



Alambique. Revista académica de  
ciencia ficción y fantasía / Jornal  
acadêmico de ficção científica e  
fantasia

---

Volume 7  
Issue 1 *Ibero-American Homage to Mary  
Shelley*


Article 5

---

## Resistant Female Cyborgs in Brazil

M. Elizabeth Ginway  
*University of Florida*, [eginway@ufl.edu](mailto:eginway@ufl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/alambique>

 Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ginway, M. Elizabeth (2020) "Resistant Female Cyborgs in Brazil," *Alambique. Revista académica de ciencia ficción y fantasía / Jornal acadêmico de ficção científica e fantasia*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/2167-6577.7.1.5>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/alambique/vol7/iss1/5>

Authors retain copyright of their material under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#).

In her oft-cited “A Cyborg Manifesto,” (1985) Donna Haraway conceptualizes the cyborg as a feminist possibility, emphasizing the need for a self-created, self-engendered female, free from the demands of capitalism and the Freudian neuroses caused by traditional family life (150). In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles identifies three stages of cybernetic theory from the 1940s to the present, i.e., cybernetic feedback loops, reflexivity and pattern recognition,<sup>1</sup> which she uses to analyze to science fiction’s portrayals of artificially enhanced humans, androids and artificial intelligence. In this article, I discuss examples of Brazilian artificial humans in works by Caio Fernando Abreu, Roberto de Sousa Causo and João Paulo Cuenca that follow the trajectory described by Hayles and raise the gender issues discussed by Haraway. Despite their rebellious nature, Brazilian gendered cyborgs generally fail to embody Haraway’s feminist vision for independence; instead, like Frankenstein’s creature, they yearn for emotional acceptance through romantic partnerships or family structures.<sup>2</sup> Here I argue that, as allegories for modernity, their search for acceptance is best understood within the history and paradigms of Latin American culture.

To analyze these examples of female cyborgs, I apply Ecuadoran philosopher Bolívar Echeverría’s concept of the “baroque ethos,” which refers to strategies and attitudes forged by subalterns as a way of surviving at the margins of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Echeverría’s cultural critique bears a marked resemblance to Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade’s idea of cultural cannibalism or *antropofagia*, a concept that appropriates and re-assembles dominant cultural paradigms. Echeverría describes the cultural and racial mixture resulting from Latin American colonial contact as “códigofagia” to illustrate how cultural codes were metaphorically devoured and reformulated by all members of society in a way that challenged the dominance of a single class (83-84). Both of these approaches identify local or subaltern forms of culture as the basis from which colonial legacies are critiqued, spurring local re-combinations and re-creations in the formation of a national imaginary. While Andrade evoked the cannibal as a trope for active resistance against hegemonic cultures and cultural colonization in Brazil in the 1920s, Echeverría focuses on historical and contemporary forms of resistance in cultural and political movements of the 1990s in Mexico (Gandler 78-79).

Although he is a Marxian philosopher, Bolívar Echeverría considers the idea of “revolution” to be based on a myth that society can be reconstructed from pure or new beginnings outside of capitalism (Gandler 234 n. 130). Echeverría’s emphasis on corporeality and the body brings the idea of labor to the forefront.<sup>4</sup> As machines constructed for labor, Latin American cyborgs cannot deny their place within capitalism, but they resist it in both direct and indirect ways, either by adopting an aggressiveness that goes beyond traditional gender roles or by

appearing to conform while working towards independence. At the same time the term “códigofagia” implies an assemblage of disparate cultural elements that must work together to form a “body politic.” If we consider that tensions between modernity and tradition characterize Latin American cultural experience, we can see how modernity (as expressed by cyborgs) can be coupled with tradition (resistance and community), in a baroque gesture for survival within Latin American societies.<sup>5</sup>

I have found the body, gender and sexuality to be salient features of Brazilian female cyborgs. The implied “wetware” of the interface between the organic flesh and inorganic material of the cyborg body, along with the presence of sexuality and reproduction, recalls Kristeva’s concept of the female body and its “disowned” or “banished” nature (8-10). Female cyborgs often provoke anxiety by calling societal expectations into question, and like Frankenstein’s male creation, are often victims of the hypocrisy, corruption and prejudice that surround them. As agents of political crisis or victims of social upheaval, they simultaneously contest female gender expectations through action while longing for acceptance in new types of communities or partnerships. In their quest for survival, they express the contradictory attitudes and experiences typical of the baroque ethos.

I begin with the work of Caio Fernando Abreu, a mainstream writer who is best known for working with themes of bisexuality and queerness. His oeuvre, dating from 1970 to 1996, de-centers the typical literary representations of national and personal identity (Arenas 13-14). In the 1975 story, “A ascensão e queda de Robhéa, manequim e robô,” [The Rise and Fall of Robhéa, Model and Robot] he endows a robot/cyborg with gender in an allegorical story about the Brazilian military regime and its persecution of artists and militants. Abreu uses the artificial nature of cyborgs to call attention to the fear and attraction of the Other in both a political and sexual sense. Despite Robheá’s desire for love and acceptance,<sup>6</sup> Abreu’s gendered cyborg remains a powerful symbol of political resistance.

Set in a near-future society run by an authoritarian regime, Abreu’s story fits into the trend of dystopian texts written in Brazil during the 1970s and 80s, when mainstream writers turned to this subgenre of science fiction to capture the tensions of the new industrial order imposed by the military dictatorship (1964-1985).<sup>7</sup> In the story, when a sudden plague affecting only humanoid robots emerges, the government denies them treatment and waits for them to “die.” Cynically, the government later launches a campaign to promote the sale of their metal remains as fashion accessories, thus commercializing the diseased parts of this population and converting them into desirable objects as commodified “outsider” art. The decorative use of the cyborg body parts shows how the recirculation of goods can result in ever more subtle forms of control, since the

now prestigious articles worn on the body reveal the consumerist mindset of modernity. This circulation is comparable to a cybernetic feedback loop described by Hayles as the first stage of cybernetics (9), since the robot/cyborg “outsiders” supply input for the system controlled and regulated by consumer “insiders.” Thus, the capitalist recirculation of formerly “taboo” objects allows the regime to re-absorb the energy of resistance to maintain its own power, since excess energy (dissent) is re-channeled and allowed to escape (as fashion), guaranteeing the smooth running of the system through a type of homeostatic control.

Despite government censorship, a journalist begins to publish news stories about the plague, turning a forbidden topic—robot/cyborg culture—into a new and different fashion trend, because humans then begin to imitate the cybernetic look by wearing metallic clothing and artificial eyewear, deepening their obsession with the forbidden Other. The journalist eventually becomes famous enough to establish an artistic movement that attracts fashion designers, artists, writers, actors and film directors, who raise the country’s artistic status to a new international level of visibility. As Idelber Avelar (“Masculinity” 187-188) notes, it becomes clear that Abreu’s robots are allegories for queerness in Brazilian society, and how this community’s artistic contributions are coopted and exploited as part of Brazil’s cultural identity. Again, cultural resistance is converted into cultural capital, this time on an international scale.

The end of the story finally introduces us introduced to “Robh ea,” the title character. She is the “offspring” of a secret group of surviving robots and the central figure of the story. Abreu’s artificial humans have families, human-like relationships and display sexual desire.<sup>8</sup> Despite the accepted robot fashion trends, actual robots continue to be subversive, with the result that Robh ea is imprisoned by the regime shortly after being discovered and used as an example of a terrorist threat. Later, she is released from prison and sponsored by a fashion designer who helps her become a famous model and actress. However, after five years, at the height of her success as an icon of Brazilian *carnaval*, amid rumors of her homosexuality, she isolates herself on an island. When a bestselling tell-all book cataloguing Robh ea’s lesbian exploits is published, she commits suicide. In a final irony, the regime turns even this most extreme form of protest to its advantage by erecting a memorial in her honor, continuing exchange of resistance and cooptation of subaltern protest by the Brazilian state.<sup>9</sup>

In his analysis of Abreu’s story, Avelar points out that the author’s use of the robot’s sexual preference and gender identity helps us understand attitudes towards transvestites and gay culture in Brazilian society (187). It could be argued that robot culture expresses an uncanny combination of acceptance and rejection of queerness in Brazilian culture, since while it is accepted in carnival and melodrama, where gender performativity and high levels of emotion resonate strongly (Perez n/p), it is rejected on a more basic level, as seen in high levels of

violence against LGBTQ communities.<sup>10</sup> This shows that the body and sexuality remain central to the construction of the Latin American cyborg. Abreu's robots manage to form colonies, resist, reproduce and survive, and while their unstable identity provokes anxiety in and persecution by humans, they are subsequently used to generate wealth and cultural prestige. In her examination of the posthuman body in *El monstruo como máquina de guerra* (2017), Mabel Moraña concludes that the cyborg body escapes classification in a way that implies contagion and dissemination (235), recalling the metaphor of the robot plague that Abreu uses to begin his 1975 story. He anticipates gender conflict and highlights the unstable cyborg characteristics of Robhéa, who is simultaneously heroic and fragile, hardened and vulnerable as an artificial female who threatens the foundations of society.

In some ways, Robhéa's struggle calls attention to a baroque form of resistance, which is distinct from that of the masculinist heroic narrative. In his study of the literature of political resistance, Idelber Avelar points out that any attitude other than open defiance is framed as suspect, "feminized" or "silenced" (*Untimely* 66). I argue that it is the gendered nature of Robhéa's struggle that avoids the heroic rhetoric of realist texts associated with the dictatorship period as analyzed by Avelar, who describes how autobiographical testimonial narratives were used to codify political resistance and to suppress issues of loss, mourning and defeat in national consciousness (*Untimely* 62).

Notably, Robhéa's story appears in the 1975 anthology *O ovo apunhalado* (The Stabbed Egg), suggesting the ambivalence of Abreu's vision: the egg with its hard shell represents a masculinity that contains the fluids associated with femininity and reproduction. Using the image of the stabbed egg, Abreu evokes the violent rupture of the symbolic order in his own ambiguously gendered way, i.e., by depicting the collapse of the border between the "inside and outside," i.e., masculine and feminine, threatening traditional heteronormative concepts (Kristeva 232). By breaking taboos among literary genres (mainstream and science fiction) and by using queer characters that straddle sexual gender, Abreu uses the hard robot shell to contain the vulnerability of Robhéa inside. Her trajectory, through pariah status, success and finally co-optation mirrors the experience of outsider artists in Brazilian society in the 1970s. Finally, one might argue that the uncanniest aspect of this story—written in 1975—is its anticipation of the AIDS epidemic.<sup>11</sup> The portrayal of cyborgs who long for acceptance and community captures the tensions between tradition and modernity in a baroque ethos of adaptation, survival and resistance within Brazilian society.

Abreu's writing is radical for the period because he avoids facile divisions between robots and humans, homosexuality and heteronormativity, resistance and collaboration. He critiques military repression, but does not turn any of his characters into heroic figures of resistance typical of the realist *romance-*

*reportagem* (journalistic novels) of the period. Avelar argues that such narratives allowed the Brazilian public to experience a sense of catharsis and relief without guilt or mourning (*Untimely* 61-63). Flora Süsskind makes a similar point, noting that these texts, although critical of the regime, fit into the naturalist paradigms of Brazilian culture and society, whose “growing pains” were part of the country’s long road to the “utopia” of a modern nation (57).<sup>12</sup> Thus, after 1985 and the end of the regime, the rhetoric of democracy was overlaid onto a society whose institutions remained largely unchanged. Instead of exorcising the violence of the past, its civilian leaders simply pushed it away while steering toward a neoliberal future of global competition.<sup>13</sup>

The figure of a defiant female cyborg resurfaces in 2008, some thirty years after Abreu’s story, in Roberto de Sousa Causo’s “Rosas Brancas” [White Roses], whose protagonist is a female cyborg named Shiroma. Her story may be seen as an allegory of Brazil’s more recent past: she is the daughter of a soldier (suggesting the military regime), who is sold out by her mysterious father (a neoliberal transaction) only to find herself in the midst of organized crime (violence, narco- and human trafficking).

The conflict between Shiroma’s cyborg status and her human emotions can be explained in part by Hayles’s second stage of cybernetics or “reflexivity,” i.e., an awareness of the human presence within the cybernetic loop that blurs the distinctions between inside and outside, machine and human (174). She points out that this “reflexivity” characterizes human and non-human interactions in Philip K. Dick’s androids, as in his 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (175), in which the androids are often more emotionally expressive than their human counterparts. In contrast, Shiroma’s father, an impassive scientist named Perseu Sunn, has no feelings for the cybernetic beings he has fabricated in his military lab. His first creation, a mixed-race cyborg named Mara, is unaware that she is not completely human, because she experiences and displays human emotions. After serving in a military unit off-world, Mara returns to Earth, where she becomes Sunn’s lover and mysteriously conceives a daughter. This incestuous situation, where Mara is both creation/daughter and lover/wife of the scientist, could be construed as representing the corruption of a dictatorial past that remains entwined in Brazil’s current body politic. This becomes part of the heritage that Shiroma must face as she struggles to survive in her crime-ridden society.

In “Rosas Brancas,” Mara finds out about her own cyborg identity when she tries to recover five-year-old Shiroma from kidnappers. It turns out that Sunn had secretly decided to sell them both to an organized crime network, but ordered the transaction staged as a kidnapping in order to hide the sale from the military lab. Mara proves to be more human than her creator, for her maternal instincts induce her to sacrifice herself for her daughter. Shiroma survives the ordeal, only to be raised by a couple who use the resources of a criminal organization to train

her as an assassin. Shiroma is essentially enslaved to her new masters in a situation typical of human trafficking.

The fast-paced story “O novo protótipo” [The New Prototype], published in 2009, continues Shiroma’s tale some 12 years later, now set in the ironically named neighborhood of Liberdade (“Liberty”), the first and principal Japanese community of São Paulo. Shiroma, who can pass as a native of this neighborhood, is now 17 years old, and is on her first mission, an assassination. She mentions in passing that she has been sexually initiated by a man and a woman before making her first kill. While she does not describe herself per se as bisexual, she admits to having sexual feelings as she recalls this first experience. However, she does not use her sexuality in her work as an assassin. As the story unfolds and she confronts the criminal who is her target, we gain insight into her psychological fragility, as she relies for her mother’s advice even as she scales walls and breaks out of powerful restraints before killing her victim.

As the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, Shiroma’s character develops further in the ten stories of the collection *Shiroma, matadora ciborgue* [Shiroma, Cyborg Assassin] (2015). In the last of these stories, recalling Haraway’s dictum that cyborgs are seldom loyal to their father-creators, Shiroma ends up killing Sunn, as well as her criminal captors in the 2010 story, “Tempestade solar” [Sun Storm]. As a part Asian, part mixed-race, sexually queer cyborg assassin, Shiroma combines genetic and moral codes in a way reminiscent of Echeverría’s *códigofagia*, constructing herself as a unique cultural assemblage. She resists both the military, as represented by her father, and her organized crime bosses, while longing for her mother. Despite her work as an assassin, Shiroma is a sympathetic character whose search for survival allows her to work within a system while simultaneously attempting to escape it.

Shiroma may also be regarded as an appropriation of the cyborg assassin figure that first appeared in Japanese cyberpunk manga and animé, most famously in the 1995 film *The Ghost in the Shell*, in which a young woman’s brain is put into a prosthetic body—hence the idea of a ghost (her spirit/brain) in a shell (body) as explained by Sharalyn Orbaugh (445). Yet Causo’s Brazilian version—Shiroma—differs from the Japanese cyborg because she was conceived and born in a conventional way, retaining a mostly human body and strong ties to her mother with whom she communicates telepathically.<sup>14</sup>

Shiroma often deploys her apparent feminine fragility to gain the upper hand on her missions, since her delicate appearance disguises her unexpected masculine strength. Given her connection with her mother and her political function as a “justiceira” or equalizer in a society riddled with crime, she presents a different configuration of cyborg: she does not present the mind/body split of the Japanese series (since she retains human organs and skin) nor the independent traits of the Harawayesque postgendered cyborg (in her attachment to her

mother). Causo's story presents an unlikely illustration of the *ethos barroco* in its reverence for motherhood (tradition, conservatism), the struggle for independence from organized crime (resistance, inconformity), and Shiroma's mission of social justice.

In *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (2002), Margrit Shildrick asserts that the monstrous body brings out "the otherness of possible worlds or possible versions of ourselves not yet realized" (Shildrick 129). This suggests that the cyborg could represent an in-between that exists between the natural and the technological, offering a sense of emancipation. It free us, if only momentarily, from biological, cultural and technological constraints in a utopian alternative implied in Shiroma's search for freedom, identity and community.

This utopian possibility is also brought up by the sexualized female android of J. P. Cuenca's 2010 *O único final feliz de uma história de amor é um acidente* [*The Only Happy Ending to a Love Story is an Accident*].<sup>15</sup> Set in Tokyo, the novel is about an android or artificial human named Yoshiko who is essentially a sex doll made to the specifications of an aged Japanese poet, Atsuo Okuda. Spending most of her time in Okuda's apartment, she narrates four chapters in the first person throughout the novel, and while she initially appears to be a minor character, I believe she holds the key the story as the representative of resistance and survival of the baroque ethos.

In this novel, the city of Tokyo is portrayed as a giant cyborg whose eyes are the cameras that monitor public places, recalling Foucault's description of the Panopticon and surveillance in modern life (201-203). While the city (and patriarchal society) is conceived of as a giant male cyborg, the female cyborg (in the figure of Yoshiko) belongs to private space and appears to be confined and powerless. Caught between these forces is the poet's son, Shunsuke, who initially does not realize that his father has hidden cameras in his apartment and a group of informants to keep him abreast of his son's activities.

Okuda disapproves of his son's relationship with his new lover, Iulana, a Polish-Romanian woman, and threatens to kill her. Okuda seduces her, and later arranges to have both her and his son killed in a train accident as alluded to in the novel's title. The son, Shunsuke, survives the accident and obsessively describes word for word, at several points in the text (17, 54, 106, and 141).<sup>16</sup> He begins with a description of the moments leading up to the accident, e.g., describing a billboard on top of a building where a children's ballet class is in progress, as well as the sights, smells and sounds that accompanied the accident. As the novel progresses, it becomes ever clearer to Shunsuke, who somehow gains access to his father's surreptitiously gathered data, that the event was planned and engineered by his father and his hidden cadre of conspirators.



Though it is true that Okuda acts as though the people in whose lives he interferes are mere avatars in a video game, the novel insists on physicality and the body. Readers learn that the revered poet abused his own wife and son both physically and psychologically. The poet now watches large numbers of people from a distance, corrupting some and destroying others, while ordering executions and beatings that are described in painful detail. While the repetition of the train accident and the sexual rivalry between father and son underscore a certain mythic inevitability that precludes change, the presence of beaten and dead bodies calls upon readers to question the prerogatives of this powerful and perverse poet.

The novel lends itself to interpretation using Hayles's idea of the third stage of cybernetic evolution, since pattern recognition and randomness characterize cybernetic fictions. The repeated textual passages (patterns) leading up to the accident suggest the mayhem caused by the accident (chaos). Viewed in conjunction with the novel's oedipal crisis between father and son, the text almost begs for a Lacanian interpretation of desire. For Lacan, the crisis of (male) development corresponds to the idea that desire (the phallus) and subjectivity are founded on absence or lack, which corresponds to a symbolic castration (Hook 62-63). Hayles compares Lacanian desire to the alternation of presence and absence of data as pattern recognition punctuated by randomness that she calls "flickering signifiers," similar to the zero-one principle of algorithms used for computer coding (*Posthuman* 30-31). Desire is always elusive and displaced in an alternation of absence and presence in the play of flickering signifiers, according to Hayles, privileging data and absence over embodiment and presence (285). In Cuenca's novel, data, recollection and desire are leveraged or mediated in the images and data retrieved by the son, who often refers to his father as a "lagosta." As a metaphorical lobster, the father's phallus/camera represents the pattern of desire, while his pincers represent castration and absence. The poet refers to his son as "estorvinho" [turbulence] that fits the idea of pattern recognition (the repetition of the exact words of the accident) punctuated by the chaos (randomness, turbulence) it provokes. Hayles writes that, "Mutation is the catastrophe in the pattern/randomness dialectic analogous to castration in the presence/absence dialectic" (33), and I suggest that perhaps the mutation is the possible murderous act of Yoshiko, an artificial intelligence programmed for pleasure, which I will describe below.

The train wreck is the central organizing event of the novel, signaling the ultimate absence, which is death. Although critics have not recognized the novel as science fiction per se, it uses the language of the third cybernetic phase of randomness and pattern recognition, which it deploys along with the presence of the female android, Yoshiko. When Iulana is killed and many bodies are destroyed in the accident, all that remains is the digital archive of the accident data, an archive that can be played over and over. This simultaneously

memorializes and erases human existence in a spectral trace. The text also suggests that the cyborg Yoshiko will soon become a substitute for the real body of Iulana in the pattern of desire of father and son. In the final line of the novel, the poet informs his son that he will soon meet Yoshiko when she prepares their evening meal of puffer fish.

Ironically, Yoshiko is the most sympathetic of all the characters, reinforcing Hayles's idea of reflexivity between humans and cyborgs. Yoshiko attempts to understand her own existence as well as the human concepts of death and love, at one point saying that that she wishes she could take refuge in the body of the poet (74), just as he had housed the ashes of his late wife in her, as a way of expressing love. However, when Yoshiko spies on the poet with his son's lover, Iulana, she feels a sensation of heat in her chest and a desire to kill him. We realize that Yoshiko, the artificial human, has developed human emotions and may kill in a moment of passion, but the poet, who uses technology to manipulate the lives of those around him, is more sinister and machine-like, responsible for killing dozens in the train accident. It is the power associated with data that gives him control and makes his destructive actions possible. Since the poison of the puffer fish can be fatal, we are left to wonder whether Yoshiko will follow her programming and prepare the meal correctly, or commit a random act of subversion and vengeance by poisoning her master, thereby freeing herself and reinforcing the title of the novel and its "happy ending" (*O único final feliz*). My guess is that, like Paolo Bacigalupi's heroine in *The Wind-up Girl*, Yoshiko will indeed overcome her programming and pursue her independence. The fact that Yoshiko's inner monologues appear in red ink in the novel, suggesting the color of blood, make this betrayal or transition seem possible. It also may mark what Hayles notes as the moment of rupture of a mutation in the pattern/randomness dialectic: "Flickering signification brings together language with psychodynamics based on the symbolic moment when the human confronts the posthuman" (33), or, as in Yoshiko's act of resistance, the posthuman confronts the human. Yoshiko, ironically, may be capable of the disobedience that the son could not muster, making us question the human/machine divide and the origins of rebellious acts of survival of the baroque ethos.

Particularly noteworthy in this novel is the Japanese setting. While one critic, Marcel Vejmelka, views Cuenca's use of Japanese culture and setting as Orientalist and superficial (225), it does serve the function of distancing readers from Brazil and its realist paradigms. As a distancing device, this mimics Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement. The Japanese setting provides an original lens for viewing such issues as illegal immigration, technology, violence against women, data gathering, and generational rivalries, all of which are themes germane to Brazilian literature. It also calls attention to the fetish of foreign

culture in Brazil and the receptivity to outsiders, especially those perceived as having technological, financial or cultural prestige.

Ironically, Cuenca takes aim at high culture, especially poetry and its cult of the artist/poet, attacking the fetishization and reverence for high art in Brazil, an approach similar to Rubem Fonseca's subversion of the crime genre in *A grande arte* (1983). In this best-selling novel, which took the literary establishment by storm, Fonseca uses classical culture and literary allusions—features of 'high art'—to offer a scathing critique of Brazilian society and its literary establishment while also bridging the popular and the erudite (Vieira 109-112). Cuenca's combination of "fetishizing" high art by "mixing in" science fiction is therefore also part of the novel's antropophagic devouring of codes or literary *códigofagia* in its resistance to literature as capital.

What fascinates me about the appearance of these female cyborgs in different moments of economic and technological change in Brazil—the period of state sponsored industrialization of the 1970s and the contemporary digital global economy emerging in the 2000s— is how they deploy the gendered body as feminized avatars, both of labor—as performers, assassins or sex workers—and of mourning, survival and resistance. While they struggle to reconfigure conventional notions of family or love, they remain vulnerable as they attempt to break traumatic cycles and mourn the past. Indeed, all three cyborgs are associated with mourning: Robhéa has a monument constructed in her honor, Shiroma retains a connection to her deceased mother, and Yoshiko's body houses the funeral urn containing the ashes of the poet's abused spouse. Their artificial bodies are also reminders of the fallen: the politically disappeared in "Robhéa," and the victims of urban violence, human trafficking and organized crime in *Shiroma* and *Final feliz*. Each cyborg suggests its own iteration of the *ethos barroco* of survival and resistance, tradition and innovation, in uncanny layerings and couplings of the human body and technology.

The cyborg interface between human and machine does not lead to a facile sense of mixture of *mestizaje* or new beginnings, but rather to a representation of a complex world of the posthuman. In *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America* (2017), Ed King and Joanna Page examine how the posthuman "baroque" can unsettle binaries and produce new mutations or outcomes (90), in a way similar to Yoshiko's (potential) role in Cuenca's novel. In a general movement towards more sophisticated interfaces between human and machine, these female cyborgs illustrate issues surrounding embodiment and new forms of the body politic that attempt to transform society into a posthuman baroque or *códigofagia* freed from the hierarchy of the organic and inorganic, offering new configurations of the Latin American posthuman that pay homage to the past while recognizing untapped potential for transforming the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Hayles explains, the first cybernetic paradigm is based on feedback loops (or homeostasis) as described in Norbert Wiener's 1949 book *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Her prototypical text for this stage is Bernard Wolfe's 1950 novel *Limbo* (23) which features enhanced, robotic-like humans. The second phase of cybernetics, dated during the 1960s and 70s, is characterized by "reflexivity", according to which beings "create" their own reality from within a cybernetic feedback loop, recognizing their role within the system. She uses Philip K. Dick's androids from his 1960s works to illustrate the reflexive stage of cybernetics (24). In the third phase of cybernetic theory, Hayles claims that pattern recognition and randomness produce what she calls "flickering signifiers" of data, which privilege cybernetic, disembodied knowledge and cyberspace over face-to-face contact and other humanistic forms of knowledge. She uses several artificial intelligences including Greg Bear's *Blood Music* (1985) to illustrate these concepts (24).

<sup>2</sup> Like J. Andrew Brown, who has addressed issues of female cyborgs in his study *Cyborgs in Latin America* (2012), I define cyborg rather loosely. Brown has examined works of experimental works of literature that feature female cyborgs and address the aftermath of dictatorships in Argentina and Chile and neoliberal regimes that followed in works dating from 1982 to 1998. Alicia Borinsky's novel *Cine continuado* (1997), in its treatment of gender and sexuality (Brown 43-47), probably is most similar to the Brazilian texts examined here, especially that of Caio Fernando Abreu. Brown examines female cyborg body as the "inscription" for the violence of the dictatorship or technology in works by Manuel Puig, *Pubis Angelical* (1979), Ricardo Piglia, *La ciudad ausente* (1982), Eugenia Prado, *Lóbulo* (1998) and Carmen Boullosa, *Cielos en la tierra* (1998) in addition to Borinsky's novel mentioned above. There are not many women genre authors in Brazil. Roberta Spindler has a story about Brazilian posthumans who get energy from solar implants, but they are humans with a new energy system. In Spindler's "Sol no coração" (2013), most humans have this implant. The story is not about rebellion, but about a family and human adaptation to a new biotechnology.

<sup>3</sup> There are four "ethes" according to Echeverría: the first ethos is the realist or protestant ethos that claims that life exists for the sake of and for the purpose of producing capital. It subordinates all work, objects and creativity to capitalism and ignores issues of social injustice or exploitation. The second is the romantic ethos that emphasizes the creative aspect of capitalism and the entrepreneurial spirit of invention, ignoring any of the negative aspects. The classical ethos consists of a wary resignation regarding capitalism, especially in its shift towards commerce and monetary value away from the concrete use value of objects (i.e. shoes that can be worn or sold). It laments the ever more abstract forms of capital that increase social distance between the haves and have-nots. The fourth is the baroque ethos. See Gandler, 295-306.

<sup>4</sup> Echeverría emphasizes corporeality and the reality of surviving within capitalism: "El ethos o gesto barroco también resulta de una estrategia de afirmación de corporeidade concreta del valor de uso que termina en una reconstrucción de la misma en un segundo nivel; una estrategia que acepta las leyes de la circulación mercantil, a las que esta corporeidad se sacrifica, pero que lo hace al mismo tiempo que se inconforma con ellas y las somete a un juego de transgresiones que las refuncionaliza" (78-79).

<sup>5</sup> In her *Foundational Fictions* (1991), Doris Sommer notes how heterosexual romantic pairings and *mestizaje* characterize the nineteenth-century novels of independence throughout Latin America. We can contrast the desire for contemporary cyborg pairings with the horror expressed by Dr. Frankenstein at the prospect of the reproduction by his creations in Shelley's novel, especially in his refusal to create a mate for his creature. Spivak interprets this as imperialist fear

of the colonized and reproduction (255-56). This marks distinct attitudes and patterns of colonization and *mestiçagem* from the point of view of the British and Latin America.

<sup>6</sup> The female cyborg did not emerge again until the first decade of re-democratization, when science fiction writer Cid Fernandez gave his female cyborg protagonist the capability and desire to reproduce in a novelette called “Julgamentos” (1993). Published nearly twenty years after Abreu’s text, Fernandez’s heteronormative female cyborg wishes to marry and have children with her cyborg husband. See Ginway, “The Body Politic,” 202-205. A similar desire to reproduce is expressed by robots in Jacques Barcia’s 2009 steampunk story “Uma vida possível atrás das barricadas.” For more on Barcia, see Ginway, “Posthumans in Contemporary Brazilian Cyberpunk and Steampunk,” 244. These are gender conforming, not rebellious, robots, so they are not of interest here. A possible comparison could be Rosa Montero’s android, Bruna Husky from her novels *Lágrimas en la Lluvia* (2011), *El peso del corazón* (2015) and *Tiempos de odio* (2018). Husky is a private detective that fights for the rights of her fellow androids and other oppressed groups such as aliens. Montero is one of the few female authors who uses genre SF to write about female posthumans in a political way.

<sup>7</sup> Causo, “Introdução” (*Ensaaios Internacionais*) and Ginway, “Brazilian Dystopian Fiction” (*Brazilian Science Fiction*, 89-135) are among the first critics to consider dystopia as a trend in Brazilian science fiction trend in the 1970s.

<sup>8</sup> As a short 5-page allegorical story, little is explained about the robots. The four survivors of the robot plague are found huddled in an underground basement: “Enquanto isso, em porões de um beco escuro, reproduziam-se como ratos os remanescentes da epidemia” While this was going on, in the basements of a dark dead end, the survivors of the epidemic reproduced like rats] (35). No more is explained except for the fact that the robots increased their numbers and were planning to make a comeback. The government eliminates all of them except Robhéa, although it is not explained why. When her picture appears in the paper, she sparks the interest of the designer who gets her released and uses her to model his fall line.

<sup>9</sup> Artistic forms of resistance and cooptation of Afro-Brazilian practices such as capoeira and samba are the clearest examples. Legalized by the Vargas regime, they soon became products that would become nationalized and exported and used to promote Brazilian “racial democracy.” See Stanley Bailey, *Legacies of Race*, (Stanford UP, 2009) and Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music and the Making of Modern Brazil* (Duke UP, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Among the most visible of this type of crime is the shooting death of Rio councilwoman Marielle Franco in March of 2018 and the resignation of a gay rights advocate and congressman Jean Wyllys, both of which illustrate the level of violence against the LBGTQ population, not to mention the anti-gay rhetoric of Brazil’s current president Jair Bolsonaro.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/24/voice-lgbt-rights-silenced-brazil>

<sup>11</sup> Tragically, Caio Fernando Abreu would fall victim to this disease some twenty years later, dying in 1996; see Arenas, 13. The AIDS epidemic is generally considered to have begun in 1981, therefore, Abreu could not have known about it while writing his story from 1975.

<sup>12</sup> For Süsskind, the function of the romance-reportagem was to portray reality that had been censored in the media: such novels would “dizer o que impedia o jornal de dizer, fazendo em livro as reportagens proibidas nos meios de comunicação de massa; a produzir ficcionalmente identidades lá onde dominam as divisões, criando uma utopia de nação e outra de sujeito, capazes de atenuar a experiência cotidiana da contradição e da fratura. Para exercer tais funções a literatura opta por negar-se enquanto ficção e afirmar-se como verdade. O naturalismo torna-se todopoderoso” (57). This illustrates the power of such “realist/naturalist” texts that displaced other forms of literature in national discourse.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the lack of reform of the police and security operations, which included death squads and other extra-legal killings, created a vacuum for illegal networks to flourish. The development of a dual state, in which equal rights of citizenship and access to state institutions are divided, is part of this legacy. Extra-legal militias, as well as organized crime, continue and grew in the aftermath of the dictatorship. See Penglase, *Living with Insecurity in a Brazilian Favela*, Desmond Arias, “The Armed Dominance of Politics” and Abaladejo “Spate of Murders.”

<sup>14</sup> Although not explained technologically, the telepathic communication between mother and daughter takes place through a seashell that Shiroma recovered during her training. This psychic link illustrates that spiritual bonds transcend the technological, or, that time does not exist in a conventional way.

<sup>15</sup> *The Only Happy Ending to a Love Story is an Accident* is the only text available in English. Translated by Elizabeth Lowe (Dartmouth, MA: Tagus Press, 2011), the novel is an unusual because it has not been examined as SF. As an upcoming young author with a marketable book, Cuenca is a mainstream writer who has ventured into cybernetic fiction.

<sup>16</sup> The repeated text leading up to the accident is: “No topo de tudo, um grande outdoor anuncia sopa em tubos de neon. O único conjunto de janelas sem cortinas fechadas ou vidros escurecidos é o do quinto andar do edifício curvo à direita. Ali, um grupo de pequenas bailarinas ensaia uma coreografia no centro da sala, enquanto outras alongam as pernas numa barra de metal” (17, 54, 106-107, 141-142).

## Works Cited

- Abreu, Caio Fernando. “A acensão e queda de Robhéa, manequim e robô.” *O ovo apunhalado*. Globo, 1975. 31-36.
- Albaladejo, Angelika. “Spate of Murders in Brazil Shines Light on Militia Phenomenon.” *Insight Crime* 18 April 2018.  
<https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/spate-murders-brazil-shines-spotlight-militia-phenomenon/>
- Andrade, Oswald. “Manifesto Antropófago.” *Vanguardas Latino-Americanas. Polêmicas, Manifestos e Textos Críticos*. Ed. and notes by Jorge Schwartz. Edusp, pp. 140-147.
- Arenas, Fernando. “Writing after Paradise and Before a Possible Dream: Brazil’s Caio Fernando Abreu” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 36 no. 2 (1999), pp. 13-21.
- Arias, Desmond. “The Impact of Differential Armed Dominance of Politics in Rio de Janeiro.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 48.3 (2013) 263-284.
- Avelar, Idelber. *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*. Duke UP, 1999.

- 
- . "Revisions of Masculinity: Gabeira, Abreu, and Noll." *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil*. Ed. Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho and Nicola Gavioli. Taylor and Francis, 2017, pp. 183-199.
- Bacigalupi, Paolo. *Wind-Up Girl*. 2009. Nightshade Books, 2012.
- Bailey, Stanley R. *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes and Politics in Brazil*. Stanford UP, 2009.
- Barcia, Jacques. "Uma vida possível atrás das barricadas." *Steampunk, Histórias de um passado extraordinário*. Ed. Gianpaolo Celli. Tarja, 2009, pp. 123-40.
- Brown, J. Andrew. *Cyborgs in Latin America*. Palgrave, 2010.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2006.
- Causo, Roberto de Sousa. "Introdução." *Ensaio internacionais de ficção científica brasileira*. Edgard Guimarães, 1997, pp. i-iii.
- . "O novo protótipo." *Portal Stalker*. Ed. Nelson de Oliveira. Daikoku, 2009, pp. 14-22.
- . "Rosas brancas." *Portal Solaris*. Ed. Nelson de Oliveira. Ed. LGE, 2008, pp. 7-15.
- . *Shiroma: Matadora Ciborgue*. Devir, 2015.
- . "Tempestade solar." *Portal Fahrenheit*. Ed. Nelson de Oliveira. Daikoku, 2010. pp. 29-37.
- Cuenca, J.P. *O único final feliz para uma história de amor é um acidente*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010.
- Echeverría, Bolívar. "El ethos barroco." *Modernidad, mestizaje cultural, ethos barroco*. UNAM, 1994, pp. 75-87.
- Fernandez, Cid. "Julgamentos." *Tríplice universo*. Ed. Roberto de Sousa Causo. GRD, 1993, pp. 70-152.
- Fonseca, Rubem. *A grande arte*. 1983. Companhia das Letras, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Vintage, 1978.
- Gandler, Stefan. *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vásquez and Bolívar Echeverría*. 2007. Trans. George Ciccariello-Maher and Stefan Gandler. Brill, 2015.
- Ginway, M. Elizabeth. "The Body Politic in Brazilian Science Fiction." *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction*. Ed. Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox. U of South Carolina P, 2008, pp. 199-211.
- . *Brazilian Science Fiction: Cultural Myths and Nationhood in the Land of the Future*. Bucknell UP, 2004.
- . "Posthumans in Contemporary Brazilian Cyberpunk and Steampunk." *Paradoxa* No. 30, 2018, pp. 233-249.

- 
- Haraway, Donna. "The Cyborg Manifesto." *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991, pp. 149-181.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Become Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. U of Chicago P, 1999.
- Hook, Derek William. "Lacan, the Meaning of the Phallus and the Sexed Subject." *The Gender of Psychology*. Ed. Tamara Shefer, Floretta Boonzaier and Peace Kiguwa. Juta Academic Publishing, 2006, pp. 60-84.
- King, Edward and Joanna Page. *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America*. UCL Press, 2017. [www.ac.uk/ucl-press](http://www.ac.uk/ucl-press).
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia UP, 1982.
- McCann, Bryan. *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music and the Making of Modern Brazil*. Duke UP, 2004.
- Moraña, Mabel. "Los monstruos de la filosofía." *El monstruo como máquina de guerra*. Frankfurt: Iberoamericana, 2017, pp. 183-235.
- Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Sex and the Single Cyborg: Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2002, pp. 436- 452.
- Penglase, Ben. *Living with Insecurity in a Brazilian Favela*. Rutgers UP, 2014.
- Perez, Hiram. "Alma Latina: The American Hemisphere's Racial Melodramas." *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 7.2 (2009). [http://sfonline.barnard.edu/africana/print\\_perez.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/africana/print_perez.htm)
- Shildrick, Margrit. *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. Sage, 2002.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. U of California P, 1991.
- Spindler, Roberta. "Sol no coração." *Solarpunk: Histórias ecológicas fantásticas num mundo sustentável*. Ed. Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro. Draco: 2013, pp. 173-190.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, 1985, pp. 243-261.
- Süssekind, Flora. *Literatura e vida literária: polêmicas, diários e retrato*. Jorge Zahar, 1985.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Yale UP, 1979.
- Vejmelka, Marcel. "O Japão na literatura brasileira atual." *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea* 43 (Jan-Jun 2014), pp. 213-234.
- Vivianco, José Miguel. "A Voice for LGBT Rights is Silenced in Brazil." *Human Rights Watch*. 24 Jan. 2019.



---

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/24/voice-lgbt-rights-silenced-brazil>