

Religiosity Versus Ecocriticism in *Masters of the Dew*, by Jacques Roumain / *Religiosidade versus ecocrítica em Senhores do orvalho, de Jacques Roumain*

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ABSTRACT

Voodoo, a religion that originated in West Africa, mixed with Catholicism in Haiti, permeates the narrative *Masters of the Dew* (1978), by Jacques Roumain. The Immanuel who gives rise to Emanuel or Manuel, and in Hebrew means “God is with us,” (Figueiredo, 2022) is the protagonist of the story and comes as a “Messiah” to make black people aware that not everything depends on religiosity. He respects the creeds exalted by his people, but warns of the responsibility of each person with the same nature whose entities they are part of. A Character, who is a victim of the diaspora, as he spent 15 years in Cuba, he returns to his country, carrying the experiences he acquired and promoting a breath of hope and continuity for his people. The character’s new worldview facilitates the unfolding of the narrative, causing a clash between the assumptions of a pagan religion, intertwined with the assumptions of Christianity, and having the environment as the trigger for conflict in the plot. This work aims to demonstrate in the narrative the clash between the assumptions of religiosity and the concept of ecocriticism.

KEYWORDS: Religiosity; Ecocriticism; Narrative; Environment

RESUMO

O vodu, religião que teve origem na África ocidental, misturado com o catolicismo no Haiti, permeia a narrativa Senhores do orvalho (2022), de Jacques Roumain. O Immanuel, que dá origem a Emanuel ou Manuel e em hebraico significa “Deus está conosco”, é o protagonista e vem como um “Messias” para conscientizar seu povo de que nem tudo depende da religiosidade. Respeita os credos exaltados pelo seu povo, mas alerta para a responsabilidade de cada um com a mesma natureza de cujas entidades fazem parte. Personagem, vítima da diáspora, pois ficou 15 anos em Cuba, volta para o seu país trazendo as experiências adquiridas e promovendo um sopro de esperança e continuidade para sua gente. A nova cosmovisão da personagem propicia o desdobramento da narrativa, provocando o embate entre os pressupostos de uma religião pagã, imbricada pelos pressupostos do cristianismo, e tendo como desencadeador do conflito na trama, o meio ambiente. Este trabalho pretende demonstrar na narrativa o embate entre os pressupostos da religiosidade e o conceito de ecocrítica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Religiosidade; Ecocrítica; Narrativa; Meio ambiente

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Masters of the Dew (1978),¹ by Jacques Roumain, a novel that began Haitian literature, brings in its fabric a very interesting proposal for reformulating the imaginary of Haiti. An imaginary constructed through the assumptions of religiosity. A religiosity that brings together voodoo and catholicism. Catholicism imposed by the colonizers and which fought so hard against voodoo. In fact, this was fought by several segments, not only by the colonizers, the French, but also by the governor, when it became a Republic after independence, as well as by the United States in its occupation in 1915. According to some scholars, today, the predominant religions in Haiti are catholicism and pentecostal churches, however, many of their practitioners are also part of voodoo. The fight against this religion – voodoo – was so intense that the people found a way to “praise two lords.” However, against this imaginary woven by religiosity, Jacques Roumain’s narrative, published for the first time in 1944, brings a new aspect: the concern for nature, the solution to the misery of a people, who in their vast majority, believe be this the work of the gods. The narrative has as its protagonist, Manuel, derived from Immanuel or Emanuel, which in hebrew means “God is with us” (Figueiredo, 2022). This one comes as the “Messiah” bringing the “good news.” A victim of the diaspora, Manuel lived in Cuba for 15 years, working in sugarcane cutting. Bringing this experience, he becomes aware that not everything depends on religion and returns, preaching to his people the responsibility towards nature that everyone needs to assume. In view of this, the approach to the concept of ecocriticism becomes pertinent. Thus, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996, p. 18) states:

(...) ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious point of view, and Marxist criticism brings to its interpretation of texts an awareness of modes of production and economic classes, ecocriticism adopts a literary studies approach centered on the earth).

And, as if complementing, Richard Kerridge, cited by Garrard, (2006, p. 15) adds, “Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.”²

¹ ROUMAIN, Jacques. *Masters of the Dew*. English translation by Reynal & Hitchcock. Oxford, Chicago, 1978.

² GARRARD, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

Given the above, it is clear that the concept of ecocriticism focuses on the relationship between literature and nature, that is, it is a study on the performance of nature in the construction of culture, it verifies how nature is defined from a cultural perspective and how nature influences the fabric of the literary text, providing the analysis of human-environment relationships through the narrators' discourse and the characters' actions.

The main theme of this narrative is the land. A devastating drought ravages the region, Fonds-Rouge. The population has already appealed to all the gods, but they have not been heard and feel abandoned. There is no prospect of improvement and the characters see no other solution, they live burning the forests to make charcoal to sell, which may have triggered the environmental crisis, then, Coates, cited by Greg Garrard (2012, p. 28),³ states:

According to a universally discrediting postmodernist logic, the belief in the existence of a global environmental crisis is just another metanarrative, as cultural theory insists that environmental threats (like everything else) are socially constructed and culturally defined: there do not exist shared universal threats – different groups prioritize those that confront their particular interests.⁴

It is a population whose colonization left deep marks and this was carried out with “civilization” as its objective. French colonizers together with the catholic church were responsible for this demand. According to Laënnec Hurbon (1975, p. 10),

They are “trampled cultures,” because the new slaves coming from Africa will have deserved their destiny for their greater good, for the salvation of “their souls”: thanks to forced baptism, they will have the privilege of being introduced little by little into the only civilization worth.⁵

³ See footnote 2.

⁴ In Portuguese: “Segundo uma lógica pós-modernista universalmente desabonadora, a crença na existência de uma crise ambiental global é apenas mais uma metanarrativa, pois a teoria da cultura insiste em que as ameaças ambientais (como todo o resto) são socialmente construídas e culturalmente definidas: não existem ameaças universais compartilhadas – os diferentes grupos privilegiam aquelas com que seus interesses particulares se confrontam.”

⁵ In French: “Il s’agit de ‘cultures piétinées,’ car les nouveaux esclaves venus d’Afrique auront mérité leur sort pour leur plus grand bien, pour le salut de ‘leurs âmes’: grâce au baptême forcé, ils auront le privilège d’être introduits peu à peu dans la seule civilisation qui vaille.”

This colonizer's mentality is relevant throughout the colonization process, as it brings a "false commiseration" towards black people and, as if that were not enough,

(...) they used the biblical figure of Cain to affirm that they [people] were descendants of the cursed man; and this curse has fallen on the black race to this day. From this white mentality, the color black became a sign of submission and divine curse (Oliveira, 2002, p. 8).⁶

Many follies were committed in the name of God, masking, in fact, greed for the material goods that the country could offer. Haiti was one of the first colonized countries to become independent. However, it always lived with difficulties. Even after becoming independent, it suffered many sanctions due to the way it gained power and, mainly, because this independence was achieved by enslaved black people with great difficulty. It took time for France to recognize this independence and, shortly thereafter, the country was occupied by the United States. An occupation that took 19 years. As if that wasn't enough, in 2010 there was an earthquake that caused great devastation. In other words, the Haitian people are always rebuilding themselves.

Thus, the way Jacques Roumain constructs the narrative is very fruitful, since this population has always been in need of a "Messiah." Manuel, as has already been said here, tries to show his people the link between man and nature, however, not in terms of the sacred but rather the intertwining between humans and the environment and how this interferes in the *modus vivendi* of the former, therefore, it needs to be taken care of. Literary analysis through ecocriticism provides an understanding of this aspect in literature, then,

(...) the environment, to be understood in its inevitable convergence between people, animals, nature and the capitalist world system, is configured as a theme and a problem that are also literary, offering the possibility of (re)defining literature – its aesthetics, forms and genres, as well as their critical and conceptual paradigms – from an eco-environmentalist perspective (Brugioni; Melo, 2022, p. 254).⁷

⁶ In Portuguese: "(...) utilizaram a figura bíblica de Caim para afirmarem que elas [as pessoas] eram descendentes do maldito; e esta maldição recaiu sobre a raça negra até aos nossos dias. A partir desta mentalidade branca, a cor negra se transformou em sinal de submissão e de maldição divinas."

⁷ In Portuguese: "(...) o ambiente, a ser entendido em sua inevitável convergência entre pessoas, animais, natureza e sistema mundial capitalista, se configura como um tema e um problema também literários, oferecendo a possibilidade de se (re)definir a literatura – suas estéticas, formas e gêneros, bem como seus paradigmas críticos e conceituais – a partir de uma perspectiva eco-ambientalista."

The narrative begins with a speech that functions as a preamble. Through it, the narrator already gives us a glimpse of its fabric.

“We are all going to die,” said the old woman. Plunging her hands into de dust, Délira Délivrance said: “We’re all going to die. Animals, plants, every living soul! Oh, Jesus! Mary, Mother of God!” The dust slipped through her fingers (Roumain, 1978, p. 1).⁸

It is understood that a story of drought and misery appears. And, in addition, religiosity is being blamed for this. The imaginary of this society begins to be outlined in the narrative. The evocation of catholic saints refers to this religion, however, when the character equates human beings with animals and plants, one can see the assumptions of oral tradition that permeate African cultures, in which the elements of nature have the same equivalence and are worthy of the sacredness attributed to them. In Haiti, as has already been said, christianity predominates, but voodoo has not been exterminated. In fact, something very curious happened, the assumptions of catholicism were assimilated by this religion originating from oral tradition. See if,

Much to the surprise of the missionaries, Haitian Voodoo hardly seems to have been really disturbed by the persecutions it has suffered throughout history. It remains, one can say without exaggeration, calmly and even enriches. The colonists can impose baptism and conversion to Christianity, but we have the impression that it is voodoo that integrates and annexes Christian religious practices to its own service and for its own survival (Hurbon, 1975, p. 20).⁹

Returning to the narrative, the character continues stating that she “she called on the Lord,” but it is no use, he does not listen and, therefore, she concludes that man is left “shift[ing] for himself.” Her husband – Bienaimé – corroborates, stating that “a black man’s really bad off” (Roumain, 1978, p. 1).¹⁰ Here structural racism is configured, in the conception of Sílvia Almeida (2019), since it is guided by an economic bias and, as can be seen, assimilated by black people themselves. However, it also reminds us of the curse

⁸ See footnote 1.

⁹ In French: “Pour la grande surprise des missionnaires, le Vaudou haïtien ne semble guère avoir été réellement troublé par les persécutions qu’il a subi au cours de l’histoire. Il se maintient, pourrait-on dire sans exagérer, avec sérénité et même s’enrichit. Des colons ont beau imposer le baptême et la conversion au christianisme, on a plutôt l’impression que c’est le Vaudou qui intègre en son sein et annexe les pratiques religieuses chrétiennes à son propre service et pour sa propre survie.”

¹⁰ See footnote 1.

attributed to skin color by the Catholic church and which permeated the colonizer's mentality.

Then, the narrative explains the drought that is ravaging the region: "A flock of crows swooped down on the charred field, like *bits of scattered coal*." (Roumain, 1978, p. 1; our emphasis).¹¹ Here, we can see the description of the environment corroborated by coal production, which refers to Coates (*apud* Garrard, 2012)¹² statement about the peculiarities of each population with regard to the environmental crisis. Contemplating this scenario, Bienaimé, very bitter, states that "the Lord created heaven and earth, didn't he?" and, if "Well, the earth's bad off, suffering. So the Lord created suffering." (Roumain, 1978, p. 1).¹³ Here, the population's imagination is consolidated. This one is prostrate, waiting for divine providences.

Furthermore, the character remembers the time when rain was abundant and crops prospered. Thus, "they all had lived in harmony, united as the fingers of the hand, they had assembled the neighborhood in collective *coumbites*¹⁴ for the harvest and clearing." (Roumain, 1978, pp. 2-3).¹⁵ A time when there was a lot of abundance.

Délira remembers her son – Manuel – who went to Cuba many years ago to cut sugar cane and never returned. Her lament is deep and after asking her husband where her son is, she evokes all the gods,

O, Holy Virgin, in the name of the saints of the earth in the name of the saints of the moon, of the saints of the stars, of the saints of the wind, in the name of the saints of the storm, protect if it be thy will, I pray thee, my son in foreign_ lands! O, Master of the Crossroads, open to him a road without danger! Amen! (Roumain, 1978, p. 11).¹⁶

Note, here, the religious syncretism permeating the narrative. This seems to account for what has already been said here, that is, the pagan religion – voodoo – appropriated the assumptions of christianity, but did not allow itself to be distorted. Furthermore, the Haitian population feels free to practice both religions simultaneously, or rather, adopts the overlap between their assumptions in a natural way,

¹¹ See footnote 1.

¹² See footnote 2.

¹³ See footnote 1.

¹⁴ "Mode of organizing collective rural work, typical of Haiti."

¹⁵ See footnote 1.

¹⁶ See footnote 1.

Each voodoo is at the same time Catholic and does not feel in any way ashamed of moving freely within the two religious systems. Voodoo manages, in fact, to adapt its calendar to that of Christianity, the dominant and persecuting religion: Christmas, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Easter, and patronal festivals are occasions for intense voodoo practices. Each major Catholic pilgrimage center is always accompanied by a voodoo shrine, where the faithful come in large numbers to reconnect with the spirits and regain their favor. The sacraments, baptisms, communion, are considered introductions to a more effective practice of Voodoo and are even recommended (Hurbon, 1975, p. 25).¹⁷

Sometime later, Délira seems to be attended by the gods, as Manuel, her son, returns. However, he doesn't get out of the truck near her house, but in the middle of nowhere. Manuel seems to want to appreciate the place and the narrator states that he feels "dejected and as if betrayed" by what he sees. The devastation that plagues the region is present and the smell of smoke from the coal mines is familiar to him.

He stared at the barren hill overlooking the village, ravaged by wide whitish gullies where erosion had bared its flanks to the rock. He tried to remember the tall oaks once animated with wood pigeons fond of blackberries, the mahogany trees bathed in shadowy light, the Congo beans whose dry husks rustled in the wind, the long rows of sweet potato hills. But all that, the sun had licked up, effaced with a single stroke of its fiery tongue (Roumain, 1978, p. 14).¹⁸

We see here, in the character's contemplation, a landscape devastated by the drought that is ravaging the region. It is interesting to note that in her memories the previous landscape appears to demonstrate the devastation. Continuing the walk, Manuel will meet a woman; the description of her clothes resembles the Virgin Mary: "she was wearing a blue dress gathered in at the waist with a kerchief. The knotted wings of the white kerchief which held her hair covered the nape of the neck" (Roumain, 1978, pp. 13-14).¹⁹ He starts a dialogue with her,

¹⁷ In French: "(...) chaque vaudouisant est en même temps catholique et ne se sent nullement embarrassé pour se mouvoir librement à l'intérieur des deux systèmes religieux. Le Vaudou réussit en effet à adapter son calendrier à celui du christianisme, religion dominante et persécutrice pour lui : Noël, la Toussaint, les Morts, Pâques, fêtes patronales sont des occasions de pratiques vaudouesques intenses. Chaque grand centre de pèlerinage catholique est toujours doublé d'un sanctuaire vaudou où les fidèles viennent nombreux se retremper au contact des esprits et retrouver leur faveur. Les sacrements, baptêmes, communion, sont tenus comme des introductions à une pratique plus efficace du Vaudou et sont même recommandés."

¹⁸ See footnote 1.

¹⁹ See footnote 1.

but when he tells her which family he belongs to, she runs away from him. Manuel doesn't understand, but later we learn that there was a big disagreement between their families.

After this meeting, Manuel arrives home and there he remembers the life he led in Cuba, cutting sugar cane,

When under the flogging of the rural police he used to feel his bones crack, a voice would whisper, "You're still alive! Bite your tongue, swallow your cries! You're a man! When push comes to shove, you've got what it takes. If you go down, you'll be seed for an unending harvest. "You damned Haitian! You black hunk of dung!" The police howled in Spanish (Roumain, 1978, p. 21).²⁰

It can be seen from this that despite slavery no longer existing, slave labor continued. His mother serves him a drink, he and his father drink it, but the father first throws some on the floor and complains why his son didn't do the same, claiming that he "forgot the custom"²¹ and that he has no consideration for the dead who also they feel thirsty. But that's not all, soon his friends come to visit him and Manuel demonstrates the transculturation he went through, as he mentions the strikes he participated in in Cuba, mentions the country's culture, as well as speaking some terms in Spanish. His friends ask him if he speaks the language of that country – Cuba – and he says yes. In view of this, we glimpse in the character the process of transculturation, which in the wake of Fernando Ortiz, Ángel Rama (2001) developed in the narrative, that is, one can perceive the three levels that this process presents: linguistic, as Manuel learned another language, worldview, as it brings a new point of view and structuring, as, from this point of view, the development of the narrative will have another unfolding. It is true that Ángel Rama develops this concept in the narrative of Latin America, however, it is justified in this narrative, considering the construction of this character.

Délira, the mother, complains about the drought to her son and says that God has abandoned them. He responds that "The good Lord hasn't got a thing to do with it."²² The mother is scared and crosses herself, saying "do not talk nonsense, son!"²³ The way Manuel explains his thesis is very interesting, see,

²⁰ See footnote 1.

²¹ In Portuguese: "esqueceu o costume."

²² See footnote 1.

²³ See footnote 1.

There's heavenly business and there's earthly business. They're two different things, not the same. The sky's the pastureland of the angels. They're fortunate-they don't have to worry about eating and drinking. Of course, they have black angels to do the heavy work-like washing our clouds or cleaning off the sun after a storm-while the white angels just sing like nightingales all day long, or else blow on little trumpets like the pictures we see in church.

[...] But the earth's just like a good woman: if you mistreat her, she revolts: I see that you cleared the hills of trees. The soil is naked without protection. It's the roots that make friends with the soil and hold it. It's the mango tree, the oak, the mahogany that give it rainwater when it's thirsty and shade it from noonday heat. [...] *it's not God who betrays us. We betray the soil and receive its punishment: drought and poverty and desolation* (Roumain, 2022, p. 23; our emphasis).²⁴

The quote is long, however, necessary to demonstrate the new mentality brought by Manuel. The intertwining between human beings and the environment is clear in the character's speech. Man depends on nature and, therefore, needs to treat it well, that is, the ills that come from nature are the response it gives to the excesses of human beings. And this issue in this narrative is very interesting, as it deals with pagan people who have a lot of respect for nature; in fact, nature is sacred to them; however, they do not share the perception given by science, because when they mistreat it, they see it as disobedience to the gods. And, interestingly, according to scholars, christianity brings the premise that the exploitation of nature by man "for his own ends" is God's will, this is based mainly on Genesis, that is, White Jr., quoted by Greg Garrard (2012, p. 118),²⁵ "constitutes a scriptural licence for whatever exploitation we think fit within the framework of moral laws set out elsewhere." Corroborating this, Greg Garrard (2012)²⁶ states that supporters of deep ecology consider this approach to be superficial, as it has an instrumental view of nature, since it sees it only as utilitarian for human beings, when it – nature – should be recognized for its intrinsic value. Thus, "ecocentrism" emerges and what is most interesting is its origin, see:

The notion of ecocentrism has proceeded from, and fed back into, related belief systems derived from Eastern religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, from heterodox figures in Christianity such as St Francis of Assisi (1182–1286) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), and from modern reconstructions of American Indian, pre-Christian

²⁴ See footnote 1.

²⁵ See footnote 2.

²⁶ See footnote 2.

Wiccan, shamanistic and other 'primal' religions (Garrard, 2012, p. 25).²⁷

This makes the theme listed in this narrative extremely relevant, since it is set in a country that has a syncretic religion, as voodoo, the pagan religion of these people, is permeated by the assumptions of catholicism. Furthermore, it also emphasizes the character's transculturation process, as from what we can see, there was a partial deculturation followed by neoculturation. The character returns to his country transcultured, because according to Aguiar and Vasconcelos (2001, p. 11), in this process,

(...) initially, there is a partial deculturation, which implies the loss of components considered obsolete; then, there are incorporations from an external culture and, finally, an effort at recomposition or *neoculturation*, articulating the surviving elements of the original culture and those that came from outside (Authors' emphasis).²⁸

This process becomes even more explicit when Délira, Manuel's mother, decides to hold a celebration to thank the entities for her son's return: "It's he, Papa Legba, who showed you the way home. Clairemise saw him in her dream, Atibon-Legba, Master of the Crossroads. We must thank him. I've already invited the family and the neighbors." (Roumain, 1978, p. 43).²⁹ Manuel helps to organize and even participates, but, later on, talking to another character, he states that, faced with misery, everyone is slowly dying and questions the way people react: "Cried about your misfortune to the *loas*,³⁰ offered ceremonies so that they'd make the rain fall. But all that's just so much silly monkeyshines. That doesn't count! It's useless, and it's wasting time." (Roumain, 1978, p. 66).³¹ Asked about what matters and whether he is not afraid of disrespecting entities, he corroborates this by saying:

"No, I respect the customs of the old folks, but the blood of a rooster or a young goat can't make the seasons change or alter the course of the clouds and fill them with water like bladders. The other night, at the

²⁷ See footnote 2.

²⁸ In Portuguese: "(...) ocorre de início, uma parcial desaculturação, que implica perda de componentes considerados obsoletos; em seguida, há incorporações procedentes de uma cultura externa e, por fim, um esforço de recomposição ou *neoculturação*, articulando os elementos sobreviventes da cultura originária e os que vieram de fora."

²⁹ See footnote 1.

³⁰ Haitian voodoo deities.

³¹ See footnote 1.

Legba ceremonies, I danced and sang to my heart's content. I'm Negro, no? And I enjoyed myself like a real Negro. When the drums beat, I feel it in the pit of my _stomach. I feel an itch in my loins and an electric current in my legs, and I've got to join the dance. But that's all there is to it for me" (Roumain, 1978, p. 66).³²

This speech is relevant given that dance is an extremely important ritual for voodoo, since its members rely on it to attract spirits. Manuel's example serves to demonstrate detachment from the traditions of his people and demonstrates a new worldview, see,

Dance plays an important role in the invocation of a loa, it is so closely associated with loa worship that voodoo can be classified as a dance religion. This ritual act reveals mysterious forces acting in the supernatural world. Drum rhythms and dances attract spirits (Suire; Freiras; Oliveira, 2021, p. 350).³³

This new worldview makes him reflect on the land and comes to the conclusion that it is good, and, despite the bad weather, it can still be productive, but it needs irrigation,

As in a dream, he saw the water running through the canals like a network of veins transporting life to the depths of the soil-banana trees swaying under the silky caress of the wind, ears beaded with corn, plots of sweet potatoes strewn over the fields, all this burnt earth changed into verdant colors (Roumain, 1978, p. 32).³⁴

The narrative now takes another direction, as everything will develop from Manuel's dream. First, he questions his father about the sources that existed before his departure, and he informs him that they have all dried up; this makes him very worried and makes him ask his mother how they will live. The mother responds: "By the grace of God" and adds: "But there isn't any mercy for the poor." (Roumain, 1978, p. 33).³⁵ Manuel rebels,

³² See footnote 1.

³³ In Portuguese: "A dança desempenha um papel importante na invocação de um *loa*, está tão intimamente associada à adoração *loa* que o vodu pode ser classificado como uma religião de dança. Este ato ritual revela forças misteriosas agindo no mundo sobrenatural. Ritmos de tambores e danças atraem espíritos."

³⁴ See footnote 1.

³⁵ See footnote 1.

“Resignation won’t get us anywhere.” Manuel shook his head impatiently. “Resignation is treacherous. It’s just the same as discouragement. It breaks your arms. You keep on expecting miracles and providence, with your rosary in your hand, without doing a thing. You pray for rain, you pray for a harvest, you recite the prayers of the saints and the *loas*. But providence-take my word for it is man’s determination not to accept misfortune, to overcome the earth’s bad will every day, to bend the whims of the water to your needs. Then the earth will call you, ‘Dear Master.’ The water will call you, Dear Master.’ And there’s no providence but your work, no miracles but the fruit of your hands” (Roumain, 1978, pp. 32-33).³⁶

The mother is surprised by her son’s speech. She attributes it to the knowledge acquired in another country but does not fail to say that he must “not give the good Lord his due,” because “he is the Lord of all things.” (Roumain, 1978, p. 33).³⁷ And besides, it reminds you of the names of the voodoo gods that command each element of nature. Manuel is not impressed, he continues with his purpose, which is to irrigate the land, he needs to find water. And to do this, he starts a campaign among the peasants, the first person he explains his ideas to is his friend Laurélien, who wants him to talk about Cuba and he responds that it is a much bigger country than Haiti, but declares the love for your country,

“That’s what I am, this very earth! I’ve got it in my blood. Look at my color. Folks could say the soil has faded on me, and on you, too. This land is the black man’s. Each time they’ve tried to take it from us, we have cleaned out injustice with the blades of our machetes” (Roumain, 1978, p. 53).³⁸

This character’s speech refers, firstly, to the way in which Haiti’s independence was achieved, that is, by enslaved black people and then, to the concept of Topophilia, which according to Yi-Fu Tuan (1980, p. 14) “is the link affective relationship between the person and the place or physical environment.”³⁹ In other words, it is the way a person sees their land, depending on their life experience. It is a very subjective concept, as it has to do with each person’s individual perception.

³⁶ See footnote 1.

³⁷ See footnote 1.

³⁸ See footnote 1.

³⁹ In Portuguese: “é o elo afetivo entre a pessoa e o lugar ou ambiente físico.”

Soon, Manuel meets Annaïse again, the girl who had run away from him. At this point, he has already been informed by his father that there was a death between their families and that this separated them, making them enemies. However, Manuel manages to convince her that they have nothing to do with it and asks for her help to continue with his project and garner help from the peasants through their women. Women, in this narrative, apparently do not have very relevant roles, however, a West African tradition appears very frequently, which is “the market”; It is the women who negotiate the few possessions to continue surviving, both Annaïse and Délira, Manuel’s mother: “Every Saturday, Délira would load two burros with charcoal and go to the city. She would return at nightfall with a few wretched provisions and a bit of change.” (Roumain, 1978, p. 51).⁴⁰ However, Manuel gives Annaïse a major task, which would be to encourage women to look for water, so that they start demanding action from their husbands, as,

the women were the most enraged. They were truly furious that was because they were the first to know that there was nothing to put on the fire, that the children *were* crying from hunger, that they were wasting away, their limbs thin and twisted like dry branches, their stomachs enormous. Sometimes the women would go out of their heads and insult each other, on occasion, even with words that are not allowed. But women’s insults don’t lead anywhere, they’re just so much wind. More serious was the silence of the men (Roumain, 1978, p. 57).⁴¹

Given this, Manuel believes that if they start talking about water constantly, as a solution to the problem, to their husbands, it will soon be easier for them to join their project. Unlike his people who wait for divine providences, as has already been said here, Manuel believes that “man is the baker of life.” (Roumain, 1978, p. 66).⁴² Annaïse agrees to help him and, in addition, they begin a relationship. But, another character will stand in their way, Gervilen, who is already an enemy of Manuel’s family and also wanted to marry her.

During his search, Manuel loses his patience several times and asks his friend: “But why, damn it! Did you cut the woods down, the oaks, the mahogany trees, and

⁴⁰ See footnote 1.

⁴¹ See footnote 1.

⁴² See footnote 1.

everything else that grew up there? Stupid people with no sense!”(Roumain, 1978, p. 36).⁴³ His friend responds:

“What else could we do, brother? We cleared it to get new wood. We cut it down for framework and beams for our huts. We repaired the fences around our fields. We didn’t know, ourselves. Ignorance and need go together, don’t they?” (Roumain, 1978, p. 36).⁴⁴

We have here the exact dimension of ignorance, not only of this population, but in general, almost universal. Man does not realize how to deal with nature, for him, it is an inexhaustible source. Bear in mind, the deforestation that takes place without paying attention to the climate changes that cause so much harm to man himself. There is an understanding that technology can meet human needs and fill the gaps left by nature, however, this does not happen, because,

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it (Glotsfelty, 1996, p. 18).

And, furthermore, in the case of this population – Fonds-Rouge, the alienation caused by religion only makes the situation worse, see,

food was getting low; they were already reduced to a few handfuls of millet and Congo beans; oh! Virgin Mary! it wasn’t her fault, she had done her duty and taken precautions in keeping with the wisdom of her ancestral gods. Before sowing the corn at dawn in the vigilant red eye of the sun, she had said to the Lord Jesus Christ, turning to the east, and to the angels of Guinea, turning to the south, to the spirits of the dead, turning to the west, to the saints, turning to the north, she had said to them, as she scattered the grain in the four sacred directions: “Jesus Christ, angels, spirits of the dead, saints, here’s the corn that I give you. Give me in return the strength to work and the pleasure of reaping” (Roumain, 1978, p. 38).⁴⁵

It’s clear, here, once again, the belief in divine providence, the responsibility attributed to the deities. However, Fonds-Rouge only gets worse and the drought begins

⁴³ See footnote 1.

⁴⁴ See footnote 1.

⁴⁵ See footnote 1.

to cause an exodus, many people, some of them young people, decide to leave the land to try their luck elsewhere, however, “Oh, loás, my loás of Guinea, you weigh the work of our hands according to our share of misery. Your scales are false. That’s why we are dying with no help and with no hope...” (Roumain, 1978, p. 91).⁴⁶ The narrative establishes a paradox between the assumptions of pagan religions, originating from oral tradition, in which, as has already been said here, nature is sacred and the axiom of Christianity that nature is to serve man. Given the answers obtained by Manuel, it can be concluded that, in fact, Haitian voodoo is extremely intertwined with Christianity, as it has a different perception of nature. People ask saints and entities for providences, but they do not feel responsible for the mistakes committed against her. Corroborating this,

The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed, an extra-ordinary amount of human history. Like some other fundamental ideas which express mankind’s vision of itself and its place in the world, ‘nature’ has a nominal continuity, over many centuries, but can be seen, in analysis, to be both complicated and changing, as other ideas and experiences change (Williams, 1980, p. 67).⁴⁷

In this narrative, we have a society whose imaginary is complex, considering that, if on the one hand, the population turns to the gods of paganism, on the other, they turn to the monotheistic God to justify their ills. Raymond Williams, speaking about the trajectory of the concept of nature, clarifies this dichotomy, claiming that pagan religions had specific gods for each event in nature: the wind, the sea, the moon etc. However, with the revelation of the “one true God,” nature became its “minister” and, often, it and God were confused, that is, the concept of nature carried religiosity in its fabric. Nevertheless, considering the current social context, in which capitalism is in force, the author states:

In this World of a properly materialist history there is no room for the separated abstract categories of ‘nature’ and ‘man’, but then what often happened was that they were made falsely equivalent, or that the historical process was seen as substituting one-‘man’- for the other (Williams, 2011, p. 111).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See footnote 1.

⁴⁷ RAYMOND, Williams. *Culture and Materialism*. London and New York: Verso Books, 1980.

⁴⁸ See footnote 46.

In this way, the author contemplates the worldview of the character, Manuel. He continues to look for water and his search reaches the ears of a large part of the population. The rural police chief intimidates him, informing him that the authorities are not happy with his conduct, but he does not give up and finally finds it:

His machete plunged into the earth. He dug furiously,
and the hole was not yet deep or large before water began [...] ‘There
she is, the good, sweet, flowing, the singing, cooling, blessed life’
(Roumain, 1978, pp. 86-87).⁴⁹

Now, Manuel will begin his campaign among the peasants so that they all unite in favor of irrigating their lands. He participates in a meeting with those who are friends and also with his family’s enemies because of a crime that occurred in the past and, apparently, manages to convince everyone, except Gervilen, who comes out of hatred and attacks him with betrayal during his return home. Manuel still manages to get home alive and his mother wants to notify the rural police chief, but he forbids her from doing so, claiming that it would be the same story of hatred and revenge that already existed between them and the water would be lost. He says that they offered sacrifices to the loas to make it rain and it did nothing, “because what counts is the sacrifice of a man. It is the blood of a man.” And, according to him, “the will of my blood that’s been shed-reconciliation-reconciliation-so that life can start all over again, so that day can break on the dew.” (Roumain, 1978, p. 137).⁵⁰ The character’s death makes us glimpse a certain intertextuality with the death of Jesus Christ, it seems like the death of the Messiah, including the song sung by the mourners: “*By what excessive kindness Thou hast taken upon Thyself the weight of our crimes. Thou hast suffered cruel death to save us from death*” (Roumain, 1978, p. 145, author’s emphasis).⁵¹ However, highlighting the religious syncretism that permeates the narrative, another character thinks that “it is revenge from the Lady of the Water.” Annaïse rebels against God,

“No, God, you’re not good! It’s not true that you’re kind! It’s a lie! We call on you to help us-you don’t hear. Look at our grief! Look at our sorrow! Look at our tribulations! Are you asleep, God? Are you deaf?

⁴⁹ See footnote 1.

⁵⁰ See footnote 1

⁵¹ See footnote 1.

Are you blind? Have you got no heart, God? Where is your justice? Where is your pity? Where is your mercy?" (Roumain, 1978, p. 140).⁵²

Still, a celebrant is paid to order the body, but the narrator states that they cannot pay for the burial to be in the church, as "the church extends no credit to the poor. It's not a shop-it's God's house" (Roumain, 1978, p. 143).⁵³ It can be seen here, the narrator's irony in the fabric of the speech. But, before finishing the narrative, the author fully reveals the way in which Haitians practice their religion through the same character who started it: Délira, Manuel's mother. Tired of life, before burying her son, she asks for death, praying,

"Hail Mary, Gracious Virgin! Make that day come! Make it come tomorrow! Make it come today even! Oh, my saints, oh, my *loas*, come and help me! Papa Legba, I call you! St. Joseph, papa, I call you! Dambala Siligoué, I call you! Ogoun Shango, I call you! St. James the Elder, I call you! Ah! Loko Atisou, papa! Ay, Guéde Hounsou, I call you! Agoueta Royo Doko Agoué, I call on you! My boy is dead. He's going away. He's going across the sea. He's going to Guinea. *Adieu, adieu*, I say *adieu* to my boy. He'll never come back. He's gone forever. Ah, my sadness! My heartbreak! My misery! My grief!" (Roumain, 1978, p. 154).⁵⁴

Manuel died, but he left his mother with a great mission: not to reveal how he died, and she invents that it was a fever he brought from Cuba, and then to gather the peasants to continue his work. Délira, when gathering the peasants, states,

It's customary to sing mourning with hymns for the dead, but he, Manuel had chosen a hymn for the living-the chant of the *coumbite*, the chant of the soil, of the water, the plants, of friendship between peasants, because he wanted his death to be the beginning of life for you (Roumain, 1978, pp. 159-160).⁵⁵

Annaïse is the one who will show him where the source he discovered is. His death, in fact, will mean a new beginning for his people. Life goes on,

From afar the wind brought a squall of voices and an untiring drumbeat. For more than a month, the peasants had been working at a *coumbite*.

⁵²See footnote 1.

⁵³ See footnote 1.

⁵⁴ See footnote 1.

⁵⁵ See footnote 1.

They'd dug a canal, a deep gully from the spring to Fonds Rouge, across the narrow plain through the acacia trees, and they'd joined it to their fields by small ditches (Roumain, 1978, pp. 163-164).⁵⁶

At the end of the narrative, Annaïse invites Délira to see the water arriving in the region. Upon arriving there, Délira laments Manuel's absence, but pointing to her belly, Annaïse states that he did not die, that is, a new life is emerging.

The clash between religiosity and ecocriticism is very evident in this narrative. The pagan religion intertwined with Catholicism and at the same time being opposed by the worldview of Christianity, given the construction of the main character, who brings with him a name derived from a biblical name and comes with a mission "to provide a new life for his people," that is, bringing "the good news" as the Messiah and, in addition, he gives his life in exchange for this new beginning. It is a very well constructed plot, as it is woven between religions and the environment and, as if that were not enough, it points to a different syncretism, as,

The syncretism between catholicism and voodoo does not end with the practice of both religions simultaneously, nor with the analogy between saints and loa, but goes as far as the use of sacred objects and even Catholic rituals by followers of voodoo. (Suire; Freiras; Oliveira, 2021, p. 344).⁵⁷

It is concluded that voodoo assimilated catholicism in such a way that it gave new meaning to its practices. However, in its discursive meshes, the novel features the character – Manuel – constructed in the likeness of the biblical "Messiah." Eurídice Figueiredo (2022, p. 192) goes so far as to state that "Messianic, utopian, the book can be read as a Christian Passion, already indicated by the name of the hero."⁵⁸ And, finally, he adds, "Manuel's sacrifice is necessary to erase the blood of discord and make peace on earth, pointing to hope and renewal."⁵⁹ This renewal aims to create a new worldview, both with regard to religiosity and the environment. Religiosity and the concept of ecocriticism constructed the clash in the narrative, with a view to the former fostering alienation and the latter highlighting the environment as the protagonist, representing degradation

⁵⁶ See footnote 1.

⁵⁷ In Portuguese: "O sincretismo entre o catolicismo e vodu não se encerra apenas com a prática das duas religiões simultaneamente, nem com a analogia entre santos e loa, mas vai até o uso de objetos sagrados e até mesmo rituais católicos pelos seguidores do vodu."

⁵⁸ In Portuguese: "Messiânico, utópico, o livro pode ser lido como uma Paixão cristã, já indiciada pelo nome do herói."

⁵⁹ In Portuguese: "O sacrifício de Manuel é necessário para apagar o sangue da discórdia e fazer a paz na terra, apontando para a esperança e a renovação."

through the ignorance of a society, which, in a way, legitimizes the analysis of the literary text.

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