

## Has the game changed? Twenty years of Ferréz and *Literatura Marginal*

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2017 marked twenty years since the Brazilian public sphere was shaken by a series of cultural works from the periphery that embodied the unique voice of the *favela* communities. In 1997, the Brazilian writer Reginaldo Ferreira da Silva, better known as Ferréz, made his literary debut with *Fortaleza da desilusão*, a collection of poems published with the financial support of his then-employer. *Fortaleza da desilusão* did not have much success, but his following books did, particularly *Capão pecado* (2000), sowing the seeds of *Literatura Marginal*. Nonetheless, it is with the publication of three special editions of the magazine *Caros Amigos* published in 2001, 2002 and 2004 respectively, that *Literatura Marginal*, a literary and cultural movement that challenged traditional notions of author, style, and representation, was born. The movement's works are rooted in the social space of the *favela* and its role within the Brazilian imaginary.<sup>1</sup> Ferréz, considered the father of the *Literatura Marginal* literary and cultural movement, and editor of the three volumes divided them into three acts as if he were directing a play, Ato I, Ato II and Ato III. By labeling each edition in this manner, Ferréz is making a statement that goes beyond aesthetics and includes political intervention and practice, inciting other writers and residents of the periphery to *atuar* (act), to assume an "attitude" and write about their identity that is marginal periférica.

The invitation to reflect on the impact of Ferréz — who is considered to be the father of *Literatura Marginal* — on Brazil's cultural production implies a revision of the movement's ideological rupture between center and periphery, and how this rupture created a new language to examine the cultural and political conflicts in modern Brazil. One of Ferréz's great achievements is that his work gained the attention of mainstream critics and thus overcame the gap between the center and the periphery. As Guilherme Azevedo stresses, the periphery does not "precisa mais de que alguém lhe conceda voz, espaço, porque ganhou voz própria, tem

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<sup>1</sup> Ferréz and other writers in this movement are also organizers, community activists, and leaders that host *saraus* (poetry readings). They also produce hip-hop and rap music, build community libraries, provide opportunities to the *favela* residents to write and publish, and even have their own clothing line (such as the *idaSul* clothing line designed by Ferréz and other entrepreneurs from Capão Redondo).

literatura, tem música, tem arte da melhor qualidade. E a periferia renova, rompe códigos, quebra paradigmas, inova” [need anyone else to give it a voice and space because it has gained its own voice, it has literature, music, and art of the best quality. And the periphery renews and breaks codes, it shatters paradigms, it innovates] (AZEVEDO, 2013, n.p). In this sense, it could be argued that the major accomplishment of Ferréz and *Literatura Marginal* was the articulation of an alternative space that destabilized the long-established dominant paradigms of elite cultural production in Brazil.

Ferréz’s success coincided with what Mabel Moraña has identified as the boom of the subaltern in Latin America. According to Moraña, subaltern representations can easily become commodities that are incorporated into the dominant forms of cultural consumption (MORAÑA, n.p.). On the one hand, Ferréz’s subaltern interventions constitute a new peripheral aesthetic that reinforces the voice of the marginalized. But on the other hand, his success entails a risk because, in response to the political potential of the subaltern’s cultural production, hegemonic culture attempts to assimilate and standardize the aesthetic of the periphery, as represented by the different elements of *Literatura Marginal*. The author celebrates the subversive connotative power of the terms *marginal* and *periferia*. Ferréz’s literary work reveals a segregated society where violence, physical and otherwise, is a way to explain and justify all kinds of social practices and behaviors.

In other words, the conventional critic seeks to tame the Other through a language of representation that ends up reproducing the elite’s stereotypes of the favela and its inhabitants. The historical connection between power and national culture has shown that the formation of a literary and cultural canon is the result of an authoritarian way of organizing the world that dictates who is and who is not deemed as a “writer,” according to a set of rules that establish how “literature” should be written. As Regina Dalcastagnè points out, Brazilian literary cities are traditionally devoid of women and the poor (DALCASTAGNÈ, 2012, p. 24). Thus, any representation of the periphery, even as a locus of excess and banditry, is very unusual. Traditionally, the Brazilian elite regulated cultural production of the favela communities in a constantly exclusionist manner.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the national intelligentsia has been able to control (or has at least tried to control) the public discourse around *Literatura Marginal* as its dissemination has expanded.

### Ferréz’s marginal origins

In analyzing Ferréz’s works as pieces of literature, most critics have limited themselves to writing about the relationship between his texts and the social re-

<sup>2</sup> This normalization was intensified in 2005 with the exhibition *Estética da periferia*, which was curated by stage designer and architect Gringo Cardia. The purpose of this exhibition was to give exposure to the visual and cultural language of the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and to display some of the creative visions in the fields of architecture, visual arts, industrial design, and fashion.

ality of *favela* life. At first, some of Ferréz's readers were disdainful of his work and questioned its literary value. Instead of literature, these critics classified his texts — and anything written by the other members of the Literatura Marginal movement — as a type of documentary prose with a strong testimonial content (CORONEL, 2009, p. 30). For example, his texts were dismissed as a *mutirão autoral*.<sup>3</sup> Benito Rodriguez, who gave rise to this notion of “discursive mutirão” to explain how these new voices also seem to point to unusual notions of appropriation and elaboration of the literate speech. While *mutirão autoral* can be understood as a negative feature of Ferréz's literary production, Rodriguez's approach to the idea of mutirão leads to a reflection on a certain literary production as the outline of a critical metaphor (RODRIGUEZ, 2003, p. 55). The application of this label to Ferréz's production was based on the fact that the writer employs a distinctly collective form of speech in the first edition of *Capão pecado* (2000). Through this performance of social community, the novel gives a voice to other leaders of the periphery. While this appreciation does not seem to have a negative connotation, historically collaborative writing, collective women writing for example, is understood as a lack of ability to write a respectable transcendental text. Others have described his first novel *Capão pecado* (2000) as a book “escrito em linguagem proposadamente de gueto, com material autobiográfico, por um ex-padeiro, filho de motorista de ônibus, morador do bairro Capão Redondo, da zona sul de São Paulo” [“intentionally written in a language from the ghetto, by a former baker, the son of a bus driver, who lives in the neighborhood of Capão Redondo, in the southern part of São Paulo”] (SÜSSEKIND, 2002, p. 11). This kind of critical assessment has not diminished over Ferréz's career: in fact, it reappears after each new publication of his books. Additionally, as Lucía Tennina has stated, the significance of Ferréz's literary production comes from its determination to destabilize and revive the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, on the one hand, and a singular proposal of the statute of the real, on the other, placing itself at the center of the most instigating concerns of the literatures of the present (TENNINA, 2017, p. 279).

Since his very first steps as a writer, Ferréz was conscious of these hierarchies and the selective process inherent in them. In 2002, he published a manifesto titled, “Terrorismo Literário” (Literary Terrorism) where, as can be seen in the following quote, he highlights these issues: “O barato já tá separado há muito tempo, só que do lado de cá ninguém deu um gritão[...] foi feito todo um mundo de teses e estudos do lado de lá” [What is cheap has already been separated for a long time, but over here nobody has cried out....over there it was made by a world of theses and studies] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 13). Ferréz goes on to highlight the normative process of selection and classification that defines the literature of the cultural elite as “literatura boa” [good literature] written with a “caneta de ouro” [golden pen] and the literature of the Other as “literatura ruim” [bad literature] written with a “carvão” [crayon]. Nevertheless, Ferréz maintains that this so-called “bad” literature

<sup>3</sup> *Mutirão* is a collective initiative to help someone or to provide community service, for example, to implement projects that aim to change the infrastructure of the favelas.

— Literatura Marginal — does not need the approval of any canon or academy. As he reasserts in the manifesto, “... o mais louco é que não precisamos de sua legitimação” [... the craziest thing is that we do not need your legitimation] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 10). Through this statement, Ferréz affirms the autonomy of Literatura Marginal, its separation from the laws of hegemonic culture in Brazil. However, this statement by Ferréz is problematic and contradictory, if we take into account the claim of the canon made by Ferréz himself and the ambiguities of the relation between center and periphery as will be shown in the following pages.

### The trademark

Ferréz’s success as a writer and the publication of *Deus foi almoçar* in 2012 raised two important questions: if Ferréz’s work now belongs to the canon, can he still be considered a marginal writer (LEROUX; RODRIGUES, 2015, p. 11)? Second, should *Deus foi almoçar* be categorized as literatura marginal just because its writer is from the periphery? Some scholars have accused Ferréz of drastically changing his approach in *Deus foi almoçar*. The claim is that the author erased marginality from his literature because the novel does not focus on the topics he had explored before: social injustice, drugs, and physical violence.<sup>4</sup> The São Paulo depicted in Ferréz’s texts *Capão pecado* and *Manual prático do ódio* is a land of social contradictions and economic disparity which oscillates between the modern face of globalized capitalism and “bolsões de pobreza e de riquezas, escassez e prosperidade” (CARRIL, 2006, p. 108). In these two books, the periphery is essentially a male space wherein a code of manly honor and brotherly love is fostered. Fraternal relationships develop among *manos* whenever they form a group that recognizes their complicity. The lives of Rael (*Capão pecado*) and Régis (*Manual prático do ódio*) are intertwined with those of a plethora of secondary characters.

*Capão pecado* is the story of Rael a very poor boy who as a child moved with his family to the neighborhood of Capão Redondo. Rael is an intelligent adolescent who is described as a “crânio-de-ferro” (nerd) because of his big black glasses “que ele já usava há muito tempo” (FERRÉZ, 2000, p. 26). He possesses the stereotypical virtues of the “good boy”: he is honest and hardworking “[s]eu aspecto sempre agradava as mães dos colegas: gordinho, cabelo todo encaracolado” (FERRÉZ, 2000, p. 26). As Luciana Araujo Marques stresses, there are several times in the text

<sup>4</sup> Although violence is an important issue in his work, it is equally important to examine its non-violent elements. Violence is not at the center of the narrative depicted in his literary texts, it is just one part of the environment of the characters. Ferréz is able to explore the violence of the *favelado* without exoticizing its communities. Although his literature gives particular emphasis to physical aggression and its direct consequences in the daily lives of the *favela* residents, it does not portray violence as the use of power over another person through the threat of physical and psychological damage. Instead, he presents it as a reaction to transgressions against social justice and dignity. Ferréz deploys the violence he has witnessed to allow the reader to deconstruct, redefine, and reshape their images of the periphery and its residents. In this sense, violence serves an instrumental role in Ferréz’s fictional production.

when Rael is introduced as if he were special and different from the other *quebrada* residents (MARQUES, 2010, p. 71). While Rael is different in many respects, his life shares the same circumstances of the other boys growing up in the *quebrada*. He acquires friends, experiences the deaths of some of them, goes to school, reads comic books, and plays video games. Rael has the life of “mais uma família comum” of Capão Redondo. When the story begins Rael works at a bakery and later gets a better job at a metallurgic factory. He works as a means to live with dignity and overcome his fate of remaining poor. Thus, he escapes the central problem of unemployment; a concern which is referred to several times in the novel as a collective problem. Rael is doomed because he cannot win either of his battles. Certain passages of the text augur Rael’s bad fortune, “Mas Rael era muito curioso” (FERRÉZ, 2000, p. 28). Rael’s material conditions and his place in the world are images of absolute exclusion. He does not wish to stay in the periphery but can never belong anywhere else. As in every bandit saga, it seems that all occurrences conspire to spoil his dreams and aspirations. Every event in the course of the plot — his new job, fast ascension, his marriage, and the birth of his child — which seems to be a sign of inclusion into the middle class, must be regarded as a false hope.

On the other hand, *Manual* is the story of Régis and his friends Lúcio Fé, Aninha, Celso Capeta e Neguinho da Mancha na Mão; it addresses the universe of urban violence and the spread of hatred as the real feeling of a competitive society, taken to the final consequences in the context of São Paulo’s periphery. Aside from sometimes sharing individual personality traits, these characters all share the effects of their socio-economic position; e.g., they have had a poor education or none at all. They gather to play video games, smoke some *baseado* (joints), or plan the robbery that they hope will get them out of misery. It is worth noting that some of their tales have the same middle and end; similar to what happens in the bandit saga, the *marginais periféricos* experience a sequence of tragedies and then their own premature death. Once again, Ferréz brings to life the complications and details of the periphery which were unknown and ignored. Régis is a character who comprehends in a critical manner the hatred of the people of the marginalized urban areas. Ferréz uses the character of Régis to speak against the oppression of the social class from which they all suffer and to take a critical look at the actions or inaction of the state. Régis has confidence and intelligence that set him apart from the other characters in the novel. He is known and respected by the residents of the neighborhood. In *Manual prático do ódio*, the crimes usually take place in the center of the city, and their main targets are banks, shopping malls, and the homes of people involved in the underworld. Régis is a *malandro* from Rio de Janeiro who acts according to his own rule, “Em rio que tem piranha boi toma água de canudinho” (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 14). But in São Paulo, he is a *bandido* who makes a living by doing “*correries*.”<sup>5</sup> He belongs to a *quadrilha* whose activity follows the paradigm of stealing, spending the stolen money, and then stealing again. Régis’s *quadrilha* plans to make a big *correria*, the one which is supposed to change their lives and

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<sup>5</sup> *Correria* is an illegal transaction.

allow them to retire from a life of crime and become lawful citizens. Régis and his partners are angry about the conditions into which they are born and over which they have no control. He comes from a poor childhood marked by hunger and humiliation (*Manual* 44). As a child, he suffers from the social stigma of poverty. He learns young that the value and power of an individual are directly related to the economic place he occupies in society, “A patroa da mãe de Régis lhe disse uma coisa que ficou esse tempo todo, e ele guarda como o começo de todo o ódio que nutria por quem tinha o que ele sempre quis ter, dinheiro” (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 44). Therefore, by his logic, he must first do the “*correria certa*” in order to abandon the life of crime because he “*tinha sonhos mais complexos*” (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 13-14). Régis dreams of integrating himself into the world of consumption, a society where equality and citizenship are measured by money. He becomes a *bandido* because that is the only path for ascension that is open to the poor children of the *quebrada*. Régis represents the strong hatred and resentment felt by the *quebrada* residents; he revolts against those who have everything they lack.

Rael and Régis must learn to deal with the constant presence of death. There is no hope of a new beginning for any of the characters in *Capão pecado* or *Manual prático do ódio*. The characters live in a physical space which is crowded, noisy, and lacking in green spaces such as parks that could lend solace to their lives.<sup>6</sup> For the characters it is impossible to avoid frequent contact with others, and often these encounters only sharpen their feelings of pain and suffering. The characters move in an unequal, divided city, separated between winners and losers, employers and workers, *manos* and *playboys*, periphery and center, *asfalto* and *quebrada*.

*Deus foi almoçar* allegedly lacks the “*marca*” (trademark) of the *favela* since it tells the story of “un personaje de clase media que se encuentra inmerso en un profundo drama personal, en la que no aparece ni una sola vez la palabra “*favela*” [a middle-class character that finds himself immersed in a deep personal drama in which the word ‘favela’ never appears] (TENNINA, 2014, 196). If by “*marca*” this critic refers to the reader’s expectations about a subject matter that could be immediately recognized as belonging in this case, to the world of the *favelas*, then the book’s marginality is admittedly questionable. The novel has also been criticized for its structural and stylistic variations. For example, it has fewer characters than Ferréz’s previous novels, its language no longer includes the slang of the urban periphery, and the fast, dynamic pace that one finds in *Capão pecado* and earlier texts — a rhythm that resembles a hip-hop performance — has vanished. Yet, a brief look at his Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter accounts demonstrates that he is still engaged with the *favela* communities.

<sup>6</sup> The writer Sérgio Vaz, when explaining the address where the “*Semana de Arte Moderna da Periferia*” would take place, pointed out that the only spaces the residents of the periphery have for leisure are bars, “O único espaço público que temos é o bar. Não temos outras áreas de prazer” (Vaz in interview with Guilherme Azevedo n.p). In another interview with Lucia Tennina, he explains that the states only left them the bar as a cultural center, because in the periphery there is no theater nor cinema nor museum” (TENNINA, 2010, p. 266).

Since the late 1990s, the *favelas* have become “hallmarks of contemporary Brazilianness” (KERTZER, 2011, n.p.). The urban periphery and its *favelas* or *quebradas* have been assimilated into the imaginary of Brazil as referential places and as the stage for cultural activities such as samba and Carnival (PEIXOTO, 2007, p. 172). Through the *favelization* of Brazilian culture, the outside world was thus exposed to the extreme poverty and social conditions of these neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup> The so-called discovery of the *favela* occurred at the same time as the destruction of the paradisiacal Brazil idealized by foreigners, best exemplified by the global consumption of bossa nova and the Carnival. The newly found visibility of Brazil’s urban periphery let everyone see for themselves that, in the words of Ferréz, they are not “*inspiração para cartão postal*” [a source of inspiration for postcards] (this is the caption for one of the photos of Capão Redondo that appears in *Capão pecado*, n.p.). A distinctive feature of the fiction of Ferréz and the other *Literatura Marginal* writers is precisely its hyper-local focus on this “un-postcard-like” social world.

Despite his commercial success and his development as a writer, Ferréz has not lost touch with his roots. Ferréz’s ability to maintain his own voice and his connection to his community are admirable given the hegemonic culture’s tendency to homogenize and standardize the material that it brings into its system. Furthermore, the suggestion that *Deus foi almoçar* does not represent the *favela* “enough” is deeply problematic for two reasons. First, it articulates an attempt by the elite to control and normalize the cultural production of *Literatura Marginal* according to a set of expectations about the periphery that has been constructed outside its boundaries — “do lado de lá”. Second, this criticism limits the creative rights of peripheral artists to their immediate social experience, insinuating that they cannot address the same concerns that mainstream works examine. In other words, it constrains their imagination and implies that those who live in the *favela* can only write about poverty, in response to the dominant culture’s norms. This idea recalls the discourses of otherness and subalternity that conceive the Other as a subject who is incapable of reasoning and consequently deny his ability to express and represent himself through his own consciousness and according to his own desires and expectations.

### **Still a *marginal***

During the 20 years of his career, from the launch of his first book, until the novel *Deus foi almoçar* in 2012, the marginality gains new forms in the literary production of Ferréz. While it might be true that the “marca” of *Literatura Marginal* seems to be absent in *Deus foi almoçar*, some other recurring features of Ferréz’s writing, such as its criticism of labor relations and mass culture, are still present.

<sup>7</sup> Adriana Kertzer defines “favelization” as “the process through which something that has been maligned throughout history is transformed into a signifier of attached value, stereotypes, coolness and Brazilianness” (KERTZER, 2011, n.p.). Starting at the turn of the century, Brazil’s status in the world increased due to an economic boom and its revitalizing social programs.

Moreover, a close reading of the novel leads us to recognize other features of Literatura Marginal beyond the thematization of social exclusion and its effects in the *favelas*. For example, in *Deus foi almoçar*, we once again encounter the setting of the *periferia*, which is characterized as a space where there is always a sense of loss or deficiency. The novel also makes visible another marginal space, a homosexual “red-light” zone located in the center of São Paulo. For the most part, the mainstream elite, including homosexuals, prefer to feign ignorance of the existence of the *Cinemão*. In *Deus foi almoçar*, Ferréz reframes and broadens the sense of what it means to be a peripheral subject and to be socially marginalized. The performance of the *marginal periférico* can be analyzed in terms of its deviance from behavioral rules that have been established by those in power in Brazil’s city centers. In contemporary urban cases, marginality must be understood in light of today’s world of consumerism. Brazil’s new middle class is actively and perversely participating in the hegemonic system under the ideas of consumerism and purchasing power. In that sense Calixto, the protagonist of the novel *Deus foi almoçar* (2012), is a representation of another form of marginality. This other version of criminality/marginality is that of the “new Brazilian middle class,” or the *remediado*.<sup>8</sup> *remediado* has been used to expose the political and social changes happening as a consequence of a new type of government. The sociopolitical circumstances in which the *remediado* emerges in *Deus foi almoçar* are not significantly different from those of the *remediados* of the end of the 19th and early 20th century. In general, the representation of the *remediado* marks a period when the population in the middle of the social stratum begins to have more political, social, and cultural participation. *Deus Foi almoçar* is the story of Calixto, a character who, similar to his counterparts Rael (*Capão pecado*) and Regis (*Manual prático do ódio*), struggles to survive in the chaotic world of São Paulo.

Through the figure of Calixto, Ferréz brings to light a sector of society that has emerged over the last ten years: the *remediado* or new middle class. The *remediado* is in a unique social position; although he has managed to achieve some social mobility, he still belongs to an urban underclass. As a consequence, the character is a victim of a “double marginalization” since he experiences social alienation from both rich and poor and is considered an outsider in both spatial — periphery and center — and social contexts. In fact, his position shows just how powerless the peripheral residents are. Despite great effort and achievement, the success of the *remediado* is relative. He remains in a powerless social and economic position and will never be a member of the decision-making elite. Likewise, Homi Bhabha’s thought on the articulation of cultural differences is applicable to the situation of the *remediado*. Bhabha uses the image of staircases to delineate the liminal path between territories. In Bhabha’s terminology, Calixto is perpetu-

<sup>8</sup> The middle-class figure of the *remediado* is not new to Brazilian Literature or to the Brazilian imaginary. Writers such as Machado de Assis (1839–1908) and Lima Barreto (1881–1922) have included him in their works. The character of the

ally situated/located on the stair steps that separate the *quebrada* from the city center. In Bhabha words:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designation of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, [...]. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal primordial polarities (BHABHA, 2004, e-location 4).

Calixto is limited to this in-between and, thus, is a vivid example of the limitations of the discourse about social ascension. In the novel, Calixto is never placed in any particular geographical setting until the middle of the story. This is of particular significance since Ferréz's work usually includes a large number of spatial references. By not fixing Calixto's position physically, Ferréz emphasizes Calixto's emotional position of living in yet another type of marginality, between the periphery and the center. Calixto's life is precarious; although it is very easy for him to descend the staircase and re-enter the lowest social level, it is next to impossible for him to get off of the stairs at the top and join the elite. Furthermore, because of Calixto's in-limbo position in society, Ferréz uses the character as a liaison to other marginal characters, such as the transvestite.

Although critics have denounced Ferréz's novels for being inconsistent in terms of topics, style, and character — from Rael in *Capão pecado* (2000) to Regis in *Manual prático de ódio* (2003) to Calixto in *Deus foi almoçar* (2012) — these discrepancies correspond to the many social and political transformations that have taken place in the Brazilian imaginary since the year of publication of *Capão pecado*. In other words, each novel offers a testimonial that addresses different cultural, social, and political references pertaining to a specific historical context. At the same time, all three novels have a disjunctive structure whose fragments are united by one common thread: sociopolitical critique. Ferréz's texts always criticize the same target: the structures and forms of social organization responsible for maintaining the practices of domination, violence, and inequality between classes. In 2000, institutionalized poverty and inequality continued to be a major challenge in Brazilian society. Hence, it is logical that the *favela* characters portrayed in *Capão pecado* are directly affected by these problems: not only are they tormented by an "infância turbulenta" (FERRÉZ, 2000, p. 119), but they also suffer from hunger, without any hope of a better future. However, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's election as president of Brazil and the beginning of his term in 2003 inaugurated a new era in the Brazilian imaginary. Lula's election was important from a sociological standpoint because he came from a very poor family and dropped out of school in the second grade. Likewise, Lula's election was significant from a political point of view because his government brought about dramatic changes by initiating many programs to combat social injustice and by increasing funding for cultural projects. His ascendancy was consequently a potent symbol of the empowerment of Brazil's poor communities.

As the narrator says when Calixto thinks about his past, “ai começa tudo de novo, a socialização, a batalha por um lar” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 149). The mere existence of the extreme poverty of the *favelas* was an indicator that there was a great need for change. The dreams of the poor and disenfranchised became a part of the imaginary of Brazil. The social programs created by Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT) during Lula’s presidency were effective and by the time *Deus foi Almoçar* was published, millions of Brazilians had emerged from poverty to join the middle class. The economic boom that started in 2003 created a new middle-class, also known as *Classe C*; over the past decade, the members of *Classe C* have been able to adopt a better lifestyle. Although the members of Class C have more than those of Classes D and E, they still lead precarious lives that can change quickly with the slightest misfortune. In this sense, the life of Calixto is more difficult than those of the *remediados* of previous eras. The narrator gives several hints that guide the reader to discover Calixto’s true social position. In the first pages of the novel, his job as a filing clerk is criticized because he has to “arquivar sem pensar, catalogar sem decidir” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 13), and he ends his workday feeling drained and exhausted. His job as an *arquivista* is not very well remunerated, however, it is good enough to allow him to enter Class C, “Calixto não arriscaria sua vida de classe média” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 13). Calixto, similar to his counterpart Rael, thinks of himself as different from other poor *quebrada* residents with whom he grew up, “enquanto muitos experimentavam o cigarro e depois viciavam, eu estudava cada vez mais” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 138). His love for his studies makes him believe that one day he will have the opportunity to have a better life, and indeed, he achieves this goal. He manages to purchase a television, a VCR, a car, a radio, and a refrigerator that together with having a *banheiro* in the *barraco* add up to the fifteen points that according to the Brazilian Association Research Institute (ABEP for its abbreviation in Portuguese) classifies someone as “*Classe C2*.” However, Calixto struggles to maintain the lifestyle of the new middle-class. His salary is spent as it is earned and he has no economic safety net, “o salário não dava para tudo isso” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 99). Classifying the members of Class C as “the new middle class” is a fallacy in the sense that its members often find more stress than happiness with their new social status and are closer to falling back into Class D than to ever moving up to Class B. Furthermore, many of the *marginais periféricos* who move into Class C have to suppress their past cultural identity in order to succeed. However, they do not have a strong sense of identity as *remediados* and end up living in an ambivalent and confused state. The process of adaptation to a new lifestyle does not happen right away. For example, Calixto still does the house chores “à moda primitiva” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 13). It is impossible for the marginal to escape a life of struggle. Calixto no longer belongs to the world of his birth and youth, but neither does he belong to the world of the upper classes.

Ferréz’s *remediados* show how difficult it can be to move into a more privileged position. The *remediados* have been labeled as *intermediários* (intermediaries), located between the poor and the wealthy. The name seems to legitimize

their status and the social order, yet in reality their status is ambiguous. This “in-between” class does not alter the social system in any meaningful way; it does not change or challenge the power and control of a small elite. This condition of “in-betweenness” makes the situation of the *remediados* closer to that of the *marginais*. As a *remediado*, Calixto is in an indefinite state, as he is neither middle-class, in the sense of bourgeois, nor poor. Calixto is very conscious of his in-between position:

Tô no meio do meio.  
Meio do meio?  
Meio do meio do resto da vida (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 79).

He is caught in between two worlds. He does not hold a clearly-defined position within the social system and feels he is without identity or influence, marginalized and excluded. Calixto is living in a social limbo where, as a former poor man, he gravitates around the social order supported in the center-periphery binomial. Ferréz creates the character of Calixto to condemn hegemonic thought. The novel shows that despite the *remediado*'s economic advantages over other characters, a restful life is still not guaranteed.

Similar to Ferréz's other protagonists, Regis, Aninha, and Rael, Calixto is lost in a universe of dreams, visions, and mental turmoil. Additionally, like these other characters, Calixto repeatedly speaks about his desire to leave the city. In the process of becoming a part of the new middle-class, Calixto's identity becomes displaced and fragmented, “...olhava para o forro da casa e sabia que não estava mais entendendo nada sobre a realidade. Estava confuso, quanto vestígios, talvez um velho filme, talvez retalhos de lembranças” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 77). Since he has experienced so many life changes, Calixto has trouble staying rooted in reality. Besides suffering from a troubled mental state, Calixto also suffers the negative effects of mimicking the behavior of the elite. Calixto's condition of “new middle class” is constructed around an incongruity where he is the “reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (BHABHBA, 2004, e-location 86). Calixto cannot maintain both his new identity and his identity of origin and thus, pays an emotional price for restraining his authentic identity, that of being from the periphery. Even when Calixto has managed to obtain most of the things his *parceiros* Rael, Regis, and the others yearn for — a steady job and the luxury of buying what he desires —, he is not comfortable with his achievements. He continually has his setbacks: “Saiu, caminhou apressadamente pela multidão, até que alguém pôs um pé na frente, ele tropeçou e caiu” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 56). His life has only changed from the perspective of consumption: “Foram à loja de brinquedos, andaram pelos corredores, vendo os pedaços de plástico para os adultos e as maravilhas coloridas para as crianças, vendo os preços para os adultos, e o que era mágico para as crianças” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 15); and he stands out in a negative way due to his differences: “os funcionários da central já deviam ter avisado Hamilton que Calixto era esquisito, senão insuportável de conviver” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 117).

In *Deus foi almoçar*, Ferréz shows how this submissive attitude keeps the elite in power and how the elite use the discourse of self-help to “sell” this compliant attitude to the new middle class. Self-help phrases such as, “Como se entupir de dinheiro” or “Como obter visto para morar na cidade Bispo Valdomiro” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 104) imperceptibly manifest to Calixto as a signal to overcome the depression and stress that arise from trying to survive in the city center. The use of self-help practices supposedly results in responsible citizenship. In reality, however, such practices have less to do with the benefits of individual autonomy and are rooted in the elite’s manipulative strategies. Additionally, the self-help philosophy lays out the rules for the behavior of a good citizen, as the narrator in *Deus foi almoçar* says, “A máquina de fazer o bom cidadão foi ligada” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 147). Self-help philosophies attempt to tell people what they need to do in order to be successful citizens and, hence, any failure is their own fault.

Ferréz associates the function of the self-help ideology promoted by the elite to that of religion. Especially in chapter thirty-two, “Meu passado,” the author insinuates that self-help messages are another way for those in power to oppress and control the masses. Calixto is constantly bombarded by self-help and religious messages on television; this propaganda tries to convince him either to “ser salvo ou comprar mais algo inútil e se sentir satisfeito por mais alguns minutos” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 153). For example, Calixto watches a program that promises salvation and whose host is a preacher but acts more like an “escritor de livro de autoajuda” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 153). In all three of his novels, Ferréz criticizes the church as an institution that oppresses his people and tries to convince them that God has a plan for everybody and their suffering must be for a reason. In the novel, the preacher, like a motivational speaker on television, recites a passage from the bible, Matthew 6: 25-36. This passage of the bible teaches the believer to live without worries. The passage continues with an encouragement so people accept their life and to trust God to provide. However, life experience has taught Calixto the opposite, in order to be someone, “é preciso de dinheiro” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 154). The desire to be a part of a larger community has gone deep into the psyche of Calixto, “ele se esforçava para se igualar a todos por ali” but, “não conseguia” (FERRÉZ, 2012, p. 98). This is one of the biggest contradictions for the *remediados*: the more they struggle for inclusion, the more they find rejection and isolation.

Both *Literatura Marginal* manifestos, “Terrorismo literário” by Ferréz and the “Manifesto de antropofagia periférica” by Sérgio Vaz (2007), define the principal features of the movement. Ferréz defines *Literatura Marginal* as: “Uma literatura feita por minorias, sempre é bom frisar, sejam elas raciais ou socioeconômicas. Literatura feita à margem dos núcleos centrais do saber e da grande cultura nacional, isto é de grande poder aquisitivo.” [a literature made by minorities, it is always good to emphasize, be they racial or socioeconomic. A literature made at the margins of the main centers of knowledge and of the great national culture, as well as of the great acquisitive powers.] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 12). He also describes it as “Ela é honrada, ela é autêntica...” [“It is honest, it is authentic...”]. The transgres-

sion of Ferréz and other *Literatura Marginal* writers is premised on the politics of authenticity – an authentic understanding of life in the *favela* and the social reality of the outsiders that inhabit it. According to most of these writers, their social lens is unique insofar as their representations of the urban periphery are more accurate than those produced by authors whose views come from the outside and who tend to romanticize and/or spectacularize culture and the *favelas*. While still recognizing the importance of Paulo Lins as an inevitable reference in the current debate, his novel was a means to enter into the established literary world, not a way to stay there and protest social conditions. The novel *Cidade de Deus* by Paulo Lins shares some characteristics of *Literatura Marginal* narratives. Paulo Lins is not considered to be a member of the *Literatura Marginal* movement. Some scholars have tried to link Paulo Lins to *Literatura Marginal*. However, in his book *Cidade de Deus* (1997), Lins does not challenge the behavior of the elite and uses the reality inside the *favela* to create an object of entertainment. Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda explains this tendency in the decade of the 1990s:

Nessa época, surgia, de forma mais explícita o interesse das classes médias pela intensificação da violência e dos confrontos policiais...Foi nessa levada que o romance *Cidade de Deus* (que diga-se de passagem, nasceu de uma pesquisa antropológica sobre violência) de Paulo Lins, tornou-se um best-seller[...]foi avaliado pela crítica, provocou interesses na academia (HOLLANDA, n.p).

In his novel *Cidade de Deus* (1997), Paulo Lins tries to give a voice to the periphery, however, he unfortunately ends up reinforcing its negative image. For example, he writes: “Os novos moradores levaram lixo, lata, cães vira-latas... restos de raiva de tiros, noites para levar cadáveres, resquícios de enchentes... vermes velhos em barriga infantil... olhos para nunca ver, nunca dizer, nunca dizer, nunca... ensanguentar destinos, fazer a guerra... gonorreias mal curadas” (LINS, 1997, p. 18). Despite the fact that Lins is an author from the “inside,” he shares the “outsiders” vision and repeats a discourse that blames the victim. The housing project *Cidade de Deus* is shown in the novel in full isolation from the rest of the city as a self-ruled territory inhabited by the newly marginalized, *neofavelado*, transgressing and violating the world which has rejected them. Lins’ protagonist makes use of his authority and abuses it through coercive action and the expropriation of local resources. Regrettably, in his creation of this character, Lins insinuates that the problems of the excluded are due to their own “innate” savagery.

Since Lins lived inside a *favela*, he is familiar with its jargon and culture. Although he claims to have simply “transcribed” the lives of the people he chose to be his characters (SANTOS, 2008, p. 567), his choice of words and his storyline portray the *favela* in a stereotypical manner. For example, he uses the verbs “levar,” “ensanguentar” and “fazer” which echo both official and popular views of the *favela* as a social problem. Lins produces and reproduces the discourse of

labeling the *marginal* and the *favela* as a threat to the social system. Instead of analyzing the underlying reasons for social conflict, Lins adopts the conservative tendency of territorializing the violence. His stigmatizing rhetoric divides the city into zones and the *favela* is depicted as a zone filled with violence, angry young boys, and poverty. He perpetuates the demonization of the periphery through the excessive use of scenes with a remarkable amount of violence as if everyone in the *favela* was a criminal. These are the same stereotypes about violence which Mexican social scientist Rossana Reguillo-Cruz identified in Mexican imaginary: a territory inhabited by poverty and an environment portrayed as the incarnation of moral flexibility and vice (2002, p. 56).

In Ferréz's words, such authors like Lins "transforma a vida da periferia em 'national geographic'" [they transform the life of the periphery into "National Geographic"]. The process of *favelization*, the symbolic transformation of the *favelas* into an iconic image of Brazilianness, functions as a significant form of social exclusion. In fact, most of the residents of the *favelas* believe that social discrimination in Brazil is based on *favela-ism*, or belonging to the *favela* (PERLMAN, 2011, p. 153). The exposure of these Brazilian *favelas*, both at the national and international level, thus gave a negative connotation to the term *favela* among international and Brazilian communities.

Ferréz refuses to define Brazil's marginal population as a minority. He sees that it is those who are living on the periphery who are in the majority and that *Literatura Marginal* is therefore "uma literatura maior, feita por maiorias, numa linguagem maior, pois temos as raízes e a mantemos" [a major literature, made by the majorities, in a major language, because we have the roots and we maintain them] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 13). He identifies his writings within a broader "traditional canon of *Literatura Marginal*" that was inaugurated by Lima Barreto (1881-1922) and continued by Carolina Maria de Jesus's (1914-1977) and João Antônio (1937-1996). These authors, like Ferréz, knew how to express in their books the stories of men and women who lived and survived in the segregated spaces of the city. In a way, Lima Barreto, Carolina Maria de Jesus, and João Antônio are pioneers in representing the subjects and territories of the Brazilian urban periphery; a distinction recognized by Ferréz and other marginal writers.

Ferréz's reference to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "minor literature" is evident. *Literatura Marginal* contains the three principal features of minor literature as outlined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: 1) a deterritorialization of language; 2) a political element; and 3) collective significance. Although it is difficult to say whether or not the *marginal* movement is completely independent of domination by the mainstream, it is certainly true that it has articulated a powerful critique of the politics of language in Brazil. Deleuze and Guattari state that minor literature, "does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language." Ferréz often incorporates the slang of the periphery into his texts, exaggerating the use of certain popular

terms. For instance, he floods texts with expressions like “mó” (*muito/a lot*), “truta” (*amigo, parceiro/ friend, partner*), and “tá ligado” (understood), among others. This emphasis on certain slang words and phrases occurs as an affirmation of the subject’s identity or particularity in contrast to the Other (JASPAL, 2009, p. 17). In general, *Literatura Marginal* is written with a “non-standard” vocabulary that belongs to the linguistic practices of the periphery. As stated in the *Terrorismo literário*, “temos nosso próprio vocabulário que é muito precioso” [we have our own vocabulary and it is very beautiful] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 11). Additionally, the marginal writer’s use of the particular language of the periphery represents an act of insolence within the normative conventions of Brazilian culture: it is commonly perceived as a threat that leads to a feeling of awkwardness and discomfort. Thus, *Literatura Marginal* represents a literature about the differences that separate their own social and cultural experiences from those of the mainstream, helping to define and affirm the identity of the *favelas*. In other words, *Literatura Marginal* can be understood as a movement that is committed to its self-recognition as a group with a particular culture and collective projects. In the process, its work is enclosed in the contradictions of silence and voice, of belonging and separation. In that sense, Ferréz’s proposal does not present an equivalent understanding of being a “minor literature” as Deleuze and Guattari who are interested in what happens inside the major language, the minor within the major. Ferréz poses an outside and an inside which is problematic, since there is no periphery absolutely outside the center, even less in a city like São Paulo.

The writers of the *Literatura Marginal-Periférica* chose the word “marginal” not only because it is an accurate description of their social position, but because of the term’s history in Brazilian literature. Contemporary marginal writers constantly make reference to the writers and poets of the 1960s movement *Geração Mimeógrafo*. These writers labeled themselves *marginal*, however the literary value of the term *marginal* for this generation is more related to their means of production. However, Contemporary marginal writers work is not a tribute or an idealization of their marginality but rather a way to use their fame to draw attention to their own social causes. At the same time that their *terrorismo literário* consists of an irreverent challenge to canonical culture, they celebrate the subversive connotative power of the terms *marginal* and *periferia*. Ferréz’s literary work reveals a segregated society where violence, physical and otherwise, is a way to explain and justify all kinds of social practices and behaviors. Consequently, *Literatura Marginal* must be seen in the context of the power dynamics of the Brazilian urban world. As depicted by Ferréz, marginality is a product of conflict and hierarchies that can be used as a weapon against the repressive concepts of the dominant culture in Brazil. According to the *Manifesto da antropofagia periférica*, the marginal writers fight “contra reis e rainhas do castelo globalizado e quadril avantajado” [against the kings and queens of the globalized castle and the stout hips] (VAZ, 2007, n.p.). The “kings and queens of the castle” are evidently not only the academics in the “ivory towers” of the Brazilian universities, but all of the

members of the neoliberal elite who profit from the marginalization of the poor. In that sense, being a marginal writer is to be against neoliberalism and the precariousness it has created. Through his writing, Ferréz enacts a marginality that transgresses the rigid roles dictated by the mainstream script of Brazil as well as global capitalism. In questioning the elites' literary and socioeconomic structures, the *marginal* movement co-opts some of their power. It is safe to say that *Literatura Marginal* is a clear call to action to expand the boundaries of both literature and capitalism and not to be restricted by the rules traditionally imposed by the mainstream establishment. *Literatura Marginal-Periférica* serves, in other words, as a counter-discourse against the dominant canon.

## 20 years later

Whether focusing on the experience of the *marginal periférico* hidden in the alleys of the *favela* or on the daily life of a worker who wanders lost in the maze of the metropolis, Ferréz's texts always develop a critique of the same subject: the structures and forms of social organization that are responsible for maintaining the practices of domination, violence, and inequality between classes. By reaffirming his "marginal" identity, Ferréz reveals his absolute otherness in relation to the traditional profile of fiction writers. Ferréz creates his own particular category within the hegemonic order of an established literary system that is usually comprised of white middle-class male writers who are consecrated by the critics and the public. At the same time, Ferréz is aware of the impossibility of complete autonomy in an era of global capitalism that envisions cultural property as profitable goods.

By necessity, Ferréz had to first "mora[r] dentro do tema" [live within the theme] of life in the periphery since that was his entire world at the beginning of his writing career. His initial work led to the emergence of an unprecedented space in which the very periphery could take on the lettered city and *marginal* authors could circulate within and outside the boundaries of their territory. Asserting himself as *marginal* became then, the condition for an author from the periphery to achieve cultural legitimacy and enter the canonical space. The second edition of *Capão pecado* in 2005, published without the photos, reinforced Ferréz's belief in the power of words and spurred his desire to be recognized as an author of fiction (DAMASCENA, 2015, p. 21). As a writer, Ferréz understands the discourse of marginal authenticity as an initial and important stage for his admittance into the mainstream literary field from which he, as well as other producers from the periphery, were historically excluded. Ferréz initially identified himself as an author of *Literatura Marginal* and as an "escritor marginal periférico", that is, someone who is outside the system. His later statement "não sou só escrito periférico" ["I am not just a peripheral writer"] evidences that Ferréz has realized that by adopting the speech of the periphery, his work has been limited. This cri-

ticism creates a double inconsistency for marginal writers within the field of literature: if they must “morar dentro do tema” and the periphery must be the theme of the narrative in order to be legitimate, then this legitimacy becomes a trap. The terms “*periferia*” and marginality turn out to be restraining labels that attempt to limit Ferréz (and others) to writing about only what he has personally lived. The binomial center - periphery, which has been criticized ad nauseam ends up being a double-edged sword. In “Terrorismo Literário”, he foresees the nullification of his work from the part of the academia and literary critics when he states “Sua negação não é novidade. Você não entendeu? Não é quanto vendemos, é o que falamos, não é por onde, nem como publicamos...somos marginais” [Don’t you understand? It’s not how much we sell, or what we talk about, nor where or how we publish... we are marginal.] (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 10). In other words, Ferréz is conscious that his place will always be that of the Other; either his literature is too testimonial or not sufficiently referential. The phenomenon that is Ferréz and the Literatura Marginal is one that still deserves much attention and debate, precisely because of this quandary.

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## Resumo/Abstract/Resumen

### Has the game changed? Twenty years of Ferréz and *literatura marginal*

**Marissel Hernández Romero**

The article analyzes the trajectory of Ferréz in the context of the Marginal Literature movement twenty years after its first publication, from the collection of poems *Fortaleza da desilusão* (1997) to his last novel *Deus foi almoçar* (2012). This manuscript is a dialogue with the critique produced in the twenty years since Ferréz's appearance. This paper seeks to assess the impact of Ferréz on contemporary Brazilian literary production. The article presents a critical discussion for the comprehension of the Brazilian literary and cultural field in contemporary times. Special attention will be given to the character of Calixto, the protagonist of the novel *Deus foi almoçar*, as his characterization represents another form of marginality which suggests a continuation of Ferréz's marginal features.

**Keywords:** Ferréz, *Deus foi almoçar*, marginal literature, periphery.

### O jogo mudou? Vinte anos de Ferréz e *literatura marginal*

**Marissel Hernández Romero**

O artigo analisa a trajetória de Ferréz no contexto do movimento Literatura Marginal vinte anos após sua primeira publicação, a coletânea de poemas *Fortaleza da desilusão* (1997) até seu último romance *Deus foi almoçar* (2012). Este manuscrito é um diálogo com a crítica produzida nos vinte anos de aparição de Ferréz. Este artigo procura avaliar o impacto de Ferréz na produção literária brasileira contemporânea. O artigo apresenta uma discussão crítica para a compreensão do campo literário e cultural brasileiro na contemporaneidade. Atenção especial será dada ao personagem de Calixto, protagonista do romance *Deus foi almoçar*, como uma representação de outra forma de marginalidade como sugestão de que há uma continuação da característica marginal de Ferréz.

**Palavras-chave:** Ferréz, *Deus foi almoçar*, literatura marginal, periferia.

### ¿Cambió el juego? Veinte años de Ferréz y de *literatura marginal*

**Marissel Hernández Romero**

El artículo analiza la trayectoria de Ferréz en el contexto del movimiento Literatura Marginal veinte años después de su primera publicación, la colección de poemas *Fortaleza da Desilusão* (1997) hasta su última novela: *Deus foi Almoçar* (2012). Este manuscrito es un diálogo con la crítica producida en los veinte años de aparición de Ferréz. Este artículo busca evaluar el impacto de Ferréz en la producción

literaria brasileña contemporánea, presentando una discusión crítica para la comprensión del campo literario y cultural brasileño en la contemporaneidad. Se prestará una especial atención al personaje de Calixto, protagonista de la novela *Deus foi Almoçar*, como representación de otro modo de marginalidad que sugiere que hay una continuación de la característica marginal de Ferréz.

**Palabras clave:** Ferréz, *Deus foi almoçar*, literatura marginal, periferia.