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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONTEMPORARY DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN FOCUS: THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE DRAMATURGY OF BRAZILIAN PLAYWRIGHT SILVIA GOMEZ

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Abstract

It is known in the literary field that the concept "stream of consciousness" has been studied in literature since the 20th century. However, there remains a gap to be filled regarding dramatic literature as a context for investigating this concept, particularly in contemporary dramatic literature, a fact that motivated the development of this study. Thus, the aim of this essay is to contribute to the expansion of studies on the stream of consciousness in contemporary dramatic literature by introducing another perspective for understanding this concept within dramatic texts: the subtext. To achieve the proposed objective, I begin with a theoretical investigation through a bibliographic review of the concept of the "stream of consciousness" in psychology, —where it was originated—literature, —previously seen as the only form of applying the stream of consciousness—and, finally, theater—which historically bore the stigma of being unable to use this concept due to its reliance on speech to express thoughts. This review seeks to understand what has already been studied on the subject. Subsequently, I propose a new perspective on the stream of consciousness as a mediator of the subtext, the essence of the character, to be performed by the actor or actress through a deep exploration of the psychological content of the dramatic text. I demonstrate this connection between subtext and stream of consciousness in the works of contemporary Brazilian playwright Silvia Gomez. Considering that the free association of ideas and the fluidity of thoughts are integrated into the creation of a powerful material for the psychological construction of characters—evidenced in the movements and gestures of the actors performing them—the stream of consciousness maintains its primary purpose, the revelation of the inner self. This is because theater encompasses the visual, auditory, and sensory aspects of the scene, alongside speech, and can therefore communicate beyond words.

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Introduction:-

The concept "stream of consciousness" was originally theorized by the philosopher, psychologist, and physiologist William James (1842–1910). Initially, the theory of the flow of thoughts was developed to refer to the movement of thoughts within the human mind. However, the use of the term was not restricted to the field of psychology. With the advent of modernity and its new inquiries and observations about the human being as an individual and a social being, many renowned writers of the past century, such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, became interested in

portraying the interiority of the human being in their fictional works. Nevertheless, psychology remained the area of knowledge most invested in this investigation. Thus, in the mid-19th century, with the publication *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) by William James, the theory aiming to study the human mind more deeply to investigate its workings gained attention.

Robert Humphrey, in his book *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1976), presents a compilation of the stream of consciousness theory, tracing it back to James's original principles and elaborating on the association of the term with literature through writing techniques. Below is an excerpt from Humphrey on this association:

“James was formulating a psychological theory and had discovered that 'memories, thoughts, and feelings exist outside primary consciousness,' and, moreover, that they do not appear to us in a chain but as a stream, a flow. (r) Therefore, anyone who first applied the phrase to the novel did so correctly only if they were, indeed, thinking of a method to represent inner perception” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 5, emphasis in the original).

Thus, for Humphrey, the application of the term stream of consciousness to literature must be based on identifying a common purpose between the theory developed by James and the author's objective when choosing to depict the thoughts of their characters. This is because the tendency of many 19th-century novelists to grant their narrators omniscient power caused, whether intentionally or not, the representation of their characters' inner worlds—as seen in *Ulysses* by Irish writer James Joyce, first published in 1920, for example—to begin to be associated with the theory of the stream of thoughts. This trend remained quite prevalent in 20th-century novels. On this matter, consider the following excerpt:

“The natural and historically correct association of this term with psychology, along with the overwhelming psychoanalytic tendency of thought in the 20th century, resulted in attributing all novels, which could be vaguely related to the undefined expression of 'stream of consciousness' [...]” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 5).

Thus, the term took on greater proportions but, at the same time, was very superficially associated with all novels that proposed an exploration of characters' consciousness. As a result, seeking a better definition of the term and practical ways to analyze it, literary theorists developed techniques for identifying and utilizing the stream of consciousness in novels. It is worth noting that, although my objective here is to analyze the stream of consciousness in dramatic literature—namely, theatrical plays—most of the studies on the stream of consciousness that I encountered during theoretical research consisted of analyses of novels. This is because the narrative description in novels was, for a long time, considered the ideal form of transcribing consciousness, as we will see below based on Prado's (2000) argument. This type of literature allows the reader to dive deeply into a character's inner world without, depending on the technique used, significant intervention from actions external to the flow of thoughts.

“In the novel, it is possible to capture this 'stream of consciousness,' which some critics regard as the 'most characteristic aspect of twentieth-century fiction,' almost in its raw, incoherent, fragmentary state, as described by psychologists. This, as we know, was the feat achieved by James Joyce in the last and famous chapter of *Ulysses*. In theater, however, it becomes necessary not only to translate into words and make conscious what should remain semi-conscious but also to communicate it somehow through dialogue, since the spectator, unlike the novel reader, does not have direct access to the moral or psychological consciousness of the character” (PRADO, 2000, p. 88).

Due to a longstanding limiting belief, which led the overwhelming majority of studies on the stream of consciousness to focus on novels, this study will address examples of novels where stream-of-consciousness techniques can be identified, such as Joyce (1983) and Lispector (2009). However, although I did not find a wide variety of plays or references to playwrights frequently associated with the stream of consciousness in Brazilian dramatic literature during my research, some studies highlight characteristics of the stream in the works of Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues (1912–1980). Additionally, one of the key figures in research related to the stream of consciousness in contemporary theater is the English playwright Sarah Kane (1971–1999), whose works form part of the theoretical framework presented here. In contemporary Brazilian theater, I identify traits derived from the stream of consciousness in the plays by Brazilian playwright Silvia Gomez analyzed in this study: *Mantenha fora do alcance do bebê* (2015), *Neste mundo louco, nesta noite brilhante* (2019), and *A Árvore* (2021).

The stream of consciousness that I propose to present and upon which this research is based is not a specific technique, nor was it structured for the literary purpose of representing consciousness. In fact, “[...] the stream of

consciousness does not have a defined technique. Instead, a wide variety of techniques are used to present the stream of consciousness” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 4). For this reason, it is necessary to provide an overview of the stream of consciousness to contextualize this study.

Before analyzing Silvia Gomez’s plays addressed in this essay, pointing out the characteristics of the stream of consciousness present in them, I provide a broad view of the theory of the stream of consciousness in psychology to enable an understanding of the logic behind its structuring. I also explore its role in literature to present the main techniques that are used in writing the “stream of consciousness” and its application in theater, using examples to elucidate the stream’s use in other dramatic texts and their specificities. These specificities differentiate dramatic texts from novels without undermining the essence of the stream of consciousness.

The search for a common denominator—a logical starting point for this analysis—is necessary, considering that this is just one of many possible approaches to studying an artistic product. Humphrey also highlights the importance of this need in his book.

“Stream of Consciousness — how many images does this phrase evoke? Secret confessions, wells of repressed energy, bold experiments, fleeting trends, the chaos of indiscrimination? Applied to the novel, it is, as Dorothy Richardson once remarked, a term characterized by its “perfect imbecility.” But the term exists; it belongs to us. It is up to us to make it useful and expressive; that is, we must come to an agreement on what it represents or, at the very least, have a more or less defined starting point for intelligent reasoning” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. XIX).

Therefore, to present this common denominator of the stream of consciousness, I take a panoramic approach to the theory of the stream within each specific area and exemplify the techniques associated with it that will aid in understanding the analysis proposed in this research.

The Stream of Consciousness in Psychology

According to William James, who was the first to conceptualize the movement of thoughts, the functioning of consciousness is based on the following five main characteristics:

1. Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.
2. Within each personal consciousness, thought is always changing.
3. Within each personal consciousness, thought is sensibly continuous.
4. It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.
5. It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—chooses from among them, in a word—all the while” (JAMES, 1890, p. 225).

From the characteristics listed above, it is possible to deduce that thought integrates the personal consciousness of each individual and is in constant movement, regardless of our rational intention. This almost uninterrupted flow of thoughts selects among various stimuli, such as external events, memories, and sensations, and absorbs the selected ones in an almost random manner. This can be understood as free association of ideas, accepting or discarding thoughts that flow like a stream. Hence the term stream applied to this notion of consciousness.

“The notion of time within consciousness, which blends past situations with present sensations and future apprehensions, combined with the constant flow of ideas, naturally causes an apparent disorder in thoughts that tend to overlap according to the aforementioned selection process. According to Humphrey, ‘Three factors control association: first, memory, which is its basis; second, the senses, which guide it; and third, imagination, which determines its elasticity’” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 39).

Based on the principle that these three factors mentioned by Humphrey constitute the concept of free association of ideas, which in turn forms the basic notion of the “stream of consciousness”, it may be understood that when this concept is associated with literature, it consists of attempting to reproduce this almost uninterrupted movement of thoughts through various techniques that help visualize a fraction of what occurs in the human mind. Scholars have referred to this as consciousness, aiming to better explain the concept:

“Consciousness refers to the entire area of mental attention, from pre-consciousness, traversing the levels of the mind, and including the highest of all: the area of rational and communicable apprehension. (4) This last area is what

almost all psychological fiction deals with. Stream-of-consciousness fiction differs from other psychological fiction precisely because it concerns the less-developed levels of rational verbalization—the levels on the margins of attention” (HUMPHREY, 1976, pp. 2–3).

Consider the following:

“There are, however, two levels of consciousness that can be distinguished with relative ease: the 'speech level' and the 'pre-speech level.' There is a point where they overlap, but in other respects, the distinction is quite clear. The pre-speech level, which is the focus of most of the literature analyzed in this study, does not imply a basis for communication as is the case with the speech level (whether spoken or written). This is its main characteristic. Briefly, the levels of consciousness preceding speech are not censored, rationally controlled, or logically ordered. Therefore, by 'consciousness,' I will be referring to the entire area of mental processes, including, especially, the pre-speech levels [...]. Let us think of consciousness as an iceberg—the entire iceberg, not just the relatively small part visible above the surface. Stream-of-consciousness fiction, to extend this comparison, deals largely with what lies beneath the surface” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 4).

Thus, according to Humphrey, in stream of consciousness fiction, “[...] the main emphasis is placed on exploring the levels of consciousness preceding speech to reveal [...] the psychic state of the characters” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 4). In line with Humphrey's reasoning, this study investigates this type of writing that delves into the inner mind of characters by a contemporary playwright. To that end, it provides examples from dramatic literature that support identifying the characteristics of stream-of-consciousness writing in the plays of Silvia Gomez.

The Stream of Consciousness in Literature

Still in line with Humphrey (1976), the stream of consciousness deals with what he called "pre-discursive elements." The author also asserts that the stream can move freely through time, and this characteristic, combined with its inherent permeability, as Oliveira (2009) pointed out, makes the “stream of consciousness” a concept that easily traverses fields such as psychology, literature, and theater.

Humphrey analyzes the use of the “stream of consciousness” through four types of literary techniques that engage with the pre-speech level: *direct interior monologue*, *indirect interior monologue*, *soliloquy*, and *omniscient description*. However, while associating these techniques with the stream, he warns, for example, that interior monologues are often erroneously conflated with the stream of consciousness as synonyms. Yet, certain particularities distinguish the two types of monologues, direct and indirect, and it is an oversimplification to equate them when the stream comprises various techniques.

“The interior monologue is, then, the technique used in fiction to represent the content and psychic processes of the character, partially or entirely inarticulate, exactly as these processes exist on various levels of conscious control before being formulated for deliberate speech” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 22).

Therefore, both direct and indirect interior monologues have a freer and more fluid structure of association of ideas. Furthermore, Humphrey reiterates that it is a technique used to portray levels of consciousness and that “it is rarely 'an expression of the innermost thought situated closest to the unconscious'” (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 22). It is, rather, the representation in its incomplete and inarticulate stage of consciousness processes before they are put into words. This marks the main difference between interior monologues and dramatic monologues or soliloquies, which are techniques used in both literature and theater, as will be addressed later.

I also highlight here the aspects in which direct and indirect interior monologues differ from each other. The direct interior monologue is "presented with almost no interference from the author and without presuming an audience" (HUMPHREY, 1976, pp. 22–23). Therefore, the description of thoughts does not seek a logical connection; instead, it allows the association of ideas to flow as naturally as possible, without authorial direction for the character or detailed descriptions for the reader. Certainly, the most famous and extensive example of a direct interior monologue, cited by Humphrey, Oliveira (2009), and Carvalho (1981) in their studies, is the one by Molly Bloom in the novel *Ulysses* (1983) by James Joyce. The character reflects on her life as she notices her husband has arrived home very late. A passage from this monologue is pertinent here to better understand it.

“Yes because he never did a thing like that before as to ask to have his breakfast in bed with a pair of eggs since the City Arms Hotel when he used to pretend he was sick in bed with a hoarse voice putting on airs to make himself

interesting for that old hag Mrs. Riordan who he thought had her in his pocket and who never left us a penny all for masses for her and for her soul the great miser that she was afraid even to part with four shillings for her methylated spirit telling me all her ailments with that old gab of hers about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world that we might have at least a bit of distraction before God help the world if all women were like her against bathing suits and low necks of course nobody wanted to see her in those I suppose she prays piously because no man would look at her twice I hope I'll never be like her no wonder she'd have wanted us to hide our faces but she was a well-educated woman [...]" (JOYCE, 1983, p. 692).

As seen in the excerpt above, the lack of punctuation and the author's choice not to intervene in the character's speech with indications or descriptions highlight the necessary fluidity of thoughts. These characteristics also allow us to identify the *direct interior monologue* (HUMPHREY, 1976). In contrast, the *indirect interior monologue* (HUMPHREY, 1976) frequently includes the narrator's presence, enabling:

"[...] the use of the third-person point of view instead of the first person; the broader use of descriptive and expository methods to present the monologue; and the possibility of greater coherence and superficial unity through the selection of materials. At the same time, the fluidity and sense of realism in the depiction of states of consciousness can be preserved" (HUMPHREY, 1976, pp. 26–27).

Thus, in the indirect interior monologue, there is not only the constant presence of the narrator but also an alternation of voices, which adds dynamism to the flow while maintaining a more logical ordering of thoughts. This enhances the understanding of the ideas being expressed. This technique, therefore, involves "an omniscient author presenting unspoken material as if it were coming directly from the character's consciousness and, through commentary and descriptions, guiding the reader through it" (HUMPHREY, 1976, p. 27).

For this reason, authors often choose to add omniscient description to the indirect monologue to clarify the psyche being explored. Because of this, Carvalho (1981) refers to this technique as a guided interior monologue rather than an indirect one in his book *Foco Narrativo e Fluxo da Consciência* ("Narrative Focus and Stream of Consciousness"). To better illustrate this concept, here is an example of an indirect or guided interior monologue used by Clarice Lispector in *Devaneio e Embriaguez duma Rapariga* (2009):

"Her eyes again fixed on that young woman who, right from the start, had made her blood boil. From the very beginning, she had noticed her sitting at a table with her man, all decked out with hats and ornaments, blonde like a fake coin, so pious and refined—what a fine hat she had! — probably not even married, yet flaunting that saintly air. And with her fine, well-positioned hat. Well, may she enjoy her sanctimoniousness! And may her nobility not spill into her soup! The most saintly-looking ones were always the ones filled with the most deceit. And the waiter, such a fool, serving her with all the attention, that slickster; and the pale man accompanying her, turning a blind eye. And the saintly one, all proud of her hat, modest about her slim waist—she probably wasn't even capable of giving her man a child. Not that it was any of her business, to be honest. But right from the start, she had felt like going over and slapping that blonde saintly face of the young woman, that noble lady with her hat" (LISPECTOR, 2009, pp. 8–9).

From the excerpt above, we can note the active voice of the narrator, at times directing and informing the reader while maintaining the character's consciousness, which connects her ideas in a tangled way. In this manner, the author enables an understanding of the context in which the character comments on the other woman, without losing the fluidity of the "stream of consciousness".

According to Humphrey, in the technique called *soliloquy*, it is assumed that there is an audience to whom the stream of consciousness is directed. For this reason, it is the technique most associated with theater, and there is no interference from the author. Let us observe an excerpt from *Avalovara* (1973), a novel by Osman Lins, also mentioned by Carvalho (1981) as an example of the use of soliloquy in literature:

"The amusement park, with its lights lost in the surrounding darkness, she and I on the carousel that creaks around its axis, the boards of the floor creak if any of the other rare guests pass by; I try, unsuccessfully, with a sharp knife, to cut the bulging eye of an ox; the suitcase falls to the floor, the sea creaks in the mouths and bellies of the fish, I hear or think I hear, face against face, the crackling of flames, the oak planks creak under our feet, I don't know if I actually pronounce invented names or give form to voices that her flesh seems to, persist, the sound of the sea

spreads in broad waves along the still somewhat wild coast, we spin embraced on the carousel, the empty bed creaks and the other where we are; how to understand that such hard instruments, the eyes, recoil, burn, turn in on themselves like a piece of silk?" (LINS, 1973, pp. 9–10).

From the excerpt above, it can be inferred that the soliloquy is written almost as if to be spoken, even in the context of a novel. This is because the thoughts are descriptive, as if directed at listeners, and despite the lack of rational logic—a characteristic of the stream of consciousness—the soliloquy, by presupposing an audience, brings more “complete” punctuation, offering greater guidance for interpreting the sentences.

Another technique is omniscient description, in which the author presents the character's consciousness in a descriptive manner, guiding the reader without emphasizing the character's voice or language. Both Humphrey and Carvalho provide an example of this technique from Dorothy Richardson's novel *Pilgrimage*, which I have transcribed here using Humphrey's mention:

“The slight jolt sent her mind probing along the road they had just left behind. She contemplated its uninterrupted length, its shops, its absence of trees. The broad street they were now beginning to bump their way up repeated it on a larger scale. The pavements were wide gangways reached from the street-bed by flights of stone steps, three deep. The people moving along them were unlike anyone she had ever known. They were all alike. They were... She could not find a word to convey the strange impression they gave. It colored the whole district they had come through. It was part of the new world to which she would be committed after September 18th. It was already her world, and she had no words for it. She would not be able to convey it to others. She was sure her mother had not noticed. She would have to face it alone. Trying to talk about it, even to Eve, would undermine her courage. It was her secret. A strange secret for all her life, as Hanover had been. But Hanover had been beautiful...” (RICHARDSON, 1938, pp. 194–195 apud. HUMPHREY, 1976, pp. 31–32).

In the excerpt from *Pilgrimage*, the character Miriam narrates life from a feminine perspective, which was precisely the author's intention in writing her. However, Humphrey characterizes the novel as a “psychic autobiography” (p. 9) by Richardson. For this reason, it is difficult to find a logical plot even with the constant presence of the author. Therefore, it is evident that omniscient description presents both the character's inmost mind and their perspective of the world through the author's narration. However, it retains the pre-speech distinguishing of the stream of consciousness, preserving the disarray of thoughts that remain as psychic material and have not yet been logically formulated.

Carvalho adds another technique to those explained by Humphrey: sensory impression. According to Lawrence Edward Bowling's definition, this occurs when the stream is presented passively, “registering only the verbal expressions corresponding to the psychic impressions brought by the senses” (CARVALHO, 1981, p. 58). Using an example from *Pilgrimage*, I illustrate the concept of this technique by using the same reference as Carvalho:

“[...] gray buildings rising on both sides, stretching into the distance that reached—sharp angles against the sky... softened angles of buildings... high angles shaped as soft as the inside of bread, with deep lower shadows... vines embedding themselves in balconies... strips of window flowers across the buildings, scarlet, yellow, rising; a confusion of white and lavender along a parapet that curved... a layer of green climbing a white-painted house frontage... Sounds of nearby and visible things listed and etched as they moved, leading to distant sounds without trace... sounding together” (RICHARDSON, 1938, p. 125 apud CARVALHO, 1981, p. 59).

In this passive manner, sensory impression describes scenarios, sensations, and impressions as the character observes them, but without bringing the active association of ideas typical of interior monologue, which conveys the character's voice as their thoughts flow in a disordered torrent of psychic material.

Regarding contemporary literature, it is crucial to understand the breadth of this term so that its application is effective without being restrictive. Contemporary art “challenges any attempts at delimitation because when one artistic proposal is established, new propositions arise to counteract the previous one, subverting it, questioning it, creating instability without necessarily destroying it” (OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 65). This perspective broadens our field of vision when proposing an analysis within this framework.

Thus, writers within modernity began to explore the psychological state of characters. During postmodernity and contemporaneity, they expanded the variety of techniques, enabling literature to convey the character's consciousness, attempting to capture its fluid state through words.

For a long time, novels were the primary focus of analysis for stream-of-consciousness writing, leaving a gap concerning studies of this theme in dramatic literature, that is, in theatrical texts. However, this scenario is beginning to change due to the contributions of some researchers, such as Oliveira (2009), who are striving to fill this gap, which is also the objective of this research.

Nevertheless, numerous playwrights, from modernity through contemporaneity, have explored the possibilities of psychological content in their dramatic texts. While soliloquy, as previously mentioned, tends to be associated with theater due to its characteristic assumption of an audience, other stream-of-consciousness techniques can also be found in dramatic texts. Furthermore, the stream may even reside beneath the text, within the interior of scenic construction, as will be examined in the next chapter. Clearly, the stream can be identified in contemporary dramatic texts just as it can in narrative genres through an analysis of the written text.

The Stream of Consciousness in Theater

As previously discussed, the "stream of consciousness" can be analyzed in literary narrative in its most intimate form and, depending on the technique identified, with minimal interference from the author regarding the movement of the characters' thoughts.

However, dramatic literature, except in some cases to be mentioned later, relies on the playwright's descriptions to better direct the characters' actions and intentions. In other words, the descriptions in the stage directions (*didascalía*) can be seen as an application of the "stream of consciousness" in producing the emotional subtext that unfolds on stage—a topic that will be explored shortly. For now, it is important to clarify the points where the use of the "stream of consciousness" in dramatic writing diverges from narrative literary writing in terms of structure.

According to Humphrey (1976, p. 23), "monologue in theater respects the audience's expectations regarding conventional syntax and diction and only suggests the possibilities of mental deviation." Thus, it is inferred that the presumption of spectators causes the playwright and the actors, who deliver the words, to provide more direction for the stream. This fact can give it a specific connotation through the interpretation of sentences with different intonations.

Because a monologue staged in theater inherently implies the presence of spectators, this condition, as Oliveira points out, contradicts the essence of the stream of consciousness, which is precisely to be "a manifestation of the character's interior, of their most intimate and unshared thoughts" (OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 23). While in a novel, the reader feels closer to the character's inner self through the author's narrative techniques, in theater, there are specificities derived from the need for action. When brought to the stage, these actions are interpreted based on choices aimed at performance.

When discussing the stream of consciousness in theater, it is necessary to consider both these peculiarities inherent to theatrical practice and the disagreements among theorists about how the stream functions in theater. In *A personagem de ficção* ("The Fictional Character"), Décio de Almeida Prado, in his chapter "The Character in Theater", uses the element of character as a guiding thread to analyze the distinctions between novels and theater. He highlights that, although both address humanity, "theater does so through humanity itself, through the living, physical presence of the actor" (PRADO, 2000, p. 84). Thus, the purpose of a theatrical text is not to remain confined to static reading as in the case of novels.

Prado also asserts that when confronted with what is being presented on stage, the spectator is "obliged" to believe in the fiction they are witnessing. However, it seems more appropriate to consider that the spectator becomes part of the scene as soon as they choose to be present, just as the actors, aware of this presence, willingly allow themselves to be observed. It is precisely this presence of others during the performance that Prado and other scholars argue challenges the realization of the purpose of the stream of consciousness in theater.

In *A personagem no Teatro* ("The Character in Theater"), Prado notes that in literary novels, the stream of consciousness can be found "in that raw, incoherent, fragmentary state described by psychologists" (p. 88), which is

arguably its most authentic form. He further explains that in theater, "it becomes necessary not only to translate into words, making conscious what should remain semi-conscious, but also to communicate it somehow through dialogue" (p. 88). He argues that the spectator does not have access to the psychological consciousness of the character in the same way a reader does, and therefore, in his opinion, theater is not the "most appropriate medium for exploring the obscure zones of the self" (p. 88).

Oliveira (2009, p. 22), however, questions Décio de Almeida Prado's (2000) assertion, drawing on studies about the "rise and crisis of modern drama" through Peter Szondi's *Theory of the Modern Drama*, which provides an overview of what occurred in theater between the 1880s and 1950s. For Oliveira, Rosenfeld (sic) adopts a conservative perspective on the concept of modern drama.

Considering that theater has adapted—and continues to adapt—to societal circumstances as they evolve and demand new perspectives, Oliveira argues that theater evolves, investigates, and anticipates latent societal issues, absorbing concepts and reinterpreting them on stage. In this sense, theater has always been an important medium of human expression, and this remains true for contemporary theater. It is capable of portraying deconstructed language and the intimate revelation of the stream of consciousness without losing its defining characteristics.

The stream of consciousness can compose not only texts written to be verbalized as speech but also what lies beyond the theatrical text—or, more precisely, beneath it. From this perspective, the stream of consciousness converges with the subtext used in theater as material for the psychological construction of characters. After making this assertion, it becomes necessary to illustrate with examples the stream-of-consciousness writing techniques present in dramaturgy. Below is an excerpt from *Waltz No. 6* by the renowned Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues (1912–1980):

“Cursedwaltz!

[holds her head in her hands] My fingers only know how to play 'this!' [in despair]
 Waltz that makes me dream of Paulo and Sônia... [sleepwalking]
 A translucent Sônia and a frayed Paulo... [covering her face and laughing]
 Dr. Junqueira is crazy about 'Waltz No. 6!' [imitating an old man]
 Ah, play the waltz, my daughter, for God's sake! [moves to the edge of the stage]
 Paulo, I hate you, and why, Paulo? [pleading]
 What have you done to me, to my face and my 15 years? [fierce]
 If only I could bury my nails in the soft flesh of your neck!” (RODRIGUES, 2017, pp. 201–202).

In this monologue, Sônia, a girl murdered at the age of 15, seems to teeter repeatedly between madness and sanity when her sentences are observed in isolation. However, the stream of consciousness here presents itself in a more logical way when the broader context of the piece is considered. This is because the association of ideas is present throughout the play. In the excerpt above, for example, she says, "My fingers only know how to play 'this!' [...] Waltz that makes me dream of Paulo and Sônia," and then immediately mentions, "Dr. Junqueira is crazy about 'Waltz No. 6!'" This occurs because the previous idea reminded her of this fact. Later, it is revealed that this is a reference to the moment when she is murdered by Dr. Junqueira.

Through the free association of ideas, Nelson Rodrigues constructs the structure of *Waltz No. 6* so that, even without detailed explanations of its elements, the narrative's storyline remains coherent. By the end of the play, it is possible to understand everything that happened to Sônia and the details encountered earlier in the story—whether read in the text or witnessed in a performance. If it didn't make sense at first glance, it does now, as the details connecting the ideas are revealed in the resolution of the plot.

The application of the "stream of consciousness" can also be observed in the work of Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), a playwright globally recognized for his contributions to the Theater of the Absurd¹, an aesthetic characterized by its

¹ "‘Absurd’ originally meant ‘out of harmony,’ in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: ‘out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, irrational, illogical.’ In everyday language, ‘absurd’ may simply mean ‘ridiculous,’ but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word, nor is it how it is applied when we speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. In an essay on Franz Kafka, Ionesco defined his conception of the term as follows: ‘Absurd

nonsensical nature. In the play *Happy Days*, Beckett (2010) presents a couple, Winnie and Willie; she is in her 50s, and he is in his 60s. The play begins with Winnie buried up to her waist while Willie sleeps. As the play progresses, Winnie becomes increasingly submerged, speaking almost entirely by herself, with Willie offering a few lines of dialogue.

Winnie's speech alternates between coherent and tangled, aiming to show the reader—and the spectator—that her consciousness oscillates between reality and reverie, often shifting between past and present.

“WINNIE - (mundane) Oh, what a pleasant surprise! (Pause.) Reminds me of the day you came begging for my hand. (Pause.) Be mine, Winnie, I adore you. (He looks up.) Life is a joke without Win. (Bursts into laughter.) What a scarecrow, you look like a ghost! (Laughs.) Where are the flowers? (Pause.) The ones that bloomed today. (WILLIE lowers his head.) What's that on your neck? An abscess? (Pause.) I need to take a look at that, Willie, before it spreads. (Pause.) Where have you been all this time? (Pause.) What were you doing all this time? (Pause.) Getting dressed? (Pause.) Didn't you hear me calling you? (Pause.) Were you stuck in your hole? (Pause. He looks up.) That's it, Willie, look at me. (Pause.) Feast your old eyes, Willie. (Pause.) Is there anything left? (Pause.) Anything at all? (Pause.) No? (Pause.) No time for beauty care, you know. (He lowers his head.) You're still recognizable, in a way. (Pause.) Are you thinking about moving over to this side now... for a while, maybe? (Pause.) No? (Pause.) Just a little visit? (Pause.) Have you gone deaf, Willie? (Pause.) Mute? (Pause.) Oh, I know you were never one to say, “I adore you, Winnie, be mine,” and after that day, not a word except for the newspaper ads. (Looks ahead. Pause.) All right, whatever, as I always say, it will have been a happy day, after all, another happy day” (BECKETT, 2010, pp. 36–37).

In the excerpt above, the playwright's meticulous intervention is evident in the indications of actions and pauses for the characters. However, these indications must be absorbed during the interpretation so that the audience does not feel a break in the flow but rather a momentary suspension that adds dramatic weight to the speech.

Now, presenting an example of a more fragmented and contemporary stream-of-consciousness technique in theater, we turn to the work of English playwright Sarah Kane (1971–1999). Kane's work, widely recognized as one of the greatest exponents of contemporary English dramaturgy, will be discussed in this study as an example of the stream of consciousness in its freest form in a dramatic text—free of authorial indications or interference, that is, the soliloquy. Using the same example cited by Oliveira (2009), we analyze an excerpt from *4.48 Psychosis*, one of Kane's most famous dramatic texts:

“Your truth, your lies, not mine. And while I believed you were different and that you might even feel the anguish that sometimes flickered across your face and threatened to surface, you were saving your own skin too. Like all the other stupid bastards. In my mind, that's betrayal. And my mind is the theme of these confused fragments. Nothing can extinguish my rage. And nothing can restore my faith. This is not a world I want to live in” (KANE, 2017, p. 11).

In this play, Kane's greatest achievement lies in the lack of definition, which amplifies the effect of the stream. The author does not specify the number of characters, their genders, or even their personalities, nor does she indicate speech intentions. This allows the visual, auditory, and interpretative staging of the play to be at the discretion of each director or group, enabling them to bring their unique interpretation of the text to life.

This lack of character definition, even if only by name, is shared by Silvia Gomez in her play *A Árvore (The Tree)*, where the main character is identified only as A. The audience knows only that she is “a woman recounting a journey” (GOMEZ, 2021, p. 23), as described by the playwright. The play explores a figurative journey, as the character narrates an internal transformation that affects her body, gradually transforming her into a tree. This leaves the audience in suspense throughout, uncertain whether her transformation is literal or metaphorical.

"A.: Day 11, 3:57 PM

is that which has no purpose. ... Divorced from its religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless' (Esslin, 2018, p. 16)."

I began to forget words. I look at things and know what they mean, what they represent, what they were once, what they will be in the future, what time they sleep, their favorite sexual position, their shoe size, but... I know what they're for, but I don't care anymore. Are those roots on the ceiling? I drink water from a broken cup. I think they're roots on the ceiling. I wash dishes, break more things, the sink is clogged, I think they're roots, I think they're moving, I remember the movements, but sometimes I don't want to reach the end of them, yes, they seem like roots. Yes. No. I think not" (GOMEZ, 2021, pp. 50–51).

From the excerpt above, it becomes possible to identify the use of the “stream of consciousness” in the soliloquy technique. Gomez does not define the meaning of the character’s metamorphosis but instead suggests a “literal metaphor” of transformation, leaving its interpretation to the reader—or the audience, depending on the choices made for staging.

Isn't the core of contemporary art precisely the free interpretation of its many forms of expression? “The contemporary embraces multiplicity, fusion, the dissolution of genres: tragic, lyrical, epic, dramatic; epiphany, cruelty, and parody coexist in the same scene” (COHEN, 1997, p. 27). Thus, as already stated, when considering the multiple possibilities of contemporary artistic practice, the intersections arising from converging elements expand the field of research.

So far, the analysis has been conducted within the established perspective of the “stream of consciousness”, based on identifying similarities in writing techniques found in certain novels and theatrical texts presented as examples. However, the focus should shift to what lies at the heart of the stream's purpose: the psychological construction of characters. In this view, the stream is a powerful material for creating the subtext of characters, requiring a detachment from the exact words of the text to focus on its intent.

The Stream of Consciousness as Subtext

The concept of subtext in theater is not difficult to understand and can even be inferred from the term itself—it refers to what lies beneath the text. In other words, it pertains to the content that can be brought to the stage through gestures, vocal tone, or makeup, based on the actors’ character construction and aesthetic choices, as well as the interpretative direction of the production. To support this assertion, I refer to Constantin Stanislavski’s (1863–1938) explanation in *An Actor Prepares*—here, using the 1997 edition:

“At the moment of performance, the text is provided by the playwright, and the subtext by the actor. (...) Otherwise, people would not go to the theater; they would stay home reading the play. We are (...) inclined to forget that the written play is not a finished work of art until it is brought to life on stage by the actors, infused with pure and authentic human emotions; the same applies to a musical score, which is not a symphony until performed by an orchestra in concert. The moment people—musicians or actors—imbue their own life into the subtext of any written material presented to an audience, they release spiritual sources and inner essence. (...) The main point of any such creation is the subtext at its foundation. The line of a role is drawn from the subtext, not the text itself” (STANISLAVSKI, 1997, p. 174).

Thus, the subtext is the marrow of the text, requiring actors to direct their investigation inward to construct the character. This means delving into the psychological essence of the character, using it to develop a score of actions, vocal tone, speech intentions, posture (whether upright or hunched), movement style and speed, and even specific tics or habits. According to Stanislavski:

“The most substantial part of a subtext lies in the ideas (...) it implies, which convey the line of logic and coherence more clearly and definitively. (...) One idea gives rise to a second, then a third, and together they form a super-objective. (...) There are occasions when the intellectual content of a subtext predominates, (...) and others when the predominance is in the lines of inner vision. The ideal is when both merge. (...) Then the spoken word becomes full of action. Words are (...) part of the external embodiment of the inner essence of a role. (...) When you reach the point where words become necessary to achieve your objective and realize your potential, (...) you will have assimilated the author’s text with the same joy as a musician receiving an Amati violin; they know it is the best way to express the feelings housed in the recesses of their soul” (STANISLAVSKI, 1997, pp. 175–176).

As we can see, Stanislavski's concept of subtext already shows an intrinsic connection with the concept of the "stream of consciousness" in its intent. The mentioned concept can be applied both to the analysis of written dramatic text and to the staging process, particularly when the focus of investigation is on observing a staged production.

Thus, I argue that subtext has a direct connection to the psychological construction of the character, based on the ideas the text aims to convey. It is, therefore, even closer to the original conception of the "stream of consciousness" as a synonym of the content of mind, than the text intended to be verbalized within the theatrical context.

This does not preclude finding characteristics of the stream-of-consciousness techniques, as previously discussed, in Gomez's written dialogues. However, I prefer to adopt another perspective. For example, it is worth exploring the meaning behind these dialogues and what is described in the didascalia or stage directions, which indicate actions and even describe the settings Gomez presents. Examining how she does this allows us to identify the presence of consciousness content within the subtext of the play.

As verbal text has lost its status as the central element in contemporary theater, its structure has become more flexible, and staging possibilities detached from the text have proliferated. When encountering plays like those of Silvia Gomez, there is an opportunity to base analysis on elements beyond the text itself. In theater, the stream of consciousness can also permeate the visuality, soundscape, and interpretation of the scene, thus necessitating a more in-depth analysis.

To this end, I propose an analytical approach that combines the stream of consciousness with the subtext in three of Gomez's plays: *Mantenha fora do alcance do bebê* (Keep Out of Reach of Children), *Neste mundo louco, nesta noite brilhante* (In This Crazy World, On This Bright Night), and *A Árvore* (The Tree).

Gomez's texts strongly question the social conditions of women and the afflictions that predominantly affect their bodies. In an interview with the website "Cena Aberta," Gomez made the following statement: "When I write, I approach poetic delirium as a kind of extreme lucidity, a pathway to what we usually prefer to silence, words in a dangerous flow" (GOMEZ, 2019, Cena Aberta).

The term "flow" as used here by the playwright does not necessarily refer to the stream of consciousness, as Gomez does not associate the term with a specific theory. However, when the author refers to what "we usually prefer to silence," I am reminded of the things we prevent our own voice from verbalizing due to the almost automatic judgment of our consciousness—or superego, to use a Freudian term. And where does what we silence go? In a way, it retreats into the unconscious.

Psychic material repressed into the unconscious will very likely find a way to escape this repression, and among the various ways this can occur, art is a widely acknowledged pathway. In this outburst of liberation, where repressed ideas blend with present thoughts and future aspirations, the stream of consciousness emerges.

This, I believe, is where the essence of the "stream of consciousness" in theatrical text lies: in the factors that, contrary to Prado's (2000) assertions, provide theater with a natural and unique fluidity. This fluidity is permeable and flexible enough to contain, within the inherent ephemerality of theatrical practice, the paradox of consciousness. This paradox reveals itself to others when performed through speech and actions on stage, while simultaneously preserving the internal element of what remains hidden in our unconscious and in the writer's intention during the writing process. "I am filled with rage, with everything that happens around me. Writing is my way of processing that rage, of digesting my time" (GOMEZ, 2020, p. 08).

The Stream Of Consciousness In Gomez's Dramaturgy

The first play by the playwright that I brought for analysis is *Keep Out of Reach of the baby* (*Mantenha fora do alcance do bebê*, 2015), that I bring with my own translation, which tells the story of Woman 1, a high-society fashion designer in the process of adopting a baby. Gomez offers a surgical critique of the excessive consumerism of society in this dramatic text. The play portrays the moment of an interview in which the social worker, Woman 2, evaluates whether Woman 1 and her husband Rubens are fit to adopt a baby.

In this play, which critiques the contamination of human relationships by consumerism and uses motherhood as an allegory to carry out this critique, Woman 1 approaches the adoption interview as if it were a shopping process. She does not hide her preference for a baby with "perfect configurations." Since the construction of the characters is crucial, I began by examining the descriptions provided by Gomez:

"A Woman (Woman 1). She is elegant in her red polka-dot dress. She is always scratching herself. Another Woman (Woman 2). She wears a nondescript suit. She looks older than she actually is. Rubens, Woman 1's husband. He wears dress pants and a vest over a shirt—his outfit resembles old tailoring styles. He is over 50. He is someone exhausted. There is a wolf tied up in one of the corners (or a holographic wolf roaming the stage)" (GOMEZ, 2015, p. 11).

From the outset, it is evident that Gomez highlights the characters' attire as their primary trait, which is no coincidence given the play's theme of consumerism and superficial appearances. Additionally, Woman 1 is described as exhibiting a compulsive behavior—scratching herself constantly. This could suggest discomfort with her own skin, symbolizing dissatisfaction with the image she is compelled to project to society. Woman 2, on the other hand, appears older than she is, possibly due to emotional exhaustion from public service work and harboring a bitterness inconsistent with youth.

There are also two male figures, a rarity in Gomez's texts: a husband, Rubens, the only named character, symbolizing the patriarchal notion of recognition and validation reserved for men, and a wolf, a symbol that could signify the voracious nature of consumerism while also representing the constant threat men pose to women, even those who seem harmless. These suppositions underpin the subtext, serving as the foundation for the psychological construction of the characters.

"SETTING

A sort of office in a public department. There is a desk and three chairs, and a telephone sits in the background. We also see a public payphone on a parallel plane (Rubens remains standing beside it throughout Scene 1, as if waiting for his moment to enter). Behind the desk, Woman 2 interviews Woman 1. At first, the interviewer rarely takes her eyes off the paperwork (paying little attention to the other woman)" (GOMEZ, 2015, p. 11).

By detailing the characters and the setting of the play, the author adds another layer to the subtext: Woman 2 treats Woman 1 with a certain coldness, possibly stemming from the pragmatism of her job or disillusionment with the system. Rubens remains in a separate area, possibly symbolizing male absence, while the woman strives to fulfill the role of motherhood. The characters' consciousnesses are clearly beginning to be shaped within the narrative. As the interview progresses, it becomes clear that Woman 1 grows increasingly restless and affected, struggling to maintain the "appropriate" demeanor she had rehearsed.

"**Woman 1**(enumerates): I'm afraid of wolves and don't like the word sausage, I know how to cook and have learned to prepare baby food, I have a structured life and an apartment with a balcony, I'm proactive and can be flexible, I will never give sausages to the baby, I adapt to different situations without attachment, I don't feel envy—they say sausages mix all kinds of meat—I thought I could handle stress, the worst kinds of meat, but now, I mean..." (GOMEZ, 2015, p. 18).

Analyzing the excerpt above, we can immediately detect the subtle association of ideas in Woman 1's speech. For example, she mentions not liking the word "sausage" and, two sentences later, states that she will not give "sausages" to the baby. This associative flow is reminiscent of Waltz No. 6, where one of Sônia's sentences leads to another, and a word used in one phrase may connect to an idea expressed two sentences later.

Here, I emphasize the stream of consciousness through the small revelations Woman 1 makes about her fear of wolves and disgust for sausages. These details contribute to the psychological construction of a woman plagued by fear of the world's dangers while clinging to her upper-class privileges.

Another moment where the stream of consciousness is evident in the written speech—and where Woman 1's true personality and intentions are revealed—is when she reads her daily task list aloud to Woman 2, as seen below:

“Woman 1: ...Research frost-free ads. Dogs don’t cry like babies. They bark. But they don’t cry like babies. (she begins to cry) Visit Egypt and see the pyramids, research tourist packages for October. Blow it all up. They don’t have the soft, chubby hands of babies. Buy plastic cylinders. Blow them all up. Fix the cordless phone. Buy gunpowder and gasoline or diesel. Call the social worker. Find 1 meter of fuse. Screw my husband. Hydrogen peroxide plus acetone, yes, that’s it. Call the baby. Screw the baby. No, I mean, glycerin for the baby’s diaper rash. Nitroglycerin. Schedule the interview. Mix slowly. Buy a baby, no, I think I wrote it wrong, rent the baby, no, I mean, adopt the baby. Adopt the baby, that’s it, I think I got confused. Buy the belt with support for the jars and cylinders and adopt the baby. Call the driver’s license office, travel to the apartment, get pregnant again, blow them all up, finance the baby, become a qualified person. Wait for a pyramid from Egypt. Believe. Find a supplier for hydrogen peroxide. Nitroglycerin. See the pyramid from Egypt grow in your belly. Diaper cream plus glycerin. (to Woman 2) Oh, I’m sorry, my notes are so messy, I... Sometimes I get a little confused. [...]

Woman 1(entertained by the reading): ...Diaper cream plus nitroglycerin. Blow up the pyramids of Egypt, oh, that sounds funny. Wear the proper clothes for the interview day. Be adequate and present the driver’s license. Eat the baby. I mean, buy the baby. Blow up the baby, no, rent the baby, no, adopt the baby. Check if the matches are gone, get a keratin treatment, acquire a definitive baby, preferably with straight hair, fix the cordless phone, call the straight-haired baby, leave the blinds open in winter, better open the windows and feel the fresh air, enjoy life, qualify yourself, recycle waste, believe, set the alarm clock, fight global warming, open the window every day and breathe the outside air, calculate carbon emissions, adapt, prepare the mixture, nitroglycerin, diaper cream plus glycerin, appear adequate again, educate the baby to be sustainable and ecological, diaper cream plus nitroglycerin. Blow it all up. Acquire a definitive baby...” (GOMEZ, 2015, pp. 23–24).

In this excerpt, the fluid discourse of Woman 1’s consciousness is evident, to the point where the character doesn’t even filter what she says. Her goals blend with personal notes and merge into a shopping list, ultimately revealing her plans. The associative flow of ideas highlights key elements that may guide interpretation, despite the seemingly disjointed sequence of sentences and tasks.

For example, the mention of explosives hidden under her clothes is still unknown to the reader (or audience), but the actress, aware of this fact, can use it as a motivator for the character’s speech intentions. The explosives are only revealed at the end of the play when Woman 1 executes her plan after failing to appear as an adequate mother. Provoked by her husband and encouraged by Woman 2, who joins hands with her to activate the bomb hidden under her dress, Woman 1 supposedly detonates the bomb and blows everything up.

“Rubens (to his wife): Shall we? Let’s get on with it. We can hold hands if that makes it easier for you. We can hold hands and count. What do you think if we count then? Would that make it better for you?

He grabs his wife’s hand and turns his back to the audience, starting to count (1, 2, 3...).

Woman 2 watches them and, after a moment of hesitation, slowly approaches and voluntarily offers her hand to Rubens. All three are now holding hands. They may count aloud, together. We see the outline of their bodies against the light, highlighting the explosive cylinders strapped to Woman 1’s body” (GOMEZ, 2015, pp. 47–48).

In the excerpt above, the unlikely thought materializes, no matter how improbable or “nonsensical” it may seem. “The stage is now empty. Only the wolf remains” (GOMEZ, 2015, p. 48). Thus, Gomez ends her text. After consuming everything and everyone around her to the point of self-destruction, only the wolf—the voracious consumerism, the threatening patriarchy, or any other interpretation this analogy might allow—remains.

The next example for this analysis is the play *In This Crazy World, On This Bright Night* (Neste mundo louco, nesta noite brilhante, 2019) also translated by me, which arose from Gomez’s discomfort with the high rates of rape and violence against women in Brazil. It features two female characters, both “Brazilian,” as emphasized by the author:

“Watchwoman of the KM 23

A middle-aged Brazilian woman. Her hair and skin, perhaps shimmering or translucent, dazzle the eyes. On a night like this, she could be a kind of fairy, a legend, or a heroine. Or just a hungover woman who needs to hide a kind of weapon between her breasts.

L

A young Brazilian woman” (GOMEZ, 2019, p. 2).

From the character descriptions, it is clear that the author provides indications that are almost poetic in their metaphoric nature, particularly regarding the *Vigia do KM 23* (Watchwoman of KM 23), Diana Louise. She hints at how the actresses might draw on references to construct the characters, prompting questions such as: What does it mean to be a Brazilian woman? How might age influence the character's way of thinking and speaking? Why is Diana portrayed as an almost ethereal or mystical figure, and how can this be highlighted? Why is L identified only by a single letter? Could L represent any and all young Brazilian women who have suffered or are at risk of sexual violence? How does this influence the interpretation of the characters' lines? These images serve as suggestions for the emotional construction of the characters, through which the "stream of consciousness" begins to take shape.

Landscapes

Autumn. A stretch of a Brazilian highway. A sign reads: 'KM 23. Return.' A closed establishment. Burned-out streetlights. A Brazilian tree slowly shedding its leaves. In the distance, police sirens and the sounds of police radio (various reports) and aerial surveillance (airplanes taking off and landing in various parts of the world). Various images throughout the scenes suggested by the characters' lines. [...]

Note: The aerial surveillance (radio) lines are free and absurd adaptations of real instructions" (GOMEZ, 2019, p. 3).

As seen in the excerpt above, the author suggests a visual and auditory experience for the scene that is as filled with overlapping and fragmented information as the narrative itself. Additionally, the symbolism of the number 23, which in numerology represents the combination of the energies of its two digits, could inspire speech intentions and staging choices, for instance.

I agree with Oliveira's (2009) assertion that the "stream of consciousness" is realized in theater through the "aesthetic experience" it provides to the spectator. Indeed, the aesthetic experience as a whole is indispensable not only to the concept of contemporary theater in general but also to a complete experience of the stream of consciousness in the theatrical context.

Later in the text, we learn that Diana witnessed the gang rape of L, which took place at the same stretch of road where Diana works as a watchwoman. Initially, Diana behaves as someone who feels powerless—or even cowardly—in the face of the sexual violence unfolding before her eyes. She merely observes the scene, exposing the normalization of such acts for someone who may be accustomed to witnessing them.

As L is assaulted, Diana comments on the situation with disgust but claims she cannot help the girl. At a certain point, however, she finds the scene unbearable and decides to intervene, asking for a bright light to be turned on to scare away the attackers, who are described only as shadows. Once the shadows dissipate—leaving the scene—the watchwoman approaches L to offer help.

Initially, L resists Diana's attempts to help and tries to repel her at all costs. However, being injured and weak, L can barely move and eventually gives in to a dialogue with the watchwoman, who insists on helping her.

L: Do you have the time? Are you a man or a woman? Can I trust you?
Vigia: What do you think?
L: Is it daytime yet? How much longer until we can leave? Have they sung happy birthday?
 Wow, I'm confused.
Vigia: Ah, the delirium has begun.
L: Sorry, I don't speak English, I'm not wearing underwear. Wow, I'm confused, what's happening?" (GOMEZ, 2019, p. 13).

Here, the reason behind L's associative train of thought is not made explicit, as it might be in *Waltz No. 6*. However, it is clear that the character's confusion deliberately blends with the dialogue's confusion. Diana even points out at this moment that L is beginning to deliriously ramble, a state that intensifies as L attempts to communicate.

L: They said they were going to bring others, you have something shimmering, many of them, something silky on your skin, I don't know, on your smooth and shiny clothes like satin, maybe it's your hair, hair shiny like a lampshade or like a crowd of those people arriving at any moment, what kind of thing are you, huh? Wow! The night is so bright and silky now, who do you think you are? (she shouts)

Who do you think you are?
 Do you think you're some kind of fairy? Go away.
 Are you old or young?
 You old cow.
 You shiny young fairy.
 You young old shiny silky satin fairy cow, do you know what it's like to lose everything?
 Oh, how confusing, let me disappear, please" (GOMEZ, 2019, p. 15).

L is visibly too injured to be psychologically stable, yet even as she tries to establish a dialogue with the watchwoman, her speech is interrupted by the memory that her attackers promised to return with others. At first glance, it might seem that only delirious words and phrases pour out of her mouth, sounding nonsensical even to the watchwoman herself.

This reflects the nature of free association, which stems from the depths of each individual and whose internal logic is not always easily understood. Before long, Diana herself begins to communicate in a similarly "disjointed" manner, exposing her own thoughts.

"Watchwoman(to the audience): I've been here over a thousand times. I've died a thousand days, a thousand times in this crazy world of a thousand sunken ships. Pain is the hull of a ship trying to reach somewhere. Or someone's face.

Image/Text: "Keep walking."

Watchwoman(to the audience, with the image of the phrase appearing simultaneously): Good. It stopped. This way, you won't get anywhere. The only way is forward; life is a whisky ad—keep walking—I love catchy phrases made by fools. (to backstage) Make it big there: keep walking. (to L) Darling, I have an idea" (GOMEZ, 2019, p. 21).

It is unclear to the reader exactly who this watchwoman is. Is she an ordinary woman on a typical workday, a mythical figure like an angel, or death itself? Gomez leaves the audience to imagine the identity of this character when reading the text solely through the dialogues.

Here, the subtext must provide clarity for the actress portraying the character. Up to the point presented in the excerpt above, taken from the play, the author's voice minimally intervenes, only where necessary, with simple stage directions typical of dramatic texts—indicating where or to whom the actress should direct her speech or which elements might appear on stage at a given moment.

However, later in the play, the author introduces a significant provocation, encouraging the actress playing L to occasionally speak from her own perspective, merging her consciousness with the character's.

"L now stands, and at this moment, the actress and character merge once again.

L/Actress 2: Oh. You need a name! She won't give you a name, okay?

Watchwoman: You're doing it again, damn it.

L/Actress 2: She won't give you a name.

Watchwoman: What's your problem?

L/Actress 2: You want to pin this on someone, but this has no beginning; this is like war, war will never end as long as two people walk through your KM 23, but you want a name. Write down the first name written in the first cave used by the first creature. Write this down: Zeus. Write down: Sextus, son of Tarquin the Proud, 500 BC, violator of Lucretia, Rome. Ah, just write down Rome and its seven hills populated thanks to the submission of the Sabine women. Write it all down and let's sit here while you fill your little notebook with the names of all the wars of all times and all captaincies, too, because that's how we were founded, and that's how we remain to this day: Island of Vera Cruz, Brazil. You could spend centuries listing all kinds of names—go ahead. Better yet, write down the name of the person who invented the word justice. That one deserves a good beating! Or then write down the name of the first person who decided to call us humanity. And we even say it nicely: h-u-m-a-n-i-t-y. Do you know where this ends? We are on the verge of wiping out the fastest shark in the ocean—600 kilograms and 30 rows of teeth—but we'll destroy it, I'm sorry. Do you know where this ends? This only ends close to extinction. But you think you can save me; look at your hair. Do you see what's happening to your hair while you watch all this? I refuse this role, but you want yours, don't you? You want to play the fairy in a story where everything is solved if we just have good intentions! We don't have good intentions in this crazy world, Diana Louise; she won't give you a name. She will

die here because that's what happens when they do to you what they do every day at KM 23, and it will just be another body left on the asphalt of centuries. (turns to backstage) Projection. Catchphrase! Image/Text: 'Terror has accompanied history'" (GOMEZ, 2019, pp. 31–32).

In the excerpt above, we see the precise operation of associative thought. The author connects one thought to the next with eloquence, maintaining the flow of consciousness and the text's development. The speech, which recalls centuries of cultural construction tied to rape, is filled with the primary fuel for L's subtext: a mixture of outrage at the atrocity this social reality represents and despair at the powerlessness to change it.

The Tree (A *Árvore*, 2021), that I translated myself, tells the story of a woman referred to only as "A." who literally transforms into a tree after receiving a plant as a gift from her neighbor, Sabina, who lives in apartment 151. Once again, we notice the author's choice to name her protagonist with just a letter, avoiding over-definition. "A., a woman and her travelogue" (GOMEZ, 2021, p. 23), is how the playwright begins the play, announcing that the story to be told is a travelogue. However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that this journey corresponds to the protagonist's internal path of transformation.

In the preface to the edition published by Cobogó, Marici Salomão—a playwright, journalist, and coordinator of the dramaturgy course at SP Escola de Teatro—states: "The Tree is a play to be read with the lungs, requiring a conscious, eager, and rhythmic effort to breathe in and out" (SALOMÃO in GOMEZ, 2021, p. 7). From the overview Salomão provides about the work, the reason for this becomes clear:

"The human landscapes masterfully crafted by Silvia thrust us into abyssal places. From them, the author draws out spasmodic women in situations of extreme limits. Such is the case of the character A., in this *The Tree*, produced during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 [...] The text is about a transmutation, a metamorphosis seemingly traced from our absurd times, in which what we desperately seem to need is an urgent shift in our civilizational course—for the sake of the environment, inter-human and political relations, and the physical and mental health of populations. And what is theater if not the shared experience of going against the grain of what is usually unquestionable? *The Tree* feeds on this radical essence" (SALOMÃO in GOMEZ, 2021, pp. 9–10).

The effort required to read this play lies in rhythmically pursuing this metaphorical and literal breathing in and out, as the protagonist guides us on a journey hovering between delirium and reality.

In addition to A., there are the characters O., who opens the play with a stage direction immersing us in a primeval forest, and the Actress, who navigates this forest, describing it as though she were "thinking aloud," much like a soliloquy in the stream of consciousness.

What draws attention to the subtext is the image of a flooded forest and the question of who one sees when unable to see one's own face, alongside the desire to become part of nature. These aspects suggest interpretive pathways the actor can explore to portray this connection, such as imagining being entirely removed from the chaos of everyday human life.

"**ACTRESS:** Imagine. It's still night, and it's dark. A primeval forest. Part of it is flooded, as is common this time of year. The water is a mirror. Someone asks: Who do you see when you see your face? (But you don't know where this voice comes from.) Magnificent trees in magnificent conversation with sky, earth, water. The sound this creates within us. We could live here forever, in this place without a ZIP code, timeless. Here, we have free thoughts and epiphanies without ZIP codes. (Never trust an epiphany that arrives with a postal code or identification numbers—it's fake, know that.) Her favorite song plays. No. No. Better not. Her favorite song doesn't play yet; we only hear the sound of the forest. Okay? Then, she begins her account" (GOMEZ, 2021, pp. 25–26).

The character Actress speaks only one more time, in an introductory manner, making it clear: "What matters is that soon I will no longer be a person. Not even a character in my own story" (GOMEZ, 2021, p. 26). Immediately after, she is referred to only as A., signifying that the character's already vague identity becomes irrelevant to the journey

that unfolds. In constructing this character, one could perhaps, and this is merely a suggestion, focus on deconstruction to channel the required energy.

As the story progresses, A. feels her body transforming, sometimes violently, sometimes peacefully, identifying these changes as “rumors.” While writing, she also speaks directly to the reader, allowing us to witness the internal movements of her past and present thoughts. The readers/spectators become witnesses to her external transformation, which inherently ties to the stream of consciousness.

The creation of the subtext for this character is essential to the dramatic text, complementing the flow by directly connecting with the protagonist’s inside-out metamorphosis. This transformation will manifest through the score of actions, speech intentions, and even the chosen costume design.

Observing the excerpt below, it becomes clear that the character brings us closer to her consciousness as she awkwardly confesses the way she addresses the plant gifted to her, which triggered her transformation:

“A.: Dear sculptor,

(Wow, see how I just called you, thinking about your body and your hands and the veins in your magnificent hands.) I read that Michelangelo took three years to finish his David, in 1504. While the Portuguese were spreading through Brazil, he was hiding to sculpt the monstrous 5-meter marble block. In the photo, I’m struck by the bulging veins, the tension in David, seconds before he faces Goliath—the impossible. I think that’s how I felt that day when you... [new rumor] (Ah...

Ah, how nice it would be to sink in, go deeper, settle, forget). Ah!” (GOMEZ, 2021, pp. 41–42).

In this excerpt, three characteristics of the stream of consciousness as a literary device are evident:

1. **Association of ideas:** Clearly present in the mention of the sculptor Michelangelo and his David immediately after A. refers to the transformative plant as “Dear sculptor.”
2. **Interruption of thoughts:** The narrative flow is disrupted by the “rumors” of transformation, highlighting the friction between the fluidity of thoughts and the sensations of the body.
3. **Lack of proper punctuation:** The phrase “Ah, how nice it would be to sink in, go deeper, settle, forget” lacks the necessary commas, intentionally creating a sense of breathlessness in the character, which Gomez extends to the reader.

This last characteristic aligns with the concept that I bring in this study of the “stream of consciousness” as subtext, as the performer embodying the character must grasp the importance of these nuances to convey the transformation happening within A. effectively.

“My little mouse, this is probably the last time I’ll write to you
I don’t know what time it is
I’ve scattered, I no longer recognize boundaries, I’m miles away, but also here, I’ll go on without the company of
words commas periods I kept this newspaper clipping
I left the window open
always
remember to breathe
in this clipping I read something magnificent
the story of an experiment
year 1774
the clipping says
science proves that plants absorb the carbon dioxide exhaled by animals and produce oxygen in return
the clipping says
read
I left the window open
isn’t it magnificent that just one centimeter of an open window is enough
this happens to remind us
in the the experiment
the clipping says

a mouse was placed inside a glass dome, and soon the little creature lost consciousness
the clipping says
this happens to remind us that words
just like us
just like the fish
just like the mountains
just like the centuries
just like the music
however
the clipping says
when a plant was placed alongside the mouse my little secret
when the plant and the little animal were together
the clipping says
he
the little animal
survived
read
I left the window open” (GOMEZ, 2021, pp. 59–60).

In this passage, the lack of punctuation reappears in the play’s final moments, but this time with an opposite purpose. Earlier, the absence of commas symbolized A.’s breathlessness. Here, in the concluding sequence, the absence of punctuation and the spacing between phrases create an unconscious exercise of inhaling and exhaling as we read alongside the character. At this point, we are entirely in tune with her, and a performance could amplify this connection, with the stream of consciousness revealed through subtext.

Thus, Gomez’s plays, both through dialogue and stage directions, demonstrate the existence of the “stream of consciousness” as a powerful tool in constructing theatrical subtext. Even when the characters verbalize the contents of their thoughts, the essence of the stream of consciousness remains intact. On the contrary, it can be further emphasized during the staging, provided the direction uses the stream to give “meaning” to the dramaturgical and scenic proposal.

Final Considerations

Academic studies on contemporary dramaturgy still represent a small percentage compared to the vast potential that investigating theatrical works written in and about our time offers. Furthermore, there is still a gap in studies on contemporary dramaturgy written by women, particularly Brazilian women, as I observed during my research in search of theoretical frameworks for this study.

In a way, this research is the blossoming of a seed nurtured extensively during my undergraduate studies, when readings on female dramaturgy piqued my interest and encouraged me to learn more about women playwrights and to venture into writing theatrical texts myself. My first text to be staged in an online theater format was *The Last Night* (A Última Noite, 2020), which later became a medium-length film and was selected for the Flick Fair Festival in Los Angeles (2020). It also reached the semifinals in the Lift-Off Global Network in the United Kingdom (2020). The play addressed the rise in violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic—a dramatic text born from a theme that deeply affected and disturbed me in the broadest sense of how it feels to be a woman and to have one’s body, and the bodies of all women, targeted in a society built on patriarchal foundations.

In this sense, the connection I felt when reading Silvia Gomez’s texts was undeniable. As a playwright, she undertakes the same process of creating from the discomforts and challenges imposed on women’s bodies every day. Thus, choosing to explore texts that resonate with my time was essential for delving into subtexts that provoke me as both a researcher and a social being.

Drawing on extensive readings on the stream of consciousness and the knowledge gained during my theater studies, I investigated the potential relationship between the concept of the thought movement known as the stream of consciousness and theatrical subtext. I realized that, by focusing on the revelation of a character’s most intimate thoughts, dramatic literature loses nothing compared to literary fiction, contrary to what was believed for a long time. Just as the author’s intervention and possible indications do not undermine a “stream of consciousness novel,

the transposition of the consciousness “flow” to the stage—where psychological revelation is expressed through various means such as speech, costume, gestures, and even vocal intonation—does not compromise the essence of the stream of consciousness either. That said, I emphasize that contemporary dramatic literature is fertile ground for researchers seeking to bring new perspectives and stimulating approaches to their studies.

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