevivência* might contribute to this transition from objecthood to subjecthood, considering that fiction presents the possibility of blurring and/or undoing images of the past, then allowing greater freedom not only for creation, but also for the re-creation of a (hi)story. Thus, while it might sometimes be difficult to retrieve the black perspective on certain historical themes/events with the help of supposedly non-fictional writings, fiction offers us a good option for reinventing or reinterpreting the past from a black perspective. *Um defeito de cor* [A Defect of Color] (2018), a novel by Ana Maria Gonçalves, is an example of this retrieval of a black perspective on events about which official documents tell a story with virtually no black voices as enunciators – that is, without representatives of blackness in the role of subject. In her novel, on the other hand, Ana Maria Gonçalves transforms the situation and

⁹ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “Escrevivência, em sua concepção inicial, se realiza como um ato de escrita das mulheres negras, como *uma ação que pretende borrar, desfazer uma imagem do passado*, em que o corpo-voz de mulheres negras escravizadas tinha sua potência de emissão também sob o controle dos escravocratas, homens, mulheres e até crianças.”

presents a version narrated in the first person by a black African woman who has been kidnapped in Africa and taken to Brazil; this woman, whose name is Kehinde, but who has been named Luísa in Brazil, tells her story covering everyday life during part of the period when slavery was legal in Brazil.

It is this change in perspective about the past that Conceição Evaristo operates by re-signifying the image of what Brazilians call “Black Mother” – image that could be compared to the stereotype of Mammy –, redeeming this image and offering a black perspective on her, overcoming the stereotyping consolidated by Gilberto Freyre in *The Masters and the Slaves*,¹¹ first published in Portuguese in 1933. While Freyre portrayed the Black Mother as passive, Conceição Evaristo makes us pay attention to the strategies of black mothers, who were often silent, but took advantage of the places they have gone through to help their own (sometimes with food, sometimes with information, sometimes by poisoning someone in the slave owner’s residence...). Such re-signification of the Black Mother has been a critical element in Evaristo’s conception of *Escrevivência*. The author has stated that the “founding image of the term [*Escrevivência*] is the figure of the Black Mother, the one who lived her condition as a slave inside the slave owner’s residence” (Evaristo, 2020, p. 29).¹²

By emphasizing the intelligence of enslaved black women in the slave owner’s residence, Eliana Alvez Cruz is in consonance with Evaristo’s project of re-signifying the image of Black Mothers, as we can notice in the dialogue between Martha and Adônis taken from the novel *Água de barreira* [Cleansing Water] (2018) and quoted below. The situation then represented happens at the historical moment of the so-called abolition of slavery in Brazil. Martha, the black woman who in fact was still a little girl, surprises the young black man by revealing her awareness about how her position can be very strategic in obtaining information from white folks; at the end of her speech, Martha reproduces the gestures that the Adônis himself had made, in order to highlight her cleverness. This ironic mimicking gesture increases the awareness of her intelligence:

¹¹ FREYRE, Gilberto. *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*. 2. ed. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1971.

¹² In Portuguese: “imagem fundante do termo [*Escrevivência*] é a figura da Mãe Preta, aquela que vivia a sua condição de escravizada dentro da casa-grande.”

She checkmated him when she said that he had learned to read, write and make speeches, but had not learned to see.

- If they think that you, a man, don't understand anything, can you imagine what they think about me? Around women they talk even more – and she pointed the index finger of her right hand at her left ear, and her left hand-finger at her forehead (Cruz, 2018, p. 114).¹³

It should be noted that the intelligence shown by the character is one of the ways in which black women – who have historically been inferiorized – are humanized in pieces of literature considered *Escrevivências*. Although Conceição Evaristo's resignification of Black Mothers and Eliana Alves Cruz's novel, *Água de barrela*, are examples of *Escrevivências* about the past, there is no reason to limit ourselves to that time: we can also think of an *Escrevivência* that deals with present and future. The importance of applying *Escrevivência* to the future should in no way be underestimated. Imagining the future could be liberating – for those who imagine it and for those who reap the benefits of such imagination. In this regard, Walidah Imarisha has once stated the following in a text published online and called *Rewriting the Future: Using Science Fiction to Re-Envision Justice*:

[...] we are living science fiction. We are the dreams of enslaved Black folks, who were told it was “unrealistic” to imagine a day when they were not called property. Those Black people refused to confine their dreams to realism, and instead they dreamed us up. Then they bent reality, reshaped the world, to create us (Imarisha, 2015).¹⁴

The importance of fiction is stated once again, and, in this case, regarding the future. Thus, we argue that both the reorganization of the past and the imagination of a future that seems to be utopian might be conceived with the concept of *Escrevivência*, which therefore proves to be very effective as a means of discussing Afrofuturist productions.

¹³ In Portuguese: “O xeque-mate foi ela quem deu, quando disse que ele aprendeu a ler, a escrever e a fazer discurso, mas não aprendeu a enxergar.

- Se eles pensa que ocê que é homi num entende nada, imagina eu? Perto das mulé eles fala ainda mais – e apontou o indicador da mão direita para o ouvido esquerdo e o da mão esquerda para a testa.”

¹⁴ IMARISHA, Walidah. Using Science Fiction to Re-Envision Justice. In: Walidah.com. 2015. Available at: <https://www.walidah.com/blog/2015/2/11/rewriting-the-future-using-science-fiction-to-re-envision-justice>. Access on January 05, 2024.

Up to this point, we have been discussing the roles of subject and object at the enunciation level, i.e. we have been thinking about the subject who produces the discourse and the object of such discourse. Now, we are going to move on to take a closer look at the roles of subject and object played by characters in cultural productions.

2 The Importance of the Actantial Roles Played by Black Characters

In this section, we are going to address the importance of roles played by black characters in *Escrevivências*. To this end, we begin with a conceptual explanation, followed by reflections and examples, and then we conclude with an examination of the point of view and the usual (con)fusion¹⁵ between enunciator, narrator and characters in *Escrevivências*.

2.1 A Brief Conceptual Explanation

In French Semiotics, we understand that there is a hierarchy of delegation of voices in discourse. The table below illustrates the point:

Table 1 – Voice delegation scheme

assumed enunciator	[	narrator in discourse	[	interlocutor x interlocutee	]	narratee in discourse	]	assumed enunciatee
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Source: Adapted from Barros, 2011.

In this scheme, enunciator and enunciatee correspond to the figures of author and reader, respectively, and they are found at the enunciation level. The enunciator then delegates voice to the narrator, who narrates the story. Narrator and narratee are found in the narration level, as one might deduce. The narrator may then give voice to the characters, and we notice the use of direct speech. In a novel such as *Dom Casmurro*

¹⁵ In her texts, such as the preface to *Becos da memória* (2017), Conceição Evaristo spells it “con(fusion).” We have decided, however, to use parentheses on the first syllable, spelling it “(con)fusion,” as we believe that this spelling favors the readings of fusion and confusion, while “con(fusion)” would draw attention to *con* and *fusion*.

(1997),¹⁶ for instance, we have Dom Casmurro himself as a narrator, telling the story and often giving voice to many characters, such as Bentinho, Capitu and José Dias, who talk to each other. At the character level, these are interactions between interlocutors and interlocutee. While we dealt with the enunciation level in the first section of this study, we are now going to take care of the other two levels.

Regarding the narration level, which we are not going to explore in detail, it must be said that when the narrators show themselves – in other words, when there is a first-person narrator – it is sometimes possible to detect, with a certain ease, the race of said narrators. That is precisely what happens in *Becos da memória* [Alleys of Memory], by Conceição Evaristo, a novel in which there is no doubt about the blackness of the narrator. That is something important to the (con)fusion between the levels, something we are going to address further in this study. What interests us the most at the moment, however, is the level that corresponds to the characters, which we are going to discuss in more detail.

While at the enunciation level it is important that black people (and especially black women, in case of *Escrevivências*) raise their voices and produce texts – in other words, that these people who were previously seen only as objects in the stories or, at most, as enunciatees of certain texts, occupy the role of enunciators – it is also important to observe how black people actually occupy the roles of object, subject, etc., as well as which values they seek as subjects and which values they represent as objects. In this examination, we believe the French Semiotics can be of great help.

In order to discuss these issues, it is first necessary to explain, albeit briefly, what actantial roles are, what are some of the roles a character might play according to French Semiotics, and what are some of the features that distinguish them. When we deal with actantial roles, we are addressing functions that are relatively de-semanticized, and which apply “not only to human beings but also to animals, objects, or concepts” (Greimas; Courtés, 1982, p. 5).¹⁷ The actantial roles refer to the *position* occupied by these humans, animals, objects or concepts. There are, for example, the actantial roles of subject and

¹⁶ ASSIS, Machado de. *Dom Casmurro*. Translated by John Gledson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹⁷ GREIMAS, Algirdas Julien; COURTÉS, Joseph. *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982.

object, which are defined by each other: The object is the element the subject seeks to attach to or to detach itself from, and the subject is the element that pursues the attachment or detachment from the object. We could say that the subject is the one who perceives, while the object is the one who is perceived. It should also be said that the object is a receptacle that houses the values. The values are responsible for making the subject pursue or avoid a given object; that is the reason why the object is often called an object of value (Greimas; Courtés, 1982).¹⁸

In addition to these two actants, which are central to narrativity in French Semiotics, others also interest us: the helper, actant that assists the subject on their journey; the opponent, which is the exact opposite of the helper, that is, it is the one who disturbs the subject on their journey; and the anti-subject, actant that is the exact opposite of the subject, and which is the subject rival in their pursuit of the object. The explanations, perhaps too abstract by now, will be more understandable as we bring in the examples.

2.2 Actantial Roles of Black Women

Let us use *The Slum* (2000)¹⁹ as an example. Rita Baiana, in relation to Jerônimo, is occupying the position of an object, while the Portuguese (Jerônimo) occupies the position of a subject – he is the one who seeks to be close to Rita Baiana, the object. Firmo is also present in their story. The latter rivals Jerônimo, playing the role of an anti-subject, fighting the Portuguese over the same object. We can also mention Bertoleza, who has two distinctive moments in relation to João Romão: in the first half of the novel, Bertoleza is a helper to Romão (who is the subject), as the man uses this black woman's labor to achieve his goal of becoming rich; in the second half of *The Slum*, Bertoleza becomes a sort of opponent to João Romão (who is still a subject), as she becomes an obstacle to the man's plans for social climbing. He wanted to achieve this second goal by marrying his neighbor's daughter, since his neighbor, Miranda, is a Baron.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 16.

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 1.

In *The Shum*, as we can note from the previous examples, black women play several actant roles (object, helper, opponent), but never that of a subject. In creations that are explained by the concept of *Escrevivência*, this situation is likely to change. For comparison purposes, we can now look at the book *Heroínas negras brasileiras em 15 cordéis* (2020), written by Jarid Arraes, a black woman from a city called Juazeiro do Norte in the State of Ceará, Brazil. The title of the book itself suggests that, in this work, black women are subjects in their own trajectories – after all, to be a heroine, one needs to be an agent and a protagonist. To better understand this, let us choose a specific piece of cordel from Arraes book, the one that bears the name and tells the story of Maria Felipa, a black woman who led more than two hundred people in the struggle for independence in Bahia, the State where she lived.

In *Maria Felipa*, we can notice black women playing the actantial roles of subject and helper. Maria Felipa herself holds the position of subject, and freedom is the object of value she seeks, as we can see in the verses bellow:

In the State of Bahia
On the Itaparica Island
She took charge
Of the battle which was grand
For the independence
Of Bahia, her living land
(Arraes, 2020, p. 98).²⁰

As we note in the poetry, there are many examples of protagonism and agency and of this black woman, who is gradually characterized as a heroin:

But the story that I tell
Is neither unique nor final
Since Maria Felipa
Was a leader without equal
And with great intelligence
Made herself phenomenal
(Arraes, 2020, p. 99).²¹

²⁰ In Portuguese: “Na ilha de Itaparica/ No estado da Bahia/ Ela assumiu o commando/ Da batalha que zunia/ Pela então independência/ Da Bahia onde vivia.”

²¹ In Portuguese: “Mas o causo aqui contado/ Não é único ou final/ Já que Maria Felipa/ Era líder sem igual/ E com muita inteligência/ Fez de si fenomenal.”

The aforementioned protagonism and agency are emphasized by the words chosen in this *cordel*, given that it is not just in the fourth verse of the above stanza that Felipa is characterized as a leader. In the following stanza – that is, the thirteenth – it is pointed out that several people were guided by Felipa’s actions; in the fourteenth stanza, it is mentioned that Felipa organized the sending of food to those who needed it, while in the nineteenth stanza, she is described as having the “vocation to be our liberator”; in the two verses that open the twenty-second stanza, Maria Felipa is called a “Black and strong heroine/ Leader of this independence”²² (Arraes, 2020, p. 101).

Alongside Maria Felipa, the leader, there are other women acting as helpers. These women are not in the spotlight, but they are extremely important for Maria Felipa to achieve what in Semiotics we call the *conjunction* with the object, that is, for her to achieve her goal and be united with her object of value. These women underline the importance of collectivity for the success of the project, and appear right at the beginning of the text, from the sixth stanza onwards:

And Maria Felipa
Was these women’s leader
About forty women
She brought together
And with a lot of courage
Has created a great fire

Gathered the warriors
Guided by Felipa
They then set fire
To the arriving ships
Who were enemies of mobilized people
(Arraes, 2020, p. 98).²³

As we note in the sixth and seventh stanzas above, the women led by Maria Felipa are not protagonists, but they keep their agency and are active in the pursuit of freedom. Although they do not play the actantial role of *subjects*, but the one of *helpers*, these women are included in the project they are working on, unlike Bertoleza, who works to

²² In Portuguese: “Heroína negra e forte/ Líder dessa independência.”

²³ In Portuguese: “Essa Maria Felipa/ As mulheres liderou/ Eram cerca de quarenta/ As mulheres que juntou/ E com muita ousadia/ Grande incêndio provocou. / Reunidas as guerreiras/ Por Felipa lideradas/ Colocaram fogo alto/ Nas embarcações chegadas/ E que eram inimigas de gente mobilizada.”

enrich João Romão and but is never able to benefit from the results of her own efforts. In the verses above, we can also note that the ships play the role of opponents or even anti-subjects, as they are described as enemies of the mobilized people. In another passage, in the seventeenth stanza, a Portuguese man represents the opponent/anti-subject, while the women continue to play the role of helpers:

In order to teach a lesson
To the Portuguese man in consideration
Felipa also counted
On the organization
Of more female strength
That formed the cooperation
(Arraes, 2020, p. 100).²⁴

Based on this brief analysis, it is possible to claim that one of the important features of *Escrevivências* is the fact that there are black people – and especially black women – playing the roles of subjects not only in terms of enunciation, but also at the level of interlocutors, i.e. when it comes to the characters. There is yet another element that seems to be recurring in *Escrevivências*: a certain (con)fusion between the levels.

2.3 Point of View and (Con)Fusion between Enunciator, Narrator and Characters

Let us revisit the levels set out in the table at the beginning of section 2.1 of this paper – enunciator vs. enunciatee, narrator vs. narratee, interlocutor vs. interlocutee – so we can concentrate on the (con)fusion between them. We might begin to explain the reasons for the existence of such (con)fusion by considering the identification between fiction and reality. The stories brought to light in *Escrevivências* play with verisimilitude, as they seem to be non-fictional. Conceição Evaristo herself comments on this in the opening of an edition of *Becos da memória*, explaining that this novel “was [her] first experiment in creating a fictional text con(fusing) writing and life, or rather, writing and living”²⁵ (Evaristo, 2017, p. 9). The (con)fusion between writing (fiction) and living

²⁴ In Portuguese: “Para nesse português/ Ela dar uma lição/ Felipa também contou/ Com a organização/ De mais força feminina/ Que lhe estendeu a mão.”

²⁵ In Portuguese: “Foi o [seu] primeiro experimento em construir um texto ficcional con(fundindo) escrita e vida, ou, melhor dizendo, escrita e vivência”

(reality) promotes the (con)fusion between writer, narrator and characters, because if the story is real, it could only be told *from the inside*, by a person who was there; thus, narrator and characters would also be anchored in reality. It is therefore common to observe attempts to identify the author with characters or narrators. In her presentation of *Becos da Memória*, Evaristo also comments:

As for Maria-Nova's resemblance to me at the time of my childhood, I'll leave the riddle for those who read us to solve. I am just going to point out that the literature marked by *escrevivência* con(fuse) the identity of the narrating character with the identity of the author. Such con(fusion) does not embarrass me (Evaristo, 2017, p. 12).²⁶

This identification is certainly reinforced by the point of view adopted, which is, as Professor Conceição Evaristo has told us more than once,²⁷ the writing that comes from inside the maid's room; in other words, it is a writing that comes from the subject who has been historically subalternized and demeaned, a writing that is not the result of an external gaze, it is not a look coming from someone who observes the scene from the outside. *Escrevivências* are produced from a core and talk about said core. As Conceição Evaristo says (apud Fonseca, 2020, p. 63), "It is from this place of mine, from 'inside out,' that my stories spring."²⁸ We would dare to say that these stories are not only told from the inside out, but also – and perhaps most importantly – "from the inside in," since the enunciatee (reader) envisaged in these texts includes people who somehow identify with this *inside*. Put differently, these are stories that are easily recognized by a certain group of people, even if they have not exactly lived them. These stories almost belong to that group, something similar to what Conceição Evaristo says in the introduction to *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres* [Non-submissive Tears of Women] (2023, p. 7) and which reinforces the (con)fusion aforementioned: "[...] these stories are not entirely mine,

²⁶ In Portuguese: "Quanto à parecença de Maria-Nova comigo, no tempo do meu eu-menina, deixo a charada para quem nos ler resolver. Insinuo, apenas, que a literatura marcada por uma *escrevivência* pode con(fundir) a identidade da personagem narradora com a identidade da autora. Esta con(fusão) não me constrange."

²⁷ Statements made during the lectures of Evaristo's course "Writing: subjects, places and modes of enunciation - literary corpus in difference" ministered in the first semester of 2023 at the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of São Paulo, a course she taught while holder of the Olavo Setúbal Chair of Art, Culture and Science.

²⁸ In Portuguese: "É desse meu lugar, é desse de 'dentro para fora,' que minhas histórias brotam."

but they almost belong to me, to the extent that they are sometimes (con)fused with mine.”²⁹

This point of view that comes from *within the situation* also ensures the overcoming of the otherness that Kilomba (2010)³⁰ talks about. Based on this inner perspective, the texts feature black characters with complex traits that go way beyond stereotypical descriptions. These texts often work on the feelings and psychology of black characters. This can be seen in Evaristo’s comments about one of the characters in *Becos da Memória*: “Ditinha’s emotional state and psychological traits are described, including her regret for having taken the jewel. Little is said about Mrs. Laura; in fact, the mistress is described through the eyes of the maid”³¹ (Evaristo, 2020, p. 27). It is very significant that the person outside the maid’s room – the mistress – has a description that presented through the filter of the person inside that room, the place where the story originates.

Another example of this *creation from within* can be seen in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,³² first published in 1979 in English, and which was first translated and published in Portuguese in 2017; Even without going into too much detail, it is worth saying that in this novel, the main character, a black woman called Dana, is forced to travel back in time and deal with her white ancestor called Rufus during the slavery period in the United States. The whole story is told from Dana’s point of view, and both Rufus and the other white characters are described through the filter of this point of view; likewise, the black characters are also described from this point of view, which results in complexifications that go beyond the commonly-held stereotypes of certain literary works. *Kindred* can certainly be considered an *Escrevivência*. In Brazil, another example of a novel that represents black characters in a sophisticated and complex way is *Ursula*, by Maria Firmina dos Reis. In her novel, first published in 1859, black enslaved people have voice, and the enslaved Túlio, Susana and Antero “receive a distinctive treatment in the text, a treatment *marked by the internal point of view* and guided by a marked fidelity to the

²⁹ In Portuguese: “[...] estas histórias não são totalmente minhas, mas quase que me pertencem, na medida em que, às vezes, se (con)fundem com as minhas.”

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

³¹ In Portuguese: “O estado emocional de Ditinha, os traços psicológicos da personagem são descritos, inclusive o arrependimento por ter apanhado a joia. De Dona Laura pouco é dito; aliás, a patroa é descrita pelo olhar da empregada”

³² Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*, New York, NY: Beacon Press, 1988.

hitherto hidden history of the African diaspora in Brazil” (Zin, 2019, p. 14, emphasis added).

3 The Importance of Ideological Alignment

That is another important constitutive factor of *Escrevivências*: the ideological alignment with ideas that benefit black people themselves. There are productions by black authors that are created as discourses that start *from within*, placing black people as the subjects of their own story, but which nevertheless work against black autonomy. These productions are ideologically aligned with a racist project, and therefore cannot be considered *Escrevivências*, once they work to comfort the inhabitants of the slave owner’s residence, and, as Conceição Evaristo reminds us (2020, p. 30), “our *Escrevivência* is not to put those in the slave owner’s residence to sleep, but to wake them up from their unjust sleep.”³³

Bearing this in mind, and in order to move forward in the discussion about elements that *constitute* an *Escrevivência*, let us proceed to a quick definition in negative terms, discussing an element that *does not constitute* an *Escrevivência*. To illustrate this, we are going to use the lyrics of a rap by a young black Brazilian man who comes from a poor area and has entered the formal politics. Before that, however, we would like to pose a consideration/question based on Conceição Evaristo’s words quoted above: in addition to not putting those in the slave owner’s residence to sleep, is it possible that an *Escrevivência* might be used to wake up black people who, asleep, have adopted the discourse of the slave owner’s residence and who believe in the racist project that undermines their own lives, often working actively, in deep somnambulism, for the realization of such project? We believe so, and, thus, we have no intention of crucifying these black people. With that in mind, we may now move on to the example.

In a video posted on the YouTube platform and entitled *Um vereas no pedaço* [A councilor on the block] (2020), if we want to translate it into English –, Fernando Holiday parodies the opening song of the US TV show named *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. In the first

³³ In Portuguese: “[...] a nossa Escrevivência não é para adormecer os da casa-grande, e sim acordá-los de seus sonos injustos”

verses of the song, Fernando Holiday manifests the place from which he comes/speaks: “This is the story I’m going to tell you/ I came from Carapicuíba to represent you/ Black, poor, missing father and I found out I was gay/ I should be PSOL, PT, UNE or PC do B.”³⁴ By claiming to be part of groups of historically marginalized people, Holiday seeks to give himself credibility to attack agendas that would *privilege* himself as a marginalized person. After complaining about his history teacher – who Holiday claims have tried to impose his left-wing thinking on him –, he expresses his disagreement and attacks an agenda that defends the rights of black people: “I didn’t want to accept it, they called me stupid/ I don’t defend quotas in public education.”³⁵ Towards the end of the video, Holiday once again addresses the racial issue by rivaling “the black movement.” He says: “The black movement will have to cry on its feet/ For this chair is mine and this black man is faithful.”³⁶ While the other requirements are met (at least apparently), Holiday’s text cannot be considered an *Escrevivência* due to the ideological path adopted: being against the progress of black people’s rights. In other words, the fact that Holiday seeks an object of value that directly conflicts with the rights of black people calls into question the inclusion of this production as an *Escrevivência*.

When it brings to light stories of oppression and suffering, the *Escrevivência* supposes the humanization of black people, and the positive valuation of blackness and black culture; that is, an *Escevivência* supposes the positive valuation of past, present and future of black people and blackness. Therefore, a cultural production that denies all of this and works to discredit blackness and the concerned agenda cannot be aligned with the purposes of *Escrevivências*.

Final Remarks

Our investigations have allowed us to outline some of the essential and/or customary aspects of *Escrevivências*. They are the following: (i) black authorship, which

³⁴ In Portuguese: “Essa é a história que eu vou te contar/ Eu vim de Carapicuíba pra te representar/ Preto, pobre, pai sumido e descobri ser gay/ Devia ser PSOL, PT, da UNE ou PC do B.” “PSOL,” “PT” and “PC do B” are left wing Brazilian parties, while “UNE” is an entity that represents the interests of Students in Brazil, and is politically identified with the left wing.

³⁵ In Portuguese: “Eu não quis aceitar, me chamaram de burro/ Não defendo cota no Ensino Público”

³⁶ In Portuguese: “Movimento negro vai ter que chorar de pé/ Pois essa cadeira é minha e o negão é de fé.”

ensures that black people are the subjects of enunciation and not just the objects of stories;

- (ii) the use of fiction to create or recreate stories in a positive perspective for black people;
- (iii) having black characters who not only play the roles of objects, but also occupy subject functions – not only on the level of enunciation, but also on the narrated level;
- (iv) having a point of view that starts *from within* rather than an outside look, as well as the (con)fusion between enunciator, narrator and characters, which is in a great extent due to the use of such point of view; and
- (v) ideological alignment with projects intended for the good and humanization of black people.

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Review II

I – REVIEW

The study at hand aims at examining the concept of *Escrevivência*, which was first used in 1996 by Conceição Evaristo, and compiling some of its main aspects. The analysis is based on the thoughts of Conceição Evaristo, Bell hooks and Grada Kilomba. It also employs concepts from French semiotics and uses several cultural productions as its *corpus*. It reaches the conclusion that, in order to be considered an *Escrevivência*, a production needs, among other things: a) to have black people as authors; b) to be a fictional (re)creation of history from a positive perspective for black people; c) to have black characters playing the role of subjects; d) to be ideologically aligned with projects aimed at the good and humanization of black people.

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 20 (3): e65636e, July/Sept. 2025

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According to the parameters proposed by the journal, the title is appropriate; its objectives are explicit, and the bibliography is up-to-date and relevant to the topic; the study contributes to the field of knowledge; the text is clear and didactic.

In my opinion, the paper has an interesting proposition, didactic exposition and examples, and conclusions that are pertinent to the exposition, except for the last one, according to comment below.

As I see it, the text needs to be proofread and the last paragraph must be reconsidered.

II - SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE TEXT CONTENT

PAGE - EXCERPT TO BE RECONSIDERED - SUGGESTION OR COMMENT

pp. 5-6 According to what Conceição Evaristo says, we can discuss how producing literature based on *Escrevivência* might contribute to making it easier to make the transition from objecthood to subjecthood, considering that fiction presents the possibility of blurring and/or undoing images of the past, then allowing greater freedom not only for creation, but also for the re-creation of a (hi)story.

Suggestion: I suggest that the expression “making it easier” be reconsidered. I believe it minimizes the struggle and suffering involved in conquering one’s right to be the subject of their own history.

p. 16 - Lastly, it must be said that we are convinced that *Escrevivências* influence the way science is produced, as science cannot be considered neutral, given that a scientific production is a discourse, and that the discourse is, as Barros (2001, p. 150) states, “a place where ideology is elaborated and disseminated.” In this sense, it is our intention that this study to be an *Escrevivência*.

Suggestion: In my opinion, the final consideration, in addition to lacking modalization, is not pertinent, in the sense that it is not aligned with the *corpus* of analysis, which is formed by fiction texts, nor with one of the parameters of an *escrevivência*, which is to be a fictional (re)creation of history.

III- PROOFREADING

In my opinion, the text lacks a general proofreading, especially in terms of punctuation, according to the examples below:

PAGE - EXCERPT - COMMENT/SUGGESTION

p. 2 We could also listen to other black women, avid producers of *escrevivências*, who inspire(d) us greatly: Ana Bispo, Eliana Alves Cruz, Iléa Ferraz, Juh Almeida and Preta Rara.

p. 16 - Lastly, it must be said that we are convinced that *Escrevivências* influence the way science is produced, as science cannot be considered neutral,

Review: p. 2 *Escrevivência* or *escrevivência*?

According to the examples, the term is being spelled in two different ways throughout the text.

p. 2 For over four months, we gathered weekly to listen to the enriching reflections of Conceição Evaristo, of Calila das Mercês, of the members of the Study Group on *Escrevivências* and other colleagues.

Review: p. 2 For over four months, we gathered weekly to listen to the enriching reflections of Conceição Evaristo, Calila das Mercês, the members of the Study Group on *Escrevivências* and other colleagues

p. 2 The discussions, which moved us intellectually and emotionally, and were always centered on the concept of *Escrevivência*, first appeared in Conceição Evaristo’s master’s dissertation (1996) and which has been thought about by Evaristo and several other

people, as evidenced by publications, such as the book organized by Constância Lima Duarte and Isabella Rosado Nunes; the book is called *Escrevivência: a escrita de nós* and was published by Mina Comunicação e Arte in 2020, carrying papers on the concept of *escrevivência*, and on the works of Conceição Evaristo.

Note: The sentence is too long.

pp. 2-3 It is only through applications of this nature that we will be able to confirm the observations we and other researchers makes, as well as to find new aspects which are frequent or even fundamental to *escrevivências*.

Review: pp. 2-3 It is only through applications of this nature that we will be able to confirm the observations we and other researchers make, as well as to find new aspects which are frequent or even fundamental to *escrevivências*.

p. 3 This act of black women taking control of the pen which Conceição Evaristo talks about, represents the act of taking control of the words about one's own history.

Review: p. 3 This act of black women taking control of the pen, which Conceição Evaristo talks about, represents the act of taking control of the words about one's own history.

p. 15 In a video entitled *Um vereas no pedaço* [A councilor on the block] (2020) , posted on the YouTube platform, Fernando Holiday parodies the opening song of the US TV show named *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. In the first verses of the song Fernando Holiday manifests the place from which he talks: "This is the story I'm going to tell you/ I came from Carapicuíba to represent you/ Black, poor, missing father and I found out I was gay/ I should be PSOL, PT, UNE or PC do B."

Suggestion: the titles could be in italics.

REVISIONS REQUIRED [Revised]

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Reviewed on April 29, 2024.

Review III

As stated in the evaluation of the first version of the text, the article at hand analyzes the concept of *Escrevivência* and compiles some of its aspects, based on texts by Conceição Evaristo, Bell hooks and Grada Kilomba, as well as based on concepts of French Semiotics, using several cultural productions as a *corpus*.

It has also been said that the text is in accordance with the parameters proposed by the journal, once its title is appropriate; its objectives are explicit, and the bibliography is up-to-date and relevant to the topic; the study contributes to the field of knowledge; the text is clear and didactic.

It has also been noted that the first version had an interesting proposition, didactic exposition and examples, and conclusions that are pertinent to the exposition, with the exception of the last one, according to comment below.

Then, I suggested the text were proofread and the last paragraph, adjusted.

By reading the second version, I can see that all the suggestions have been accepted and implemented, as shown in the third column of the tables below.

In my opinion, the problems have been solved. However, at the suggestion of this reviewer, the final paragraph of the text was removed, but not replaced. As a result, the

final remarks were left without an inspiring closing, so to speak, and I think the text calls for this.

This absence, however, does not prevent the paper from being approved.

APPROVED

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Reviewed on May 19, 2024.

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