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QUEER THEORY AND *MONOCEROS*: Private versus Public life

JOÃO PESSOA

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QUEER THEORY AND *MONOCEROS*: Private versus Public life

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado à Coordenação do Curso de Licenciatura em Letras, da Universidade Federal da Paraíba – UFPB, como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciado em Letras - Inglês.

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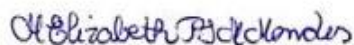
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If a work of art is rich and vital and complete, those who have artistic instincts will see its beauty, and those to whom ethics appeal more strongly than aesthetics will see its moral lesson. It will fill the cowardly with terror, and the unclean will see in it their own shame. (Oscar Wilde)

ELE NÃO. ELE NUNCA!

RESUMO

A literatura, em toda sua dimensão de arte e ficção, possui um papel político e social marcante e presente na reconstrução da história cultural de um povo ao representar os desdobramentos de questões individuais e coletivas. A teoria *queer*, que surge em um amplo guarda-chuva teórico que engloba tanto as teorias feministas quanto os estudos de gênero e sexualidade que cortam diversos campos de conhecimento, entre os quais a literatura, é uma “ferramenta” de bastante valia diante de problemáticas sociais que são denunciadas, sim, em obras literárias que se voltam à temática *queer*. Nesse sentido, a literatura *queer* dá visibilidade a assuntos que são postos em lugar de invisibilidade pelo senso comum, mesmo nos tempos atuais, trazendo, para o foco do debate, questionamentos das normatizações sexuais. Sendo assim, este trabalho objetiva analisar os papéis de dois casais homoafetivos (Max/Walter e Patrick/Ginger) que são personagens no romance canadense *Monoceros* (2011), de Suzette Mayr. Partimos de uma discussão da teoria *queer* a partir de vários autores fundamentais para essa área de estudos, entre os quais Louro, Butler, Miskolci, entre outros, a fim de subverter a leitura que se constrói de uma narrativa e/ou sociedade que tenta negar as diferenças sexuais na representação literária, com efeitos na vida prática de personagens e de sujeitos homoafetivos, no caso, em *Monoceros*. Buscamos, assim, nos atrelar a visões de literatura e de mundo que contestam visões essencialistas e binárias da sexualidade, tentando discutir os motivos para a narrativa criar um jovem gay suicida. As relações entre a sociedade opressora e suas vítimas são discutidas nas análises da narrativa em foco. Por fim, este trabalho é desenvolvido por meio de pesquisa bibliográfica, tentando construir pontes entre literatura, fortuna crítica e teorias contemporâneas.

Palavras-chave: Literatura canadense. Teoria Queer. *Monoceros*. Suicídio.

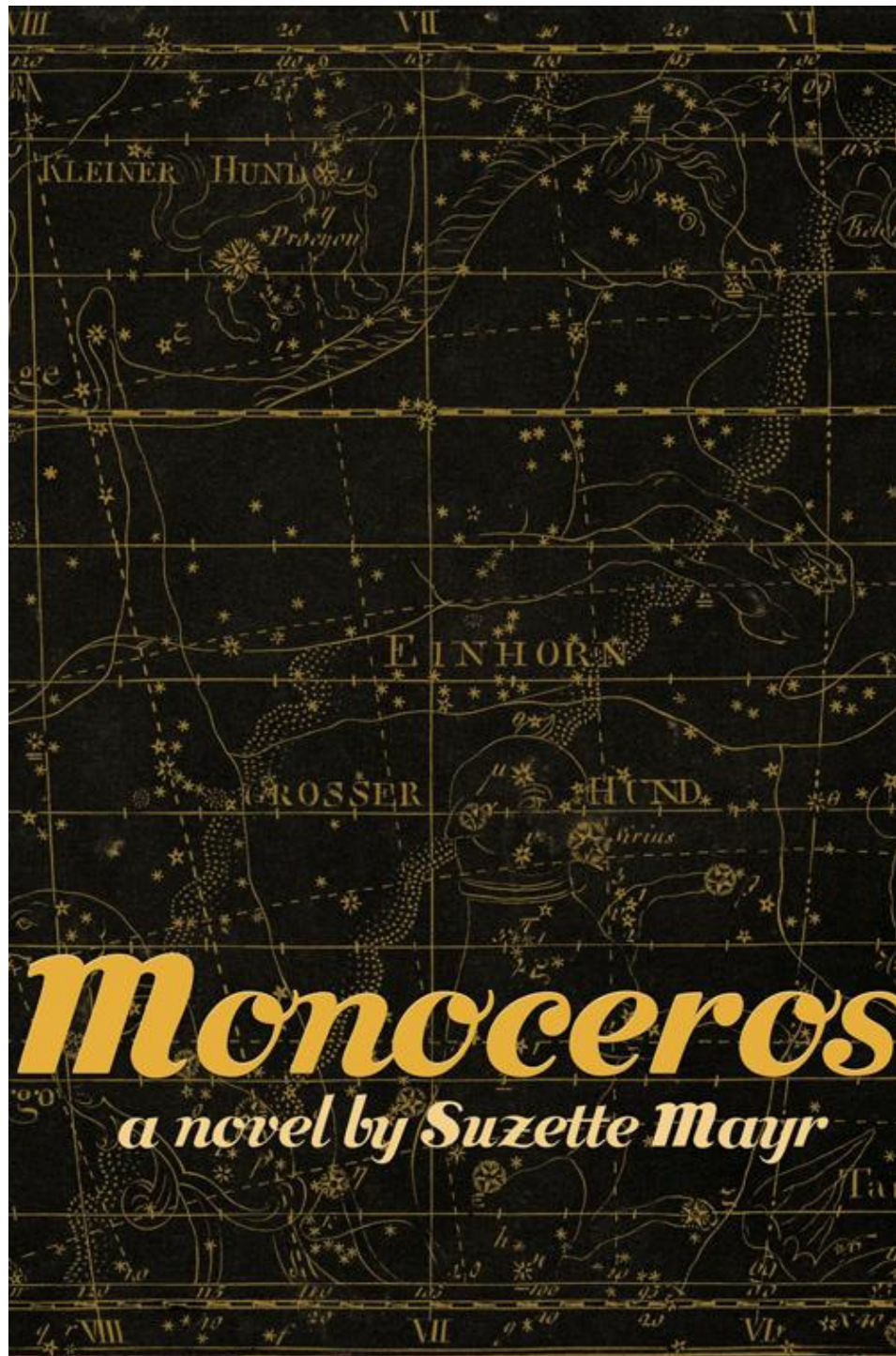
ABSTRACT

Literature, in its artistic and fictional dimension, endues political and social roles remarkable and determinant for the reconstruction of cultural history, while representing the unfoldings of individual and collective issues. Queer theory, which appears as part of a broad theoretical umbrella that encompasses feminist theories and studies of gender and sexuality, on the basis of several fields of knowledge among which literary studies, is a valuable tool to deal with the social aspects developed and discussed in literary works, mainly those defined as focusing in queer themes. In this sense, queer literature gives visibility to subjects that are often taken as invisible by common sense, even nowadays, bringing to light questionings of sexual normalcy. Therefore, this work aims at analyzing the roles of two gay couples (Max/Walter and Patrick/Ginger) characters in the Canadian novel *Monoceros* (2011), by Suzette Mayr. We start our study with a discussion of queer theory developed by several fundamental authors, such as Louro, Butler, Miskolci and others, in order to subvert the social comprehension generally offered of narratives and/or societies that try to deny sexual diversity, with effects on the practical life of characters/homoaffective people, in this case, in *Monoceros*. Thus, we seek to engage with visions of literature and theory that challenge essentialist and binary views on sexuality, trying to discuss reasons for the narrative to create a young suicidal gay teenager. Relations between the oppressive society and its victims are discussed in the analysis of the narrative in focus. Finally, this work is developed through a bibliographical research, building bridges among literature, criticism and contemporary theories.

Key words: Canadian Literature. Queer theory. *Monoceros*. Suicide.

IMAGE LIST

Book cover



This is the first edition of the novel, published in 2011. *Monoceros* is known as the constellation of the unicorn, which is a very representative symbol for LGBTQ+ people.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the research work we present here belongs to the broad field of literature and culture, specifically, contemporary literatures in English, one of our first intentions is to develop some comments on the relations between the literary, the cultural and the social spheres. As a matter of fact, specific social events became important for the development of political and theoretical concepts in all societies over time. Between the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the United States of America, as the most representative country in the North America, experienced some radical changes because of the social and political conflicts they were facing as a society. It was a time in which several minority groups were still fighting for civil rights – just like nowadays.

Two of these specific groups were women and LGBTQ people. Therefore, such social groups became more aware of the determining importance of fighting prejudice in order to modify traditional strict views on identities and subjectivities. Most of them fought for better jobs and equality, as well as for social acceptance; that is, in general terms they were defending their right to occupy a different place in society, implying they should be actually treated as human beings whatever their sexual practices were like. In several ways, segments of some civil rights movements excluded women and LGBTQs from their political activism based on the fact that they were not the mainstream pattern in terms of social identity, even inside such political movements. In order to be these standard accepted codes one had to be white, male and/or middle class. If they failed to get into those categories, people were excluded or at least questioned about their specific difference, being sometimes included sometimes excluded from broader political agendas. Black women and transsexual people are examples of excluded individuals during the process of development of the feminist and gay movements.

The United States of America were already seen as a respectful country around the world because of its development, power and influence after the World War II. Furthermore, events and ideas that were circulating in the USA were extremely influential to other countries and societies, particularly to the whole America – North, Central and South. The fact of being able to spread new ideas and new manners of protesting common sense subjectivities was mainly identified in US feminist and gay movements.

One among several movements that began influencing the world along the second half of the 20th century was the Queer movement. As it became more visible towards the 1980s in the USA, it spread and defended new codes of behavior to the whole planet in different levels and

ways. At first, gay and, later on, Queer movements, emerged out of the necessity to criticize heteronormativity that used to “control” and oppress part of the society, imposing heteronormativity as the model for all human kind to follow.

In fact, two of the main sources of inspiration for the Queer movements were the feminist and gay movements for social rights in the USA, which started getting organized since the 19th century. After all, feminist and also gay movements had common struggles. Both of them were trying to achieve the right for individuals to be different and also socially “equal” in terms of respect in the sexual and/or working spheres. For instances, it is widely known that men usually get better wages than women, even if they do the same work.

In view of that, it is also known that many LGBTQs suffer a lot with prejudice and are victims of violence that frequently occurs only because of their non-normative sexuality. Sexism and homophobia, in this sense, are results of the violence experienced by people who do not correspond to the idealized norm (male, white and/or heterosexual) and also for majority groups use to feel they are more important and powerful than the minorities.

At a specific point of cultural history, mainly in the period marked by the post (postmodernity/postcolonial, etc.), Queer theory became an organized discourse in theoretical and academic terms, highly attached to the queer social movement at the same time. Another key idea to keep in mind is that it still is a project in development, for the world is in constant change. Besides, Queer theory and its studies highlight and question social practices of normativity that are intrinsically imposed by society and, therefore, oppress groups of minorities that do not adapt to what is prescribed as “normal” – heteronormativity being one example. Sexuality, to queer theorists, is a historical power device that is deeply connected to our conceptions of bodies, social relations, institutions and culture, among others. So, as a device, sexuality is present in cultural elements such as Literature.

Thus, this research aims at discussing the meanings attached to Queer theory, stressing its contributions to the field of literature, field of studies in which our work is inserted. One of our main objectives is to remind the reader that this is a theory developed in different fields of knowledge, such as Literature, Political and Social Sciences. Besides these first objectives, this work intends to help readers build a sense of awareness about sexuality, an uncommon subject.

The corpus of this work is the novel entitled *Monoceros*, word which refers to the constellation of the unicorn, an important symbol for LGBTQs’ movements. This novel, published in 2011, was written by the Canadian author Suzette Mayr, who is also a professor of Creative

Writing in a Canadian University. It is a book inspired by a real event that did not get the necessary attention according to the author. For this reason, Mayr decided to write this book on the events. *Monoceros* departs from the suicide of a 17 year-old gay boy named Patrick Furey, who is also called the “dead boy”. In fact, he is the character who teases other characters and their plots.

Although it is a book full of interesting characters, we selected 4 characters to develop our research. Before speaking about these characters, it is important to mention that all of them have a Catholic school as a common place. Max and Walter, the principal and the guide counselor of this school, are a gay couple which draw inner conflicts of being “into the closet”. Patrick and Ginger, students at this school, struggle their relationship from obstacles such as Petra, Ginger’s girlfriend, who comes to be one of the reasons for Patrick’s suicide, for she is somehow abusive.

Monoceros was chosen for this research for it is a contemporary novel which deals with struggles that are not limited to one context. It is a Canadian novel that shares a lot of common reflections with the Brazilian context where we are inserted in. Brazil is the winner in terms of violence against LGBTQs and that is the reason why it was decided to write about Queer Theory having *Monoceros* in mind; for we believe literature can touch the reader and promote empathy. *Monoceros* is not a very popular work, but it was well recognized and awarded in Canada, what shows the quality of the discussions presented in it.

Our research work is organized as follows: The first part, which discusses the Queer movement and the related theories, is subdivided in three sub-sections. At sub-section 1.1 we present references concerning the context corresponding to the emergence of Queer movement and theory. At sub-section 1.2, an analysis of the concept of ‘queerness’ itself is presented, trying to bring this debate to the literary field. After this initial input on Queer studies and its relation to literature, we move on to provide an overview on *Monoceros* and its queer aspects at sub-section 1.3. In the second part we discuss the idea of frontier and separation of spheres related to some characters, which is developed along sub-sections 2.1 and 2.2. It is essential to inform that Max and Walter are the central figures of our analysis since they are presented in detail in the private and public spheres. Patrick and Ginger establish a less mature relationship, once they are teenagers. This relation is less visible since one of them is already dead since the beginning of the plot and their subjectivities are not represented in very detailed ways. At the end, we present our final considerations.

1 DISCUSSING QUEER THEORY, LITERATURE AND *MONOCEROS*

1.1 Queer theory and its context

Once the term “queer” was, at best, slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse - Annamarie Jagose

In order to have a better understanding of the Queer movement and theory, it is important to have in mind its history and at least try to propose or construct a temporary definition of it. According to *The Oxford Dictionary Online*:

The word queer was first used to mean ‘homosexual’ in the late 19th century; when used by heterosexual people, it was originally an aggressively derogatory term. By the late 1980s, however, some gay people began to deliberately use the word queer in place of gay or homosexual, in an attempt, by using the word positively, to deprive it of its negative power. Queer also came to have broader connotations, relating not only to homosexuality but to any sexual orientation or gender identity not corresponding to heterosexual norms. The neutral use of queer is now well established and widely used, especially as an adjective or noun modifier, and exists alongside the derogatory usage.

This definition brings up a historical background in order to create an atmosphere in which we can examine other aspects of the meanings attached to the word “queer”. The process of changing the meaning of the word “queer” involves a questioning of empowerment related to those individuals whose characteristics differ from several patterns generally reproduced in society. Many scholars, mainly from Linguistics, have already been pointing out the power of words and of language along the 20th century, especially after the 1950s. As Miguel A. Cabrera (2011, p. 33) while discussing Joan Scott’s ideas, states that “language reveals entire systems of meaning” which is extremely significant once we consider the Queer context. Speaking about language, Cabrera still emphasizes that:

[...] language not only refers to how people think about concrete subjects, but the way people conceive the very differentiating relations that organize the human world - either in terms of hierarchy or interdependence, or as a binary structure “built on oppositions between, say, good and evil, or wet and dry, or dependent and independent, or male and female. It is particularly important to adopt the understanding that language intervenes in the construction of social identities.

It is clear that social changes begin with the social use of language, which can also be stated in relation to the literary context, once it goes beyond the simple use of words, for it is a social and symbolic practice indeed. In this sense, there is no way to analyze literature without considering what composes it: language. Keeping this in mind, it is fundamental to recognize changes that took place in favor of people who differed from dominant patterns of behavior at that time – those generally defined as decentered people. The word “queer”, as it was explained, “was first used to mean homosexual” in a pejorative way; however, it gained a broader and more positive meaning as time progressed, later becoming attached to a so-called gay culture largely spread around the world. Guacira Lopes Louro (2008) points out that “it is Queer theory that conceives human’s sexuality as fragmented and in constant change, able to be constructed and reconstructed, both in practice as well as in the discursive and identitarian level”¹. Therefore, we may notice that in the social practice of language, Queer theory occupies different realms, being interdisciplinary since its emergence.

As William Benjamin Turner (2000, p. 3) comments, “it is difficult to summarize what Queer theory is about in a sentence, or even a paragraph”, or in a final paper. This is due not only because Queer theory embraces different forms of sexuality, specially those opposed to what is socially considered to be the norm that makes it difficult for anyone to define its nature. Yet, it is fundamental to recognize that it is a tool that “helps” minorities to better understand themselves in terms of gender. Glória Anzaldúa (2017, p. 409) reveals that the Queer is as “an identitarian label in the English language”², but to each person this identity is different. Although not being something concrete, many people can identify with some elements of the queer logic and have their experiences shared and respected; a topic this research paper intends to discuss in the novel we are going to focus on.

It is possible to state that Queer theory cannot be totally separated from the Queer movement, an unfolding of the feminist and gay movements that were in the top of social revolutions in the USA along the 20th century - more precisely from the 1950s to the 1980s, with new unfolding in the present century. Moreover, the Queer movement dealt with minorities that, to a certain extent, were identified with the feminist and LGBTQ community, but somehow there were still specificities³, between these two groups that made (queer) people not find a place for

¹ Original in Portuguese – [*É a teoria queer que concebe a sexualidade humana como algo fragmentado e em constante mutação, podendo ser construída e reconstruída, tanto na prática quanto no nível discursivo e identitário*].

² Original in Portuguese – [*Um rótulo identitário na língua inglesa*].

³ We may mention by specificities being a drag queen, a transsexual, a gender fluid person or a gay with feminine traits, among others.

themselves in those agendas. Furthermore, later on some scholars felt the necessity of inserting these topics into their fields of knowledge. Thus, the recent and open visibility of the queer identity had impacts on several fields in the academic sphere and in life in general.

According to a comment by Carlos Eduardo A. Fernandes (2015, p. 30), a specialist in queer studies, while discussing Louro's ideas (2004, p. 38-39), "queer represents the difference that does not want to be tolerated, but that intends to subvert, questioning any vestige of essentialist and binary views on sexuality"⁴. That means being Queer is not only about being a gay subject, for there are many gays that still follow heterosexual social norms and judge those who are out of these norms in negative ways. With this in mind, we need to comprehend that everything related to sexuality is socially and culturally constructed. Heteronormativity imposes a reasoning according to which people in society are naturally heterosexual and, because of this, everybody needs to behave according to it. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998, p. 548) state that:

By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent - that is, organized as a sexuality - but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations - often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might *not* be heteronormative. Heteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality.

In Fernandes' words (2015, p. 30), "According to a *queer* perspective, the subject and its identity cease to exist in a stable and fixed way, incorporating a post-identitarian vision, giving rise to fluidity and flexibility, multiplicity and constant opening of identity and new realities of being a subject in the world"⁵. Thus, we come to conclude that queer principles comprise not only sexuality but also the identity of the subject in broader terms – which is developed socially and historically, build along innumerable spheres of social life.

⁴ Original in Portuguese – [*Queer representa a diferença que não quer ser tolerada, mas que quer subverter, contestar qualquer vestígio das visões essencialistas e binárias da sexualidade*].

⁵ Original in Portuguese – [*Na perspectiva queer, o sujeito e a identidade deixam de existir de maneira estável e fixa, e incorporam uma visão pós-identitária, dando lugar à fluidez e flexibilidade, multiplicidade e constante abertura da identidade e novas realidades do sujeito ser no mundo*].

Problematizing identity helps us to go further or deeper in the field of Queer theory. Cabrera (2011, p. 39) reinforces Scott's statement on "identity as something achieved through the process of coming to consciousness", which has to do with the social and historical experiences that we live. Moreover, this process means changes and constructions which human beings experience throughout their lives. In fact, although it might, at a first glance, seem simple and singular, identity is always multiple and plural; and as Berenice Bento (2006, p. 82) mentions, "Queer politics is based on the instability of identities"⁶. After all, gay identity has changed considerably in the latest decades for several reasons; one of them being the contemporary comprehension we have on sexuality, which improved a lot over the years.

Having discussed the context, we are going to get closer of the literary universe in order to see how queer themes mark contemporary literature.

1.2 Queer studies and Literature

I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows - E.M. Forster

Once we discuss and become aware of the guidelines of the Queer movement and the changes attached to the meaning of the word "queer", we become more aware of Queer theory, which works almost as "extensions" of that specific social movement. In fact, the academy was responsible for developing this debate as a new field of knowledge, the Queer studies area. It has been developed as a new branch in Social Sciences, Literature, Philosophy, among others. It is also necessary to acknowledge the still close links between Queer studies and Feminist studies. If feminism was the field of knowledge to question the arrangements of gender in social life, Queer studies brought the theme of sexuality and sexual identity to the center of the debate. Since our interest in Queer studies is connected to literary studies, we are going to discuss its growth in this specific field of knowledge.

The complexity of Literary studies involves many different levels of knowledge, attached to aspects related to theme and structure (characters, plots, settings, and narrators, for example, according to more structural views of literature); in fact, all elements of a narrative. When a literary work is analyzed taking the foundations of Queer theory into consideration, such elements can and are probably going to be considered, but the main focus is to observe how questions connected to the

⁶ Original in Portuguese – [A política queer é baseada na instabilidade das identidades].

representation of sexuality affect the text and the plot. In addition, we already have literary works that are described as “Queer Literature”.

A literary work identified with Queer approaches generally denounces the oppression imposed by heterosexual norms through its theme and other elements of the narrative. *Monoceros*, our object of study in this work, contains several characters that can be considered Queer, a way the author finds out for discussing social and sexual arrangements in her narrative. Besides this, until the present, society generally reaffirms heterosexuality; the social constraint imposed on LGBTQ individuals in their social relations tends to be represented in literary texts that deal with this context. Characters trying to affirm themselves in queer narratives often undergo difficulties to live their life the way they want to. Thus, the “Queer” genre, most of the times, brings to light queer characters facing several difficult times while trying to survive, often being presented as “dead people because of their sexuality”. In this sense, Suzette Mayr (2011b), author of the novel which we discuss, says that:

The writing came with a number of constraints that I had to impose or were necessarily imposed upon me if the book were to not be part of what I saw as a worrying phenomenon in mainstream North American culture of the “dead queer” genre. By this I mean the fact that non-heterosexual characters are rarely central characters in film or mainstream texts, and when they are, those films or texts that do receive significant attention usually include that disturbingly popular character of the queer man or woman who is doomed and/or dies either directly or indirectly because of his or her sexuality. Primary examples of this are award-winning films such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Milk*. In terms of North American literature, Alison Bechdel's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic memoir *Fun Home*, about her closeted gay father's suicide, is another example of the kind of text about queers that is accepted and celebrated by the mainstream.

In *Monoceros*, Patrick, who is the protagonist, kills himself not because of his sexuality itself, but because of the pressure people exert on him. As it will be seen later on in this paper, Patrick accepts his sexuality very well. However, there are several pressures on him: his family tries to make him believe that his homosexuality is just a phase, the boy who he has an affair breaks up with him because of fear, Ginger's girlfriend threatens Patrick, the guide counselor of the school where Patrick studies, who is also gay, does not help him when he needs, etc. Thus, we observe that Patrick's death is a result of a sequence of events, not a consequence of his sexuality only, and that is what differentiates his role from the usual “dead queer”.

With this in mind, in our research, we decided to select two groups of characters in order to analyze this topic in a more detailed and profound way, helping readers to understand and maybe

enjoy it. Thus, since one of our goals is to verify the way Queer theory might help us in reading such narratives in more positive and promising ways, we are going to approach two pairs of characters marked by their non-pattern sexual desire.

1.3 *Monoceros* - How far queer is this narrative?

That's what literature is. It's the people who went before us, tapping out messages from the past, from beyond the grave, trying to tell us about life and death! Listen to them! - Connie Willis

Monoceros is a novel published in 2011, in Canada. It was written by a Canadian writer named Suzette Mayr, who is also a professor of Creative Writing in the University of Calgary's Faculty of Arts. The story narrates several events that took place after Patrick, a teenage gay boy, hanged himself. When the story begins, this half-protagonist, referred to as the dead boy, had already died. We consider him the protagonist since he assumed the role of linking all other characters in one or another way. As Liane Schneider (2015, p. 3) mentions in an article on the novel, "in fact, the suicide committed by a queer 17-year-old student referred to in the very first chapter of *Monoceros* conducts the development of the whole plot, determining the way all other characters relate to each other".

In this sense, the point is that the boy's suicide triggers all other events in the novel. As an example, there is a gay couple's crisis that has to do with their being "in the closet", since one of them, Max, is the school principal in the institution central to the narrative; he thinks he has to conform to social normativity at least in his public life. With the boy's suicide, Walter, who is Max's boyfriend, who also works at that school, starts to think of coming out of the closet, while Max thinks they cannot do this. Here we can see an example of the heterosexual pattern that oppresses, trying to control gay people's behavior. Then there is Patrick Furey, the boy that hangs himself because he fell in love with a classmate, Ginger, who seems to correspond in their private meetings, but has a girlfriend in the broad group they belong to. Max/Walter and Patrick/Ginger will be our focus on this final paper.

In *Monoceros* there is a feeling of "forbidden" love, which means being gay but in the closet, which contributes for Patrick's suicide. His story is based on several other stories, but there was a specific one who inspired Mayr to write this novel, as she says:

The motivation to write the novel came when I learned that a 17-year-old boy who was attending the government-funded Catholic high school where my

partner was a teacher killed himself after a bout of homophobic bullying. There were queer teachers and staff in the school who might have been in a position to help him or offer empathy, but they didn't and/or couldn't because of the highly restrictive atmosphere of the Catholic school for queer people, where teachers or staff who are exposed as being non-heterosexual are fired from their jobs and have no legal recourse with which to retaliate. (2011b, p. 52)

While reading this novel, we immediately have an idea on how a queer perspective might improve our understanding of it. It is a novel with several layers in terms of plot. Each plot is related to a different character. The chapters are divided and entitled by the name(s) of the character(s) that is/are central in that section; so, each chapter is related to events connected to one or two characters and, at the same time, every character is connected to the dead boy. Walter, Max's partner, is the counselor at the school in which the dead boy studied and Max is the principal.

It is also important to think about the title of this novel. What is the meaning attached to the word *Monoceros*? Why would Mayr choose this word for the title of her narrative? According to the *Oxford Dictionary Online*, *Monoceros* is "an inconspicuous constellation (the Unicorn), lying on the celestial equator in the Milky Way between Canis Major and Canis Minor". In Jean Chevalier (2009, p. 289), the Unicorn is described as a

Fabulous animal, known among many peoples, usually white, in the shape of a young goat, donkey, rhinoceros, bull or (as above all in later times) horse with a single horn. In Christian West became popular mainly through the -> Physiologist. This single horn can be interpreted as a phallic symbol (cf -> onager), but as it raises in the forehead, "headquarters" of the spirit, it is at the same time a symbol of sublimation of the sexual forces and in this way it could become a symbol of the vaginal purity – The horn is straight and pointed (sometimes also spiraled) [...] Christianity knows the unicorn as a symbol of strength and purity. According to the legend, it can only be captured and tamed by a virgin, in whose lap it takes refuge, when it is persecuted.⁷

That said, in terms of symbolism we notice that the Unicorn has a lot to do with sexuality and gender – two aspects that are discussed in *Monoceros*. In this novel we also come across Faraday, a young classmate of Patrick and Ginger, who is a fan of unicorns, but since she is not our main focus of analysis here, we will just mention that she might be the virginal girl who is

⁷ Original in Portuguese – [*Unicórnio*, animal fabuloso, geralmente branco, em forma de cabrito, burro, rinoceronte, touro ou (como sobretudo em épocas posteriores) cavalo com um único chifre, conhecido entre muitos povos. No ocidente cristão tornou-se popular sobretudo através do -> Fisiólogo. Este único chifre pode ser interpretado como símbolo fálico (cf. -> onagro), mas como nasce na testa, "sede" do espírito, é ao mesmo tempo símbolo de sublimação das forças sexuais e assim pôde tornar-se símbolo da pureza vaginal. – O chifre reto e pontiagudo (às vezes também espiralado) [...] O cristianismo conhece o unicórnio como símbolo de força e da pureza. Segundo a lenda, ele só pode ser capturado e domesticado por uma virgem, em cujo colo se refugia, quando é perseguido].

able to understand sexual relations and sexuality in much more elaborated ways than older characters.

Moreover, as reported by Alice Fisher (2017) in an article for *The Guardian*:

The unicorn has also done its bit for the LGBT community in the last century. The rainbow flag was created by American artist Gilbert Baker in 1978 as a joyous symbol of the diversity of the gay community. It became prominent during the gay rights protests of the 1970s and 1980s. Rainbows and unicorns are so intrinsically linked (the association is also a Victorian invention) that it's unsurprising that the magic creature started to appear on t-shirts and banners at gay pride around the world, with slogans such as "Gender is Imaginary" or "Totally Straight" emblazoned under sparkling rainbow unicorns.

Fisher (2017) still complements it saying that "we've aligned ourselves with the unicorn – a symbol of hope". In view of that, this is what *Monoceros* is about. It is about the breaking of patterns usually taken as absolute and universal. It is about being different and recognizing this difference as symbol of a fight for existence in a micro society here represented by a Catholic school, which is the place where all characters in the novel meet each other, the place they share. At first glance, for example, we may not notice the representation of the school as fundamental for the plot structuring and it really is the meeting place of the group and it has also to do with the fact that religiosity implies a group that follows agreed rules, creating a community, in this sense. According to Judith Butler (2011, p. 70),

There are a variety of religious positions on public life and a variety of ways of conceiving of public life within religious terms. [...] In other words, some religions are not only already "inside" the public sphere, but they help to establish a set of criteria that delimit the public from the private.

The school as an institution is taken as one of the first places where the child socializes after leaving the domestic sphere. In *Monoceros*, it is notably a way the author found to analyze and, at the same time, criticize society, helping us to understand the situations presented and the relations established in the novel. Moreover, *Monoceros* plays with this idea of being repressed and oppressed; it shows that being different must not be seen as something negative. In fact, being different humanizes us.

According to Schneider (2015, p. 2), while analyzing this novel, "it is impossible to deny that educational institutions have recently become quite violent places to be in, especially during the last decades of the 20th century and in several countries, but mainly in the North American context", and it is not by chance that *Monoceros*' narrative takes places in Canada. That can be

taken into consideration for *Monoceros* is also a narrative on violence. Schneider (2017, p. 35) still asserts that “throughout this novel, there are violent acts that determine not only the path which the narrative takes, but also the unfolding that marks the life (and the death) of its characters”⁸. Furthermore, the violence that takes place in this novel is a consequence of questions related to sexuality, such as gender and sexual orientation. Schneider (2015, p 4) points out the connections between the educational sphere and violence itself, “it seems clear that violence must also to be acknowledged as a gendered phenomenon in order to better deal with bullying episodes at schools”. Gerald Walton (2016, p. 36), while discussing the concept of bullying also says that “the language of bullying, itself normative and hegemonic, is intrinsically connected to powerful norms of gender and sexuality”. That said, relations of power are presented to the reader along Mayr’s novel and our reading of it intends to indicate the innovative way this author uses for dealing with such topics, generally hidden in the closet in other texts and contexts.

⁸ Original in Portuguese – [*Ao longo desse romance, ocorrem atos violentos que determinam tanto o rumo que a narrativa toma, como os desdobramentos que marcam a vida (e a morte) de suas personagens*].

2 A QUEER VIEW ON *MONOCEROS*

2.1 Max and Walter: Frontiers between private and public life

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation - Oscar Wilde

Max and Walter have a relationship well described in the novel; nevertheless, it is, to some extent, composed of contradictory elements. Sometimes the narrator states they are boyfriends and, in other moments, husbands, in both opportunities presenting them as emotionally connected.

Way back on Monday 4:17 a.m., Walter, the guidance counselor – stone-cold irritated at his boyfriend Max because of their fight the night before, stone-cold awake hours before the alarm clock is set to shriek them awake – hauls himself out of bed and shakes open the newspaper in the dark of the kitchen. His boyfriend Max now awake too, bumps into the wall on his way to the bathroom. (MAYR, 2011. p. 27)⁹

This passage leads the reader to imagine this couple's everyday habits; after all, the alarm clock is set to wake them up at the same time (together). A simple routine in a couple's life, the reader may think. But it is not only that. In this sense, the vocabulary used to refer to them simply as 'boyfriends', with no double meaning, interests us. So, one might guess that it is on purpose that Mayr problematizes the definition of their relationship. At home they can be described as lovers.

Queer, as Moita Lopes (2008) says, is more complex than it is suggested by the binomial hetero and homo. What matters us is the struggle Max and Walter will confront in their life as a gay couple, as we can read from the narrative voice on Walter's thoughts:

Once upon a time, this was enough for him, this job. His work life with the students and their girl or homework or timetable problems one thing, his real life with Max another thing: a clear outside, a clear inside. The occasional leak of one world into the other, the occasional charge of seeing his boyfriend by chance in the hallway or at a meeting and Walter secretly gloating *He's mine* [...] And how wonderful that Max made sure their work life and real life could stay separate, so vigilant: two peas in a pod they were as a couple. Max and Walter undercover. Their electrifying, delicious secret. (MAYR, p. 106).

⁹ The following passages of the novel are from the same edition, which is mentioned in the references.

At this point we have an idea on how Max and Walter are used to the closet. Their relationship, described as ‘real life’, is a secret to the rest of the world. And this is the beginning of Walter’s dissatisfaction because to him, “spring is overrated, but a winter that never ends, like this one, feels like it’s pushing him closer to lunacy [...] the time for spring is now. Now.” (MAYR, p. 106). In other words, Walter realizes that the way he is living secretly with Max - what does not make him happy - it is too heavy. He wants more than “a closet to live in” and that makes him representative of one of the queer political purposes of becoming visible. To give an illustration of what I mean, we bring what Miskolci (2015, p. 25) states: “The Queer, thus, is not the same as a defense of homosexuality, but a refusal of violent moral values that institute and determine the line of abjection, this strict frontier between people who are socially accepted and the ones who are relegated to humiliation and collective contempt”¹⁰. Thus, once Walter wants to come out of the closet, he is already breaking the heterosexual norms that oppress people who do not follow the pattern considered normal by this majority group.

Significantly, Fernandes (2015, p. 31) mentions that “a new way of observing and researching comes up, it considers the queer as a parameter of deconstruction of norms, a transgression and a denouncement of symbolic manifestations that rejects sexual diversity”¹¹. Once the critical aspect of Queer theory is taken in consideration, it is possible to see how the relationship between Max and Walter denounces the oppression suffered by couples living a life out of the heterosexual model. There is a particular moment in the novel which represents the Queer parameter mentioned before. Walter is in a gay bar when his process of internal change takes place:

He sucks hard at the creamy head on his beer, trying to ignore his leaping irritation at two of the other guys putting their arms around each other and calling each other *babe* and *honey* in this too public place [...] If Max were here he would have signalled to Walter *Time to go home* and ranted the whole way back to the house about these flammers and public displays of affection giving everyone a bad name, and how he and Walter keep it in the house and only in the house which is the only right way to do it and sexier too [...] then he dances by himself in the steamy, dark dance club with a beer in his hand like he’s nineteen again, and if one of them’s a student or a colleague or a superintendent or a parent or a priest – if they see him, well, he will also see *them*, he isn’t the only one – and for

¹⁰ Original in Portuguese – [*O queer, portanto, não é uma defesa da homossexualidade, é a recusa dos valores morais violentos que instituem e fazem valer a linha da abjeção, essa fronteira rígida entre os que são socialmente aceitos e os que são relegados à humilhação e ao desprezo coletivo*].

¹¹ Original in Portuguese – [*Passa a existir uma maneira de olhar e de pesquisar que considera o queer como parâmetro de desconstrução de normas, como transgressão e também como denúncia das manifestações simbólicas que rechaçam a diversidade sexual*].

the first time in a long time, he's finally Home. He's once again himself with his own people". (MAYR, p. 120-121)

It is noticeable how Walter changes his mind in terms of acceptance for "he feels himself again with his own people". This might be taken as an epiphany, since he understands that he is not alone, he and Max are not the only gay couple hiding away, and, consequently, it might be easier than he used to consider to publicly show their same sex love. It is clear, when he considers how Max prefers repressing their affections in public, that he is already wishing to come out, to live an open life in the public sphere. Max would probably be irritated at that gay bar because two gay men were kissing and "exposing" their affection to each other and to others. So, Walter's internal struggle is already stated to the reader: a man that used to be into the closet is now coming out.

Notably, Walter's internal change comes not only because of this scene. He is conscious that he could have helped the "dead boy" Patrick Furey, being employed at this school. However, he did not try to do it, even though helping students was part of his job as a guidance counselor. Despite his duties, he refused to show to that boy that he was gay just like him, refused to tell that to be gay was normal and that he could help him with anything he needed. Or, better than that, he did not have to show his sexual orientation to the student, but support him in respect to the bullying he was suffering. He acted like Furey's problems were non-existent, making as if he did not know the reason for the bullying to take place.

Somehow the narrator exposes what Walter had in mind, as put by the following narrative voice: "Walter is not the dead boy's mother. He is not the dead boy's father. He was just his guidance counselor. What was the last thing he said to the dead boy? *Good luck. Or Perk up.*" (MAYR, p.44) And this way of thinking contributed to the boy's suicide, for the narrator says, "the boy having solved his problems then" (MAYR, p. 36). As a matter of fact, after looking for some professional help and not being comprehended at all, there seems to be nothing else to do than try to stop all that suffering. But what did Patrick Furey tell Walter? "Patrick Furey was addicted to another boy. I'm in love, he told Walter." (MAYR, p. 35). Being in a same-sex love relationship was the dead boy's problem in life.

Throughout Walter's experiences the reader can feel how difficult and good, at the same time, it can be to exercise personal freedom, no matter his or our sexuality. Walter exposes to the reader his contradictions and the tensions he faces. Coming out of the closet, for a character who used to be conformed to hiding his self in terms of sexual orientation, even living in the same

house as his boyfriend/husband, but telling no one that this happens, is not easy. However, once he takes the decision of coming out, he does not come back. Now, Walter is a man that seeks for his voice in the public sphere, who realizes that there are many people like him; he is figuring out diversity but a different kind of brotherhood as well. Max, the other one in this couple, will have to adapt or separate from him. And according to Louro (2013, p. 53):

Diversity shows, more than ever, that the history and struggles of a cultural group are crossed and limited by conflicting experiences and struggles carried out by other groups. In this sense, we must learn, in these postmodern times, to accept that truth is plural, that it is defined by the local, by the particular, by the limited, temporary, provisional. We must learn to be modest and, at the same time, to be attentive to the political ethos of our daily actions. We need to pay attention to the public and private strategies that are put daily into action to guarantee the stability of the "normal" identity and of all associated cultural forms; to pay attention to strategies that are mobilized to mark "different" identities and those that seek to overcome the fear and the attraction that "eccentric" identities elicit in ourselves. We need, finally, to turn to practices that destabilize and deconstruct the naturalness, universality and unity of the center and that reaffirm the constructed, moving and plural ethos of all positions.¹²

To Walter, who is more open-minded in the relationship and less worried with being “identified as gay”, it is clear he does not want to continue living a secret. He stayed in the darkness of not being himself for too long. His real life could not be separate from his work. So, he finds a picture that he took of Max in a trip they did and “then props the picture on the corner of his desk. The inside life now outside”. (MAYR, p. 125). It is an attempt to open up and show colleagues his real identity and identification.

On the other hand, Max is still tied to heterosexual norms that repress what is considered unnatural and does not consider coming out of the closet as his boyfriend does. Eve Sedgwick (2007, p. 22) says that, “the gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life”. As we read in *Monoceros*,

¹² Original in Portuguese – [A diversidade nos demonstra, mais do que nunca, que a história e as lutas de um grupo cultural são atravessadas e contingenciadas por experiências e lutas conflitantes, protagonizadas por outros grupos. Por isso, temos de aprender, nesses tempos pós-modernos, a aceitar que a verdade é plural, que ela é definida pelo local, pelo particular, pelo limitado, temporário, provisório. Temos de aprender a ser modestos e, ao mesmo tempo, a estarmos atentos em relação ao caráter político de nossas ações cotidianas. Precisamos prestar atenção às estratégias públicas e privadas que são postas em ação, cotidianamente, para garantir a estabilidade da identidade “normal” e de todas as formas culturais e a ela associadas; prestar atenção às estratégias que são mobilizadas para marcar as identidades “diferentes” e aquelas que buscam superar o medo e a atração que nos provocam as identidades “excêntricas”. Precisamos, enfim, nos voltar para práticas que desestabilizem e desconstruam a naturalidade, a universalidade e a unidade do centro e que reafirmem o caráter construído, movente e plural de todas as posições].

A long time ago Max thought he could do without a man entirely, love the sinner hate the sin, but then he needed this man, his body, his smell. But he needed his job too. Needed the money and the benefits and the pension, Bald-Headed Baby Jesus his pension, he can never give up his pension, does Walter expect Max to quit his job for Walter and give up his pension? (MAYR, p. 163)

This leads us to think that Max is afraid of what might happen to him in society - once he knows gay people are frequently marginalized - and because he is sure that coming out of the closet will be a reason for him to lose his job and his position of privileges. Said that, after seeing his face on the picture at Walter's desk, Max confronts him:

I don't think a photograph is at all necessary, Max stammers.
It's how couples act.
But the couple you're referring to doesn't act like that. And now you prop my face on your work desk without even asking me. Without telling me. You used to be so discreet. You *loved* to be discreet. (MAYR, p. 143).

At this point, it is notable how important to be discreet is to Max. How he is scared of what society will think about him. As if being gay were a crime. But that is what heterosexual norms and all implied relations of power make people as Max think. That is the reason why there are so many gays acting like oppressors of other gays. According to Miskolci (2015, p. 15), "several non-standardized gays help the stigmatization and negative perception of those who cannot fit the heteronormativity."¹³. If we pay close attention to Max's words, we can see how negatively he sees Walter's current attitudes. We can also see how controlling Max is in the relationship – he feels able to define not only his behavior but Walter's as well.

It is impressive to notice the way much criticism of gay relationships appears in this novel on the representation of this couple. There is a moment, for example, in which a character asks if Max is gay. Yet, the answer is: "He's not gay. His boyfriend is" (MAYR. P. 214). The reader may be confused and ask "how could it be possible?". A non-gay dating a gay guy? However, it seems to us that such an answer is an attempt to value Walter's position as a gay out of the closet while Max is still into it. To the character who expresses his thoughts in such a way, it is clear that being a gay out of the closet is reason for pride. It is a way of inverting roles – if society asks. In this case, it is like heteronormative gays did not deserve to be called as gays. In this passage, Mayr criticizes social norms by describing a scene in which a heteronormative gay does not have the approval of another gay who is publically same-sex oriented. It is basically what Thomas Peele

¹³ Original in Portuguese – [*Muitos homossexuais também normalizados ajudam na estigmatização e na percepção negativa daqueles que não cabem na heteronormatividade*].

(2007, p. 2) explains below, but inverting the group who uses to be described as the one as “being in need of acceptance”,

Texts of popular culture frequently represent lesbian and gay people as being in need of acceptance by straight people, just as Kippy Sunderstrom represents Darren Lemming, these texts construct a heterosexual audience that is in a position to be tolerant. The construction of this subject position, in turn, reproduces the very marginalization of lesbians and gay men that the text might be trying to undermine, since this construction more or less permanently isolates queer culture. And, as Britzman suggests, a model of acceptance that relies on tolerance might require some subjectivities to remain intolerable.

It seems to be clear that Max hides behind Walter’s more open queerness, repressing it in public. Of course it is not easy to break the norms and come out of the closet, but it is not easy to live in the closet either. It may be seen as a safe place to be in, but it is, at the same time, a place of loneliness and uncertainty, where society somehow makes gay people see their same-sex orientation as a problem still to be solved; just like Max’s thoughts at the moment he suffers a car accident.

His metal side screams, a punch in his door, the gouged paint, his tire gashed and melting. His car skids and squeals and he wonders how he is going to argue his way out of this one, he has a report to write for the director, he has budgets to balance, he can’t fritter away even fifteen minutes worrying about nonsense like this, how many witnesses, he can taste blood, this is no easy speeding ticket he can play stupid with. Maybe he will die, and he guesses dying will solve his problems, but he doesn’t want to die, he doesn’t want to be in pain, he wishes he could have said goodbye to Walter, Oh Walter, I love you, I’m so sorry, who cares about a table. Why did he care so much about a stupid table? Someone who cares that much about a table deserves a one-way ticket to Ponoka. (MAYR, p. 134-135)

This situation shows us that he loves Walter, who is his husband, which would probably mean “family” for society; Walter is the closest person to Max in terms of connivance, for they live together in the same house, they work in the same place, they share a life. However, Max still refuses to bring his same-sex relationship to the public sphere when he is confronted by a paramedic:

__Is there anyone you want to call? asks a paramedic.

__No, says Max, straightening his shoulders, he is a single, professional man in his late forties and so he doesn’t need any help. No one. (MAYR, p. 135)

What it is implicit in this passage is the fact that to Max, the “closet” is really seen as a safe place to live in as a member of society, free from worries and pressures. Maybe he wanted to call Walter at the moment of the accident, but to him it was important to maintain his position in the public sphere. That said, we may bring up Miskolci speech while commenting the “*Epistemology of the Closet*” by Sedgwick:

The closet is a way of regulating the social life of people who have same-sex relationships, but are still afraid of the consequences in the familial and public spheres. It is based on the secret, the “lie” and the double identity. This triad constitutes protection mechanisms that also imprison and bequeath psychic and social consequences to those who hide in it. Dividing a self into two, maintaining an illusory identity between yourself and those with whom you coexist, requires a lot of effort and ability to withstand the fear of being discovered. Fear creates the need to always be alert for signs that denounce your intimacy and desires, to avoid places and people who associate you with a dreaded identity, force to act against your own feelings and maintain commitment to the social order that rejects you, controls and pruning of the most varied forms.¹⁴

The “closet” is and will still be for a long time a tool for survival for many LGBTQs, no matter the social advances. Almost at the end of the novel Max is confronted by another character that is a drag queen with the name of Crêpe Suzette. In a gay bar, Max says to her: “I was just looking for my nephew Colin”, and Suzette answers: “Oh, honey. Just let your nephew die a *natural death*” (MAYR, p. 213).¹⁵ It happens that this drag queen is the uncle of a student who studies in the same school where Max is the principal. This girl, whose name is Faraday, told her uncle about the dead boy Patrick Furey, who committed suicide, fact that shocked her. The expression “*natural death*” in his dialogue with Max shows that the closet is full of pressure; it is a place where people closed inside feel incapable of asking for help and, because of that, they may want to give up their lives, as Patrick Furey has done. To die a *natural death* means to live with no oppression.

¹⁴ Original in Portuguese: [O armário é uma forma de regulação da vida social de pessoas que se relacionam com outras do mesmo sexo, mas temem as consequências nas esferas familiar e pública. Ele se baseia no segredo, na “mentira” e na vida dupla. Esta tríade constitui mecanismos de proteção que também aprisionam e legam consequências psíquicas e sociais àqueles que nele se escondem. Dividir-se em dois, manter uma fachada ilusória entre si mesmo e aqueles com quem convive, exige muito esforço e capacidade para suportar o medo de ser descoberto. O temor cria a necessidade de estar sempre alerta para sinais que denunciem sua intimidade e desejos, evitar lugares e pessoas que o associem a uma identidade temida, força para agir contra seus próprios sentimentos e manter o compromisso com a ordem social que o rejeita, controla e poda das mais variadas formas].

¹⁵ Author’s emphasis.

After analyzing an adult gay couple's life, we are going to discuss the same-sex love in the lives of two younger students, relation which is extremely important for the development of *Monoceros*, as it is presented in the following section.

2.2 Patrick Furey (the dead boy) and Ginger: Frontiers between life and death

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors - Oscar Wilde

Since we have Max and Walter as the center of our discussion about the tensions between public and private life for gay people, from now on we will concentrate on the relationship established between Patrick and Ginger; a hidden relationship - at least until some point. Even though they were students in the same Catholic School, which represents society as one of its institutions, Patrick Furey and Ginger did not use to go out together, neither in the halls nor out of school. It was the kind of social relationship in which we know something is going on but no one is sure about what it is. Their first "meeting" was silent, in the weight room during a class in which they were enrolled together. This meeting means the first time they noticed each other and identified some kind of attraction taking place; that was the beginning of something they did not even know what was supposed to be.

Ginger's chest and shoulders popping as he bench-pressed, Furey poised just above him, in the centre of his eyebrows a perfect frown line, Furey's eyes on Ginger's, Ginger could have sworn he'd just been kissed. (MAYR, p. 139)

This description shows us how they were not fully aware of their situation, once it is their first described meeting. There was not a feeling yet, or intentions. It is a moment in which these two boys are admiring (or desiring) each other; and, of course, it has to do with their repressed sexuality. That is why they do not understand very well what has just happened. After that, Ginger has a moment of reflection:

Ginger zipped open his backpack. Biology test next week. His index finger on the diagram of a bisected human heart. His cellphone purred. Another text from Furey. He clicked the text open. Never knew how easy, how normal, this could be. (MAYR, p. 139)

This passage describes how both guys were not sure about what was happening between them. It is a moment of discoveries. Yet it is funny the way Mayr plays with words. In this passage, she describes the "chemistry" that arises between them in their first meeting. Moreover, in the same

passage Ginger remembers from nothing that he will have a Biology test to be done “next week” – subject hugely used to impose heteronormativity as natural from a “rationalization of biological mimicry”, as Rita Terezinha Schmidt (2017) says. What happens in the situation described above is the beginning of a kind of relationship – which is not determined in the novel - between two boys. Still reflecting on Biology, sex and gender, Butler (1990, p. 6) says that:

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. [...] Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders.

We do not have so much information about Ginger, but Patrick, the dead boy, had lived tough moments in all spheres of his life. His family could not accept him as a “normal” person just because of his sexuality, for example. His mother even tried to convince him that “he was confused”. Following the parameters and expectations of a society, the future of a teenager boy should be to be a heterosexual man; nothing more. It can be too much pressure for a boy who is starting to understand his sexuality as an inherent human characteristic. Not being accepted for who we are may cause unknown inner struggles that might be too harsh for a person such as Patrick Furey to deal with.

The day he told you he was gay. – Just be normal, you said. – Sell insurance if you want. Burn around Europe, then come home, go to university, save up for a car. You’ll find a girlfriend. You’ll be different then. You’ll grow into who you’ll be. Your husband in denial. Your husband insisting *it’s just a phase*. (MAYR, p. 157).

Patrick, as we may notice, is aware about his sexuality. Ginger, on the other hand, has a girlfriend, which could make him a bisexual person. However, dating someone does not mean that you love this person. Ginger shares his intense feelings for Patrick several times. He admits that he loves Patrick and for that we may infer that he dates a girl in order not to suffer prejudice – which happens a lot. In a moment of intimacy, they talk about presents:

__When will you give me your picture for it? asked the dead boy.
__You crazy? asked Ginger, his eyes darting over the graves, his mouth blowing on his cold hands, on the dead boy’s. – What if you lose it? Anyways, you don’t need a picture, we see each other in the halls. But see the rose engraved on the front? It’s red. Red means love. (MAYR, p. 11-12)

We can say that Ginger is to some extent a little bit afraid of turning public his relationship with Patrick, but he does not deny that his feelings for Patrick are real. That said, we need to pay attention to the fact that their meetings are in a place where people are not used to: The cemetery. For them, the cemetery represents “the safe and luscious dark” (MAYR, p. 202) they “need”, and this way it becomes the frontier between life and death.

After Patrick’s death, Ginger could easily live his life, however, “he wishes that every night could be like that last night they met here, right on this spot. He wishes he could be dead too” (MAYR, p. 202). It is tough for a teenager to deal with such mix of feelings. It is like he needs to state a positioning on his life, but first, he has to survive the mourning. Petra, Ginger’s girlfriend, was aware about the secret-same-sex relationship in which Patrick and Ginger were. She was responsible for the bullying Patrick faced in several circumstances. She even tried to do the same with Ginger, in the sense of controlling him, imposing the heteronormativity, making reference to what we have been discussing since the beginning in this work. However, he was strong enough for not accepting it.

Meet me or IL tel the hol skool, she texts him, her hands shaking and cold as she clicks in the words on her phone.
The beautiful chime of a message in her inbox, she tears it open, her lover is finally talking to her!
Then youll B a murderer 2 x, says the message from Ginger.
She repulses him. (MAYR, p. 205).

Living surrounded by people who does not understand your struggles is really harsh for anybody. Patrick, bullying and social rejection reproduced by the patterns of heteronormativity were enough for him to take his own life. For Ginger, being exposed could make him suffer the same as his same-sex lover. They are examples of the real frontiers that day by day people pretend not to see.

One has to keep in mind that Mayr shows her readers that having gay workers at that school does not help those students at all in dealing with their sexual difference. In fact, it might be that, exactly because they were able to identify what was going on, they stayed away from the guys, trying not to deal with that topic at that institution. At the same time, Mayr presents us Petra, a very cold, rigid female student, as suggested by her name – Petra, that is connected to the word rock in its origins -, who is an obstacle between the two guys, not allowing their real falling in love. Petra is a character that will probably be analyzed in deeper ways in future works on *Monoceros* we intend to develop.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To all the young people who discover they are gay: Don't be afraid to come out of the closet right now - Núria Añó

To talk about *Monoceros* meant to me more than simply analyzing a novel. It meant to give voice to people that are represented by the characters presented in this work and also to problematize social aspects that still need to be developed through discussions, for they can bring huge consequences to people's lives if not taken into consideration; Patrick Furey's suicide is an example, once he felt somehow "invisible". Schmidt (2017, p. 252) affirms that "voice is the register of the individual's presence"¹⁶, so people need to be heard and have their stories shared.

Monoceros is not only a proposal of reflection on happenings post a suicide but also about previous events as we presented. It is about empowerment, dreams, denouncement and speeches too. There is a character named Faraday who was not one of our main focuses on this work, but who has an important role along the novel, for she is the only one who really cares about the "dead boy" – even though they were not close friends, but classmates. She is a person who truly believes in unicorns and maybe that is how her connection to Patrick is established. She represents kindness and empathy because of the way she deals with people around her, despite the fact they do not understand her beliefs. Her voice is extremely important to us once she is as restless as the reader about Patrick's death/suicide. In a moment of reflection with herself, for example, we have a draw of her thoughts about death and society through the symbol of the school: "Of course. Maybe Patrick with his perfect skin lies under one of these tombstones. Maybe several Patricks lie under several of these tombstones, the grief of an entire school enfolding each of them" (MAYR, p. 132). Then again, we can infer that society "enfolds" people out of heteronormativity, just like it happens to Patrick.

On the other hand, Max represents the gay oppressor, figure is easily found in our societies. He is the common gay "into the closet" who is aware of the privilege of following patterns and for this reason he limits himself to express his same-sex love only in the private life. The problem with that is his judgmental attitude that is more likely prejudice than only a way of living. On Patrick Furey's suicide, for example, it is Max who says: "Patrick Furey took his own life and threw the school into chaos" (MAYR, p. 180). It is an example of violence against not only the memory of a queer 17-year-old boy (who is a young boy before sexuality or gender identity) but also to all young boys who find themselves in desperate moments because of a sexuality they did

¹⁶ Original in Portuguese: [a voz é o registro da presença do ser].

not even chose; One can state that, in the novel, most of the characters do not make an effort to comprehend it. As Schmidt (2017, p. 249) asserts about giving visibility to discussions on gender, “it is not a trivial or frivolous attitude, because speaking of gender is not a topic of private life, but of social life in general, and of intellectual life in a particular way”¹⁷, which has a lot to do with our discussion on Max and Walter.

Patrick was a victim of this model of society, which is extremely judgmental and patriarchal. He suffered pressure in all aspects of his public life – family, school, religion, relationship. Everything connected. He is not only a boy who committed suicide; he is, rather, a product of the oppression who reacts by killing himself.

It is interesting to see that the Canadian context is not that different from ours. Although it is a developed country, violence and prejudice are still phenomena to be confronted. And that is why books such this one must be explored and shared. Literature is about the pleasure of reading and also about the power of touching people. Just like many human beings, “The boy a supernova in this unicorn constellation.” (MAYR, p. 258) may be taken as an advice on how to deal with our students – attention, care, positive attitudes are the best tools, for sure. We want all Patricks alive, not only as stars or memories, although recognizing that memories are important to guide us towards the locations we look for in life.

Monoceros is a novel in which Mayr gave visibility to different views and experiences of queerness. Patrick, as a matter of fact, is the one to promote the whole discussion that emerges in that school. Through his death, which affects most characters in the novel, bringing to light the theme of intolerance, bullying and the consequent suicide of a young guy, becomes an opportunity to discuss such a problem with students and readers; those who might be affected by his destiny in Mayr's plot.

¹⁷ Original in Portuguese: [*Não se trata de uma atitude trivial ou leviana, porque falar de gênero não é um tópico da vida privada, mas da vida social em geral, e da vida intelectual de modo particular*].

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