1 Introduction

There is something amiss behind Robert Walser's idyllic vistas and Bernardo Carvalho's exotic sceneries. They are, upon closer inspection, neither idyllic nor exotic, but the first subterranean signs of a world that is slowly undoing itself. Landscape, as it appears and is described throughout the work of the Swiss and the Brazilian writer, provides an excellent – and yet insufficiently explored – pathway to the authors' literary projects. Through their treatment of landscape both authors reveal not only their main aesthetic concerns and stylistic preferences, but also their broader literary goals – and, in Carvalho's case, the extent to which he is influenced by Walser's work.

This study, thus, posits the landscape as the feature which not only binds the work of these two authors together, but also unveils their literary projects in their entirety. The landscape functions as a synthetic and unifying figure that triggers, at first, through the analysis of landscape description *per se*, the main and most evident elements of the authors' works, such as their preferences for settings and themes, their linguistic and narrative tics, their Romantic influence and backdrops, their penchant for movement and heights. However, when sustained as a methodological figure beyond the scope of its own description, the landscape soon reveals a darker, far more fascinating and far less explored side of Walser's and Carvalho's oeuvres: a vengeful, seemingly defeatist, barely disguised resentment against the *status quo*, which gives way to the more latent and biting elements of the authors' prose, such as irony, the unheimlich, the apocalyptic aesthetics of a disaster-prone fictional world, the obsession with the themes of madness and sickness, an understanding of history and literature through the figures of failure and marginality, as well as the anti-heroic agenda which undermines the very same Romanticism from where both authors seem, at a first glance, to draw their strengths.

A comprehensive study of the landscape and its implications in the work of both Walser and Carvalho is barely inexistent. With two notable yet still insufficient exceptions,[1] the landscape within the critical reception of Carvalho's work is usually – if at all – used as a byword for the post-colonial or the (trans)cultural, when it in fact underscores a much more literary than political maneuver, as the opening chapters of this research seek to demonstrate (the politics is in the details). The landscape is also, in both authors' cases, commonly equated to the poetic (in

1 One unfortunately too short – Pedro Dolabela Chagas & Dárley Suany Leite dos Santos, "O Narrador e a Paisagem: Milton Hatoum, Bernardo Carvalho e o Fim do Projeto de uma Literatura Nacional", 2015 –, and the other too adjectival – Carlinda Fragale Pate Nunez, "*Mongólia* de Bernardo Carvalho: Romance de Espaço e Imagologia", 2015.

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Walser) or the photographic (in Carvalho), a naïve notion which this research also seeks to offset by showcasing the complex implications triggered by landscape description in the authors' oeuvres, as opposed to the mere affectation of a writerly or aesthetic sensibility. It is also not unusual, within the authors' critical reception, to have the landscape foreshadowing the mood of a given character or, rather, of a given narrator, as if symbolically mirroring said narrator's psychology and inner turmoil. This book shows how the narrators' agendas run much deeper than psychology, a notion in any case shunned by both authors, and how their inner turmoil is located above all in language, of which the landscape is not only a function, but also the gateway to all that is hidden underneath the text's surface.

The landscape, as previously stated, also functions here as a unifying figure, not only triggering both the main and covert elements in the authors' oeuvres, but also providing a conceptually sound conclusion to their analysis. This somewhat circular maneuver pays tribute to one of the few systematic studies on the landscape in Walser's work, Jochen Greven's "Landschaft mit Räubern. Zu Robert Walsers (vermutlich) letztem Prosastück", which, in spite of its unique approach, is ultimately a text more interested in Walser's rapport to Schiller than in Walser's approach to the landscape.[2] Greven nevertheless insightfully notes that the landscape is a prominent feature in what are usually considered to be Walser's earliest piece of writing, 1899s sketch "Der Greifensee", as well as of his last, 1932/3s "Die Landschaft (II)". The landscape comes full-circle in Walser's oeuvre, both prefacing and concluding what Greven deems the central elements of the Swiss author's prose: the progressive transition from open and known territories to small and unknown spaces, the presence of an ironic and self-commenting first-person narrator, the gasp for freedom and autonomy, the clash between Realism and Romanticism, between Materialism and the Absolute. This assessment prompts Greven to ponder, in the first half of his text, before turning his attention to Schiller, over the specificities of the landscape as a narrative device in connection to Walser, amongst which three are of fundamental importance to the initial framing of this research.

Greven initially shapes his approach by poetically claiming that, to Walser, landscape is a framed picture full of mysteries or riddles ("Ein gerahmtes Bildchen voller Rätsel"): it conjures a familiar sight which can be contemplated from a safe distance, at arm's length, the guarded distance of a landscape painter, but that underneath its apparent idyll flows a metaphysical sense of loss. From there,

2 Alternatively, two other articles also deal prominently with the landscape in Walser's oeuvre, although both reduce the landscape to a component of Walser's flânerie: Claudia Albes, *Der Spaziergang als Erzählmodell. Studien zu Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adalbert Stifter, Robert Walser und Thomas Bernhard*, 1999; and Bernhard Böschenstein, "Sprechen als Wandern. Robert Walsers 'Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet'", 1987.

Greven resorts to the intertwinement of nature and culture in Walser's oeuvre in order to note how these fixed and familiar aspects of the landscape actually play on the underlying illusion of its cultivation and colonization, a notion which this research further investigates by way of Rousseau and of the meanings and implications the term "landscape" has acquired over the centuries, leading up to a contemporary discussion with anthropological undertones on which Carvalho's fictional and essayistic work sheds light. Building upon that, Greven finally remarks on the profound artificiality of the landscape in Walser's oeuvre, especially in the texts written during the author's so-called "Bieler Zeit" (1913–1920), around which this book's first chapter is organized. The landscape is made into an artifact, a highly artificial *décor* which, rather than merely working towards the projection of a given mood, as seems to be Greven's takeaway ("Landschaft als Spiegel der Seele"), is effectively made into a function of the language. This study posits, with Greven but adjusting slightly his emphasis, that the turmoil found in Walser's (and in Carvalho's) work is not projected by the landscape, but by language itself, of which the landscape is arguably its most revealing function.[3] It is only then, by submitting the landscape to the language and its narrative agenda, that one may unravel, in all of its complexity and scope, the fictional stage upon which Walser's and Carvalho's self-reflecting first-person narrators narrate, with their dying breath, a world full of riddles that is slowly undoing itself.

The state of turmoil to which most characters and narrators in Walser's and Carvalho's oeuvre are subjected, of a world that is undoing itself faster than language can stabilize it, speaks of an existential crisis in search of an outlet; it speaks of tiny, off-centered, marginal, logorrheic voices on the verge of extinction desperately trying out words and turns of phrase in the hopes they might stumble upon an answer to the riddle that is their existence, an answer to why this world and all the dark secrets that lurk underneath it. From a strict philosophical point of view, it could hardly be posited that either Walser's or Carvalho's work are properly existential, as they both lack a more sustained discussion on (and representation of) alterity, and downplay all psychological implications, but there is nevertheless an existential cry lurking behind their work, a cry of fundamental conceptual importance inasmuch as it negates what could at a first glance be perceived as two purely cerebral or belletristic bodies of work. This existential cry is pursued throughout this entire research as it greatly underscores one of its central concep-

3 Although informed by its usage within the structuralist literary theory as a kind of use to which language can be directed, or as an action contributing towards the development of a narrative, the term 'function' is ultimately being employed here in its grammatical sense, i.e., as an action contributing to a larger action, or as a factor that is related to or dependent upon other factors. See the entry 'function' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008, 136–137).

tual concerns: that of equating literature with existence, i.e.: to rapport literature first and foremost to the existential aspects of human experience, rather than to a jargon-laden technical vocabulary. To that extent, this study favors the primary sources over the secondary literature, thus placing the literary text itself at the forefront of the research and investing heavily in close reading strategies. Likewise, the essayistic shall be given priority throughout this study by means of both its writing style and its most recurring and influential theoretical sources, such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Edward Said, W. G. Sebald, and Susan Sontag.

Benjamin and Sebald perform a particularly significant task inasmuch as they not only bind Walser to Carvalho, but also simultaneously open up Carvalho's own work to the German tradition, a central tenet of Carvalho's fiction which receives very little attention beyond its more obvious Kafkaesque implications. Thus, through Benjamin and Sebald, this book explores a few connections between Carvalho and Thomas Bernhard, Heinrich Böll, and Thomas Mann, always reporting these connections back to Walser. Any comparative study of Carvalho within the late nineteenth or twentieth century German tradition, be it with Bernhard, Sebald, or even Kafka, to name but a few, must necessarily first go through Walser. This study seeks to pave the way for such future studies.

In addition, the connection between Walser and Carvalho via the German tradition allows for an intensive immersion in Romanticism and in its legacy over the course of the last two centuries. Romanticism, as already mentioned, plays a central role in this book not only as theoretical fodder, but also as the overall solitary yet self-sufficient tone which subverts notions such as failure, defeatism, marginality, and escapism into viable literary values. In doing so, this research seeks to explore Romanticism's lasting influences as they emerge at the two ends of the twentieth century and at the two margins of the Atlantic, first in Walser's oeuvre and then in Carvalho's, and how these authors' depiction of the landscape actualizes Romanticism's (and Schiller's) belated promise of freedom through nature, albeit with an unheimlich twist via Nietzsche, Sebald, and the linguistic challenges posed by the turbulent course of the twentieth century.[4]

The external pressures or Romanticism are also to be felt throughout this study, as they seep into biography and shape the reception of an author's work, especially if that author is either deceased or prone to first-person narration, or both. This Romanticized biography, feeding off undue psychology and idealized suffering, is, in many ways, a curse to the oeuvre or Robert Walser (1878–1956).

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4 Language's fallibility in the face of the twentieth century, a recurring theme in this book, is succinctly captured by Susanne Zepp when she writes that "[t]he course of the twentieth century shattered the capacity of language to capture events." (Zepp, 2015, 153)

More than sixty years after his death, his death still stands as his life's emblem. Walser is resurrected through the merit of his fall, introduced by means of anecdotal prophecy – that famous passage from *Geschwister Tanner* (1907) which, fifty years *avant la lettre*, foreshadowed his own solitary demise in the snow. The writing proper only comes afterwards, and is not infrequently bent in order to shed light on his troubled life, perversely confirming that from one's death one does not escape even after dead. Walser's oeuvre is held hostage by Walser's biography, by the mystery that was his weightless existence, by the echoes of an "I" whose secrets will never be truly revealed.[5]

Walser's life is a legend begging for theoretical indulgence, and Romanticism would be here to blame – Romanticism was the meter against which Walser measured his worth, at times mirroring its ways, at times writing against its grain. Valerie Heffernan nonchalantly points this out by means of an 'of course': "Of course, we should not forget that according to the romantic cliché, the lonely, forgotten writer, who suffers so much during his lifetime, is usually discovered after his death and celebrated for his genius" (Heffernan, 2007, 77). Walser fits the profile to the dot, like a guilty criminal on a police lineup: the anecdotal quirkiness of his youth in Berlin; the frustrating silence following each of his publications, save for Hesse's early enthusiasm, Benjamin's prophetic short essay, Kafka's belated fandom, or an unhelpful Thomas Mann toying with the idea that one of Walser's short-story collections – *Die Rose* (1925) – might had been written by a child; the ever-looming bankruptcy, the long-lasting poverty; the inescapable (yet debatable) onset of the mental illness inscribed in his family's genes and the lucid refusal to keep on writing, adding up to almost twenty-five years of silence in the sanatorium of Herisau, until the day came when he went out for one of his famous walks and never returned, an outcome already predicted half a century before in one of his books – and the additional decades it nonetheless took before he achieved some degree of posthumous recognition.

By the tone of some critical biographies and less critical theoretical accounts, Walser was one miracle short of plain martyrdom. And yet, to reduce Walser's prose to the turn of phrases of his own autobiography – to let his oeuvre be

5 As Walser himself stated to Carl Seelig in one of their Wanderungen: "Das alles ist viel hübscher von außen. Man muß nicht hinter alle Geheimnisse kommen wollen. Das habe ich mein ganzes Leben so gehalten. Ist es nicht schön, daß in unserem Dasein so manches fremd und seltsam bleibt, wie hinter Efeumauern? Das gibt ihm einen unsäglichen Reiz, der immer mehr verloren geht. Brutal wird heute alles begehrt und in Besitz genommen" (Seelig, 1989, 23). Or as Walser, hidden behind another deceptive, enigmatic "I", warns his reader in the short story "Das Kind (III)": "Niemand ist berechtigt, sich mir gegenüber so zu benehmen, als kennte er mich" (P, 78).

tainted by Romantic clichés – would mean to annul his unique voice and literary merits in benefit of a compelling narrative. To accuse Walser – in a Mann-like manner – of being an autistic writer disengaged from reality, to presume he was merely illustrating his own life via his writing, would mean to deny the ingeniousness of his fictional persona. Walser was, *of course*, reacting to his environment, and although one might scholarly connect the dots between the texts and the anecdotes, it would be considerably more rewarding to follow the path of one of Walser's best commentators: Sebald. Sebald, compounding on Elias Canetti's reading of the Swiss author, notes that Walser remains eerily absent from his own texts despite the autobiographical echoes they might suggest, an absence that instills abstract undertones in his writing, that exchanges weight for melancholy and thus subverts the equation: where his autobiography might have succumbed to density, his prose thrives on weightless atmosphere.

> According to Elias Canetti, what set Walser apart from other writers was the way that in his writing he always denied his innermost anxieties, constantly omitting a part of himself. This absence, so Canetti claimed, was the source of his unique strangeness. It is odd, too, how sparsely furnished with detail is what we know of the story of his life. (...) Walser must at the time have hoped, through writing, to be able to escape the shadows which lay over his life from the beginning, and whose lengthening he anticipates at an early age, transforming them on the page from something very dense to something almost weightless. (Sebald, 2013, 129; 139)

If there is an autobiographical truth in Walser's oeuvre, let it then be the truth of a fabricated autobiography cut from his own skin but made of different material, made of depth and craft and words that dissolve from one line to the next. Walser's oeuvre is ultimately as autobiographical as that of a Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), but whereas Pessoa was a functional schizophrenic obstinately curating his own biography, Walser allowed himself to be absorbed by the opacity of his own writing, conjuring with little method from one story to the next an "I" who is by no means affiliated to the "I" from a previous text, or characters who share a name but little memory of a life past. Each full stop decimates a dynasty, leaves behind a parade of familiar faces who, upon closer inspection, have no faces whatsoever.

Walser subverts identity and biography by not making them last. His oeuvre is a ghost town erected on the Romantic-Realist crossroads, pledging allegiance here to one, there to the other, and ultimately to none – his not having an audience freed him from having an audience, from having to conform to genres and comply to expectations.[6] Accordingly, this reading of Robert Walser's oeuvre will

6 In Walser's own words, as reported once again by Seelig: "Je weniger Handlung und einen je kleineren regionalen Umkreis ein Dichter braucht, umso bedeutender ist oft sein Talent. Gegen

not take the autobiographical and the Romantic at face value, but rather focus on the spaces left open between authorship and biography, between affiliations and refractions, between marginality, failure, and heroism.

Lacking the Romanticized deeds of posthumous achievements, Bernardo Carvalho (1960–) must resort to his keen reading of Walser – an otherwise virtually unknown and, until recently, untranslated author in Brazil[7] – in order to carve his own marginal mythology out of the Walserian tradition. After all, a nuisance for the work of contemporary writers is the inconvenience of their still being alive. Their insistence, even, on choosing life over canon. Death is ultimately only simple for the heart, and only preferable in the arts. If Hegel's aesthetics have imparted Western civilization with one bit of wisdom, is that the only good artist is a dead one. Atop his formaldehyde tower, Hegel knew what was best for art: to lead it to its grave, so that philosophy could write its epitaph.[8] Legends, true or false, find in the epitaph their first tentative formulation; the epitaph cradles the myth in its infancy while teaching it one important lesson: the deed is not what has been done, but its depiction. The main symbolic difference between "work" and "oeuvre", when referring to an author's *corpus*, is that the latter tends to be posthumous: while an author's "work" means the sum of his or her books, an author's "oeuvre" encompasses all such books plus the ever expanding mystery of his or her existence. Alive and active, Carvalho must thus, through Romanticism, the landscape, and the Walserian tradition, manage his own fictional claims to autobiography, failure, defeatism, marginality, and escapism.

Carvalho is, in many respects, the odd man out in recent Brazilian fiction. He appears to be stylistically and conceptually estranged from his contemporaries, invariably fashioning himself as an outsider despite being critically acclaimed, published by one of Brazil's most influential publishing houses, recipient of the country's main literary prizes, and perfectly inserted within the cultural and academic *milieux*. Carvalho's self-styled outsider status comes not so much from a lack of commercial or critical success, but from its systematic refusal, from his conscious descent into self-imposed exile, his definitive steps towards a Walserian

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Schriftsteller, die in Handlungen exzellieren und gleich die ganze Welt für ihre Figuren brauchen, bin ich von vornherein misstrauisch. Die alltäglichen Dinge sind schön und reich genug, um aus ihnen dichterische Funken schlagen zu können" (Seelig, 1989, 9).

7 A 2003 edition of *Der Gehülfe* (translated as *O Ajudante*) has long since run out of print. Only in 2011 has *Jakob von Gunten* first appeared in Brazil, and a first, lean collection of short stories, called *Absolutamente Nada e Outras Histórias*, was published as late as 2014.

8 Following Benedetto Croce's morbidly compelling criticism of Hegel: "L'Estetica dell'Hegel è, perciò, un elogio funebre: passa a rassegna le forme successive dell'arte, mostra gli stadi progressivi che esse rappresentano di consunzione interna, e le compone tutte nel sepolcro, con l'epigrafe scrittavi sopra dalla Filosofia" (Croce, 1990, 387).

kind of marginality and disappearance. When analyzed chronologically, Carvalho's body of work exposes an author deliberately trying to be marginal in face of a successful formula, choosing, out of principle, obscurity over fame. By doing so, by actively pursuing the solitude of the Walserian tradition as posited here (the link between Walser, Kafka, Bernhard, and Sebald), Carvalho attempts to cast himself as an exile within his own literary generation, and the outcome of such a maneuver is one of the most intriguing and singular voices in recent Brazilian fiction, and one of the few to still be explicitly dealing with the legacy of Romanticism.

In order to not only compare the work of these two authors from the viewpoint of the century and the ocean that stand in between them, but also to unravel the legacy of Romanticism and the historical implications of the landscape from a joint European and Latin-American perspective, this study begins with a literature review on the topic of the landscape which seeks, on the one hand, to first introduce scholars and concepts that shall be called upon as the research unravels, and, on the other, to frame the original approach given to the landscape via Nietzsche, Sebald, and the Dutch poet Armando: that of a vengeful and cruel landscape, indifferent to the suffering of those who roam its surface and to their plight in search of a language that might make sense of a world that is undoing itself around them.

The third chapter follows suit by positing the landscape as an original means of uncovering the poetics of Walser and Carvalho, thus establishing the tone and the baseline for the reading of these authors' oeuvres throughout the entire research. It first seeks to establish the progression of landscape descriptions in Walser's work, showing how his deceptively idyllic and pastoral depictions are in fact subtle gateways to the unheimlich, and how this progressive incursion into the unheimlich gains momentum as the dissonant elements pick up pace and Walser's fictional world abruptly starts to shrink, exposing, in this progression, the main elements and themes behind Walser's oeuvre. The chapter then expands on these Walserian themes and begins exploring their repercussion within Carvalho's own literary output, showing how the unheimlich feeling elicited in Walser's oeuvre is reworked into Carvalho's apocalyptic and deceptively exotic aesthetics, and how this apocalypse, much like Walser's unheimlich, surfaces in language and in movement, eventually shedding light on both authors' ambiguous relationship towards the legacy of Romanticism, which this chapter only begins to analyze. Finally, the chapter turns its attention to irony, autobiography, and disappearance, topics explored in further depth in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter continues to examine the role played by Romanticism in the authors' oeuvres as they try to come to terms with its legacy. Two topics in particular are pursued in this chapter within a Romantic framework: the role of irony in each author's work and its transmutations over a century and across an ocean; and the implications of the recurring refusal of manual labor voiced by the authors'

characters, a refusal which presupposes two oeuvres that deal primarily with the life of the mind and that, as a result, portray the fate of intellectuals in the turn of two centuries. The contention towards manual labor and the penchant towards depicting the Romantic-yet-not-entirely-Romantic life of the mind are combined throughout the chapter in order to posit a view shared by both authors of "history as failure", and how such worldview further fuels the aesthetics of strategic marginality championed by Walser and embraced by Carvalho. The chapter also focuses on the central role played by the narrator, and how this narrator prompts a broader analysis of narrative authority and of the artificiality of narration in the authors' work. The figure of the narrator surfaces as the central pillar in the triangulation between character, narrator, and author, as articulated in the fifth and last chapter.

The fifth chapter draws back from the literature review and the opening chapters in order to show how the landscape provides not only a pathway to the oeuvres of Walser and Carvalho, but also how these two authors set the landscape as the horizon towards which their literary projects flow. The chapter draws upon previous discussions on epidemics and their connection to the landscape as a means of exploring how first Walser's and then Carvalho's characters and narrators fall prey to spells of madness and sickness, and how these spells not only underline the role of language in their work, but also mark the irreversible path of their protagonists towards the margins, thus consolidating their status as outsiders and anti-heroes. The chapter also resorts to Carvalho's reading into Walser's biography in order to make a final point on the figure of the author and on the use of (deceiving) autobiographical strategies in fiction, thus adding the last leg to the ongoing discussion on the articulation between author, character and narrator. Finally, the chapter seeks to draw conclusions from the recurring debate on nature versus culture as framed throughout the research, and how this debate triggers once again the unheimlich in the authors' narratives, prompting with it the return of the landscape as closed, claustrophobic spaces give way to open, phantasmatic sceneries – vengeful, barren, seemingly sentient landscapes prone to fire and desertification.

The prophetic recurrence of the desert in Walser's and Carvalho's oeuvre – or, rather, of the linguistic representation of *a* desert which illustrates the position of the landscape within their work as a function of their language and narrative agenda – is neither random nor naïve, but the conceptual culmination of the trajectory which this research sought to uncover and analyze. By congregating some of this study's recurring names around the topic of the desert, such as the late Barthes, the early Lévi-Strauss, and Nietzsche, the conclusion aims at coming full-circle both theoretically and thematically, wrapping up all elements and themes that were triggered by the analysis of the landscape and that ultimately found solace in the landscape, in the literary prophecy of Walser's and Carvalho's ecology of failure.

Table of abbreviations

Table of abbreviations to the work of Robert Walser:
A – *Aufsätze* (1913)
F – *Feuer* (1907–1933)
FKA – *Fritz Kochers Aufsätze* (1904)
G – *Der Gehülfe* (1908)
Gsch – *Geschichten* (1914)
GT – *Geschwister Tanner* (1907)
JvG – *Jakob von Gunten* (1909)
KD – *Kleine Dichtungen* (1914)
P – *Poetenleben* (1917)
Ps – *Prosastücke* (1916)
R – *Der Räuber* (1925)
S – *Der Spaziergang* (1917)
T – *Träumen* (1913–1920)

Table of abbreviations to the work of Bernardo Carvalho:
A – *Aberração* (1993)
BS – *Os Bêbados e os Sonâmbulos* (1996)
FM – *O Filho da Mãe* (2009)
I – *As Iniciais* (1999)
M – *Mongólia* (2003)
MFE – *O Mundo Fora dos Eixos* (2005)
MS – *Medo de Sade* (2000)
NN – *Nove Noites* (2002)
O – *Onze* (1995)
R – *Reprodução* (2013)
SP – *O Sol se Põe em São Paulo* (2007)
T – *Teatro* (1998)