

## Introduction

Anthropocene or the age of man marks a significant change in the process of exploring man's contribution to knowledge and its distribution in the social exchange. Anthropocene is the era underlined by man's presence as a factor of climate and environmental changes, and his newly established position calls for his answerability to humanity, more than ever. Literature has always been one of the modes of representation that involved the necessity of a changed perspective regarding what is shared experience and common knowledge. In terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of answerability (1990: 2), man and life become one when literary work is actualized in the consciousness of one's being, or in the act of holding an individual answerable to the historical and social process. This perspective calls upon the relationship between literature and social order, which will be explained in the analysis by taking into account diverse cultural contexts.

One of the early representations of the human-nature relationship in the history of literature is travel writing, originating from the early days of world travels and discoveries, a genre that stands between literary and scientific discourse. These writings are a clear demonstration of the way different writing strategies were employed to understand how humans crossed the path from orality to literacy (and in what terms/viewpoints is this difference important). Walter Ong (2002: 32) demonstrates the significance of words/sounds in the psychodynamics of orality as momentary happenings, which propels human's desire to possess them (or stabilize them) in the process of writing. Some travel writings are in-depth descriptions of indigenous people in terms of their differences and exclusivity, and also in the sense of the author's dominant position to the one depicted as an object of discourse. Peter Kolb's representation, originating from the 18th century, of the Hottentots who lived at the Cape of Good Hope, is a step toward the later accounts, when "European interventionism became increasingly militant" (Pratt 2008: 44). A clear example of this process can be found in the description of one ceremony, where the boy's testicle is being removed and substituted with a ball of ship's fat. In Kolb's account, there is a detailed and precise analysis of the way this act took place, taking into consideration its factuality, i.e. the discrete elements of this procedure and its cultural significance. Anders Sparrman and other travel writers from the second half of the 18th century, on the other hand, do not consider this act part of a ritual, a cultural act, but merely observe the anatomical traits of indigenous people, thus deculturating Hottentots (Pratt 2008: 51). Pratt includes several

remarks regarding the position of indigenous subalterns in later accounts as objects without voice, lacking intellectual and spiritual attributes and powers. By the late 18th century, travel writers started to disregard the ritualistic significance of the practices they encountered, subjugating native man to a kind of voiceless human being. This act of “anti-conquest”, as Pratt calls it, clearly shows the shift in perspective and the way subjugation was carried out by the language strategies. In this sense, language begins to function as an instrument of domination, hiding this feature in the specter of its uses, and in the description strategies that are blurring the proper understanding of a certain character or a situation.

Postcolonial writing is a step forward in the employment of different narrative strategies in the process of depicting human-nature correlation. Pablo Mukherjee investigates the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984 and the narrative that illustrates this matter in a fictional manner, namely Indra Sinha’s novel *Animal’s People* (Mukherjee 2011: 216-231). The conclusion that can be drawn from this narrative is that all beings suffer, regardless of them being human or non-human, and this point is something that Mukherjee analyzes through Paola Cavalieri’s rejection of the institutional definition of suffering as something attributed only to human beings. Since all beings are capable of emotional and cognitive intentionality, as Mukherjee argues, they are all entitled to enjoy freedom and welfare. Sinha’s novelistic world entails a certain hybrid being, the so-called Animal, a creature between human and animal, who is highly capable of “transpersonality” as a mode of being. This includes his ability to experience all beings and the world as connected by an endless network, since his skills are not limited by the cultural order and the physical world as we know it. He is able to visualize the thoughts of others, in the same way he understands human and non-human languages. In that sense, it is clear that one narrative can employ a wide range of strategies to attribute positive or negative traits to a certain phenomenon. The author’s approach to the distinction between humans and nature defines his ideological position (in terms of shared ideas and notions), and also the point he starts from. That is why the exploration of ancient texts, which represent a sort of collective understanding, proves to be a valuable source for investigating human position in the world.

### **Nature-culture correlation and environmentalists**

One aspect of the proper reading of the nature-culture relationship consists in being aware

of the explanation of their interchange and dynamics, explored in the studies originating from various interdisciplinary approaches in humanistic and social studies (and, more precisely, in the field of environmental studies). There are broad terms placed under the heading “ecological imperialism”, e.g. bio-colonisation, environmental racism, speciesism, etc. (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 3), defined in the sense of the acts of colonization of different countries throughout human history by the male, dominant, European settlers and administration. It is an investigation of the systematic settler practices that also involved animals and plants, since the idea was to attribute nomadism to indigenous people to confirm that they were somehow uninterested in land ownership. Native animals and plants were considered a common good, while non-domestic livestock was a privilege granted only to the settlers. That is the way local people were transformed into objects without a past (history) and culture. Virginia Anderson, on the other hand, analyzes the transformation of early America through the domestication of animals and demonstrates how the ritual of killing animals was also a sign of differentiation and segregation between the native (local) people, and the upper class. The existing link between native Indians (native Americans) and English settlers was their silent agreement that animals were a good source for obtaining meat. However, their approach to hunting and the ways it was executed clearly differed. “Aware of the power of animal spirits, native hunters treated their prey with respect and performed rituals defined by reciprocity (...) But notions of domination and subordination were central to the English, who believed that the act of hunting epitomized the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humankind over animals” (Anderson 2004: 58). One can note that in both cases, which are culturally different, there is a clear attempt to place native people on the pole of the subjugated, underlined by the lack of some distinctive feature (reason, speech/writing, consciousness, etc.).

The interrelation between nature and culture is often determined as an extension of the post-Enlightenment ambivalence between reason and emotion. Val Plumwood, in her work *Environmental Culture*, investigates the particular form of reason which is deified in Rationalism, and its supreme status that devalues the realm of nature. Plumwood suggests that a possible solution to this ambivalence is the concept of environmental culture as a “systematic resolution of the nature/culture and reason/nature dualisms that split mind from body, reason from emotion, across their many domains of cultural influence” (2002: 4). We are witnessing ecological pitfalls as a result of the separation between the body and the mind, and yet human beings are still proponents of the idea that there must be a scientific

or technical solution to all environmental issues as a kind of “deus ex machina” fix. Women, bodies, and earth are still seen in terms of the necessity of their cultivation, and their energy and sources can be used properly only if there is an efficiency that determines this process, regardless of the possibility of their extinction. The rationalistically defined otherness (nature) is something that “natural capitalism” (as Plumwood argues) treats as a resource or commodity, without any ethical constraints that inevitably lead to an “ecological crisis”, and a shift in the monologically centered culture. The consumerist perspective propels human beings into actions that distribute meaning to our existence, negating or denying the responsibility that companies and workers should hold. That is the so-called effect of “remoteness”, or the abyss between the worker and the product, alienated from the process itself.

The concept of environmental history, in the 1970s, was viewed as a possible intervention to the Western-oriented perspective of the nature-culture separation. Donald Worster’s essay *Ecological History* represents a key point to the inauguration of this notion, since he is evoking Aldo Leopold’s ideas from 1949, concerning the proper understanding of the human past by affirming the distinctive traits of nature. “He introduces a separate program for ‘environmental history’ and argues that it should comprise three levels: the first is the most basic for Worster – nature itself; the second is to understand how technology has restructured human-ecological relationships; the third refers to conceptions, ideologies, ethics and regulations [...]” (Asdal 2003: 62). Kristin Asdal’s essay is a valuable resource for depicting the aporia ingrained in the fact that nature, without its ability to speak or willingly/consciously communicate, cannot be represented fully and appropriately. In that sense, it is more than evident that the problem can be avoided by overcoming the superficial divide between nature and culture. Asdal argues that a step towards the resolution of this conflict is post-constructivism and its unbiased point of view.

### **Man as a historical subject**

In terms of defining the nature-culture correlation, the moment man affirms his status as a subject in the historical process is of utmost importance. Since antiquity, people strived to define something that can be called human nature, and they equated it with different phenomena. In that sense, we will try to point out some of the uses and adoptions of the Marxian paradigm that serve as an explanation of man’s position and its relatedness to

animals in the world, and then see this phenomenon in a broader context, taking into account literary texts and their presented world-view.

In *German Ideology* (a set of manuscripts written between 1845 and 1846), Marx and Engels distinguish man from animals by his ability to produce means for life, and it is this exact quality that ensures the increase in population ratio and the “intercourse” between individuals. In a historical sense, one can discern the “real, active men” (Marx and Engels 2010: 36) that determine the way ideology develops and changes. Ideology (morality, religion, metaphysics, etc.) depends on the human consciousness, which is also connected to the increase in material production. This statement provoked a sort of critique, which can be noted in Fromm’s description of the way ideas have independent existence in social life. They influence the phenomenon called social character, an agency that molds and channels individual energy in a given society. “I want to emphasize again that the theory that ideas are determined by the forms of economic and social life does not imply that they have no validity of their own, or that they are mere ‘reflexes’ of economic needs. The ideal of freedom, for instance, is deeply rooted in the nature of man [...]” (Fromm 2009: 67).

In his elaboration of the Marxian paradigm, Erich Fromm states that the process of defining the human being and the essence called humanity was meant to represent an equivalent of the morphological, anatomical, and psychological structure that all living beings have in common. “Thus man was defined as a rational being, as a social animal, an animal that can make tools (Homo Faber), or a symbol-making animal” (Fromm 1973: 219). He sees humanity as a direct result of the contradictions - the process of minimizing instinctive determination and the development of the human brain and its function. The self-awareness of human beings and their creativity are qualities that underline man’s position as an outcast in the world of nature, since he is constantly faced with the limits of his understanding and means to overpower the world, combined with his impossibility to live in harmony with nature. On the other hand, reading Marx’s *Capital*, Fromm pinpoints the significance of what is called “human nature in general”, in contrast to “human nature as modified in each historical epoch” (2009: 21 - 22), although Marx, faithful to his historical method, was never prone to such abstraction. Since every human being changes in the course of history, and every culture writes its text, humanity can be seen in the light of the Freudian conflict between “the reality principle” (the way a human strives to sustain his own life and survive in the real world), and “the pleasure principle” (the act of physical

release of sexual energy).

The manner in which ideological structure influences man and his position in the world can be also seen in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's philological accounts. He analyzes the notion of the individual that cannot be grasped without defining the human relationship with the world, thus reframing the notion of individuality. In that way, he enhances the understanding of the problem called "intersubjectivity". It is a phenomenon defined as a basis for the distribution of a proper sense of the word dialogue, which is a fundamental notion in humanities and related scientific branches. Bakhtin's early writings, dedicated to the relationship between Marxism and the philosophy of language, envisage the question of man and his position as an agent in the world. By explaining the term intersubjectivity, Bakhtin gives a more detailed account of the contribution that concrete individuals make to the world (their presence and psychological state always manifest as interconnection, as a word-to-word correlation). In that sense, he writes and publishes his book under the name of another prominent researcher and collaborator of that time, Valentin Voloshinov. They pertain to the same circle of researchers, gathered around the Belarusian towns Nevel and Vitebsk in 1918, which later, in the midst of the current political struggle, transferred to Leningrad, where most of the members were arrested. In that sense, Craig Brandist (2002: 5) speaks of the necessity to understand the work of the so-called Bakhtin circle in the European intellectual context of that time. Intersubjectivity is defined by Voloshinov and Bakhtin as follows: "In point of fact, word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. [...] Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'." (Vološinov 1973: 86). In this perspective, man's actions are conditioned by his residence in the universe of words, so the way they affect each other in their endless reciprocal relationship underlines an important facet of intersubjectivity. This point can be seen in the light of Bakhtin's previous statements, published under the name of Pavel N. Medvedev, in the book titled *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, Bakhtin argues that since the existence of man is defined by his appearance in the social sphere - the material base and the superstructure, his identity cannot be grasped abstractly, because he belongs completely to the realm of production and cannot be isolated from it. In that sense, Bakhtin defines the phenomenon called "ideological environment", which is a direct result of the intersection between different types of consciousness, again defined by their appearance in the social field. "The ideological environment is the environment of consciousness. Only through this environment and with its help does the human

consciousness attain the perception and mastery of socioeconomic and natural existence” (Bakhtin/Medvedev 1991: 14).

Arguing human position from a historical perspective, Perry Anderson, adopting the Marxist perspective, took into account Indian tradition and analyzed the way the ideological environment determined its development. His work is titled *The Indian Ideology*, as a sort of an echo of the aforementioned work by Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*. He applied Marxist criticism to the history of India, which unfortunately led him to take on a certain colonial perspective. By discussing how Hinduism had such a negative impact on the development of historical accounts in India, he concludes: “Hindu culture, exceptionally rich in epics and metaphysics, was exceptionally poor in history, a branch of knowledge radically devalued by the doctrines of karma, for which any given temporal existence on earth was no more than a fleeting episode in the moral cycle of the soul” (Anderson 2015: 173 - 174). However, the importance that Marxist thinkers attributed to ideology and history cannot be properly grasped in this cultural context without taking into account the nature of these texts. Historical and mythological Indian writings represent a whole in that literary universe and do not necessarily rely on the simple differentiation in terms of spatio-temporal relations. In light of this exact difference between mythological and historical narratives, Indian writings represent historical events distinctly and change the perspective of chronology, which cannot be understood as a simple time passing by. They underline the exact human-nature relationship as a sort of existence beyond the realm of what is culturally or ideologically based, thus ensuring the appearance of metaphysical notions.

### **Nature-culture relationship regarding two ancient texts**

The problem of reading and interpreting nature in the context of human existence has been a domain of special interest to literary studies and teaching literature as well, especially regarding ancient cultures and literary traditions. In the ancient text that envisages the Mesopotamian point of view, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the correlation between nature and civilization is presented by two main characters in the narrative - Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The coming to life of Enkidu is initiated by the gods' intervention to limit Gilgamesh's strength as a king of Uruk and as a semi-divine creature (“two-thirds of him god and one-third human”). Aruru, the goddess of creation, is summoned by Anu to create a companion to Gilgamesh, someone who matches his heart and willpower. The unique act of creation is

performed by the goddess Aruru, as she molds Enkidu's figure from clay and water. Enkidu's ancestors can be traced back to the god Ninurta, rendering him a semi-divine creature. The text informs us of Enkidu's ignorance of men and their culture, and gives several ideas about his animalistic nature: "Coated in hair like the god of the animals, / with the gazelles he gazes on grasses, / *joining the throng* with the game at the water-hole, / his heart *delighting* with the beasts in the water." (George 2000: 5; italics by the editor). At first, Enkidu is a hybrid being, and his human body is a husk that covers his ambivalent essence (although his creation is more alike to other human beings, which is illustrated in one Sumerian epic poem about the creation process executed by the mother earth, Ninmah).

Samuel Noah Kramer (Kramer 1959: 76 - 103) investigates the first cosmogonic myth in Sumerian culture that envisages the ambivalent character of earth and heaven. It is an important starting point for grasping differences between cultures because this dualism is incorporated in Enkidu, since he is an animal and human at the same time, although still unaware of his human character and the ability to speak or interact as a human being. The entrance of Enkidu into the human world is underlined by the appearance of the hunter, who came across Enkidu as he was standing with the herd by the water hole. Noticing his enormous strength, the hunter became troubled and asked his father for advice, since Enkidu was hampering his hunting. At that point of the narrative, Shammat the harlot, a temple prostitute, uses her charms to attract Enkidu and "civilize" him through the continuous sexual act that lasts six days and seven nights. After this sacred ritual, Enkidu's erect posture and clear body started to frighten animals, they no longer recognized him as an equal and his reason and understanding were hindering him from being part of the herd. However, Enkidu's transition into the human world could not have been completed without his ritual stay at the sacred temple of Anu and Ishtar, through which he would be recognized by the citizens of Uruk as equal. The fact that Enkidu realized the need to seek a friend by instinct is again a confirmation of the unstable duality (body-mind correlation) that every human being entails. Gilgamesh and Enkidu's expeditions are shaped by Gilgamesh's strength and his ability to confront even death. However, his quest for the "plant of heartbeat", as a sort of immortality potion, ends without results since the snake was attracted by the plant's scent and carried it off. Enkidu is a natural, ambivalent, female-like figure that needs to be tamed and subjugated by civilization, enhancing its productivity and creative powers. The epic envisions a quite pessimistic outcome, which Enkidu can foresee from the beginning, thus resolving the conflict between nature and culture in nature's favor



(or, more so, in a friendly dialogue). The text states, in a way, that every human civilization is doomed to be destroyed, in order to be replaced by a more structured and developed world order that is in fact determined by the same nature-culture correlation. Epic's finale underlines the necessity for the civilized man to accept nature as a vital part of his being, affirming its specific character, power, and relatedness to human existence.

As part of the Itihasa-Purana branch of Indian literature (a composition of writings concerning historical and mythological testimonies), the epic *Mahabharata* is thought-provoking evidence of how man struggled to become a historical subject through mythological imagination. The sixth parvan (or chapter) of this epic is called *Bhagavad Gita* (or *Bhagavad-gitopaniṣad*), and it underlines the connection of this text with the ancient texts called Upanishads (Basham 1981: 409). It echoes the difference between possessing knowledge and becoming (or creating) through supreme knowledge, two different modes of being that are underlined in the epic, according to the character's/narrator's perspective.

*Gita* consists of 18 chapters with different lengths and various kinds of verses, systematized mainly in the metrical form called shloka. In the third chapter, Krishna explains the doctrine of karma to Arjuna and here the text evokes the act of self-sacrifice, executed by the god Prajapati. Although Brahman is described here as a supreme being or a sort of godly-like substance, there are parts of this book that contradict this statement, and that fact led to the later interventions that established the structure the epic has today (by various interpolations). The specific manner by which the sacrifice and the slayer (i.e. receiver of all goods) are connected is underlined by their reciprocal relationship. "With this nourish ye the shining ones and may the / shining ones nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye / shall reap the supremest good" (Bhagavad-Gita 1905: 61). Sacrifice is not just presented as a way to obtain greater good, but also as an act of self-improvement for the sake of every living being. In that sense, man can transform himself by action which is not performed in the usual way, but only through the "action without attachment", disregarding the results of the process. Although this context is usually interpreted in terms of its significance for the proper understanding of the concept of karma, it is clear that it also depicts man's stepping into the historical field (or the ideological environment as endless intersubjectivity and connectedness between different ideological elements). The intersection between the mythological and the historical paves the way for the writer's rebirth in the historical realm as well, and here the phenomenon of action gains its deeper sense (as being rooted in space

and time).

Every action, in this context, is determined by the abstract qualities it arises from, like desire or wrath (here, the creative force of desire is once again underlined). In that manner, the senses, mind, and reason are the true source of actions. The process of self-transformation and self-growth is described as a phenomenon marked by duality, which cannot be diminished because it is grounded in the very essence of human existence. However, if we take into account previous Vedic verses, we realize that duality is the exact place where every activity is conceived (although the undivided darkness or the unified mass gave birth to all living beings). The task of humanity is to choose the right action, which affirms and does not exclude any of the elements of which the body, mind, or spirit consists (including nature). “The senses, the mind, and the Reason are said to be / its seat; by these, enveloping wisdom, it bewilders the dweller in the body” (Bhagavad-Gita 1905: 74). In that sense, history here is projected not just as a set of facts, brought under a common denominator, but a more profound variation between the possible and the probable, “balancing truth to the facts against the need for those facts to make sense” (Hamilton 2003: 8). By stepping into the realm of action, man becomes a godly-like figure that irrevocably needs to take into account the oneness of existence (as a union of different elements) to define his place in the world.

### **Concluding remarks**

Literary text and its interpretation prove to be a valuable tool for the analysis of nature-culture correlation. Historical processes appear as part of one objective narrative only when the material facts are distributed in an unbiased manner, so it is of foremost importance to make interpretation/hermeneutics a vehicle for history’s clear-cut dialectic. Edward Carr noted this process and stated that history is not just “a hard core of facts” nor “interpretation”, but a dialectical interchange between these two phenomena. In that sense, history cannot be seen as a way of posing a present perspective on the facts of the past (Carr 1990: 22 - 23). Nature-culture correlation underscores the importance of history as a place where they meet and intersect, proving their interdependence. Ancient Mesopotamian epic underlines man’s necessity to accept the animal part of his existence in order to sustain and survive in the world that is created under the illusion of human supremacy. Ancient Indian epic reveals the way the mythological and philosophical construction of ideas and

events veiled historical concepts. By employing epic techniques, spiritual and religious thoughts confirm their relevance in the cultural context. Epic narration and historical action become sort of a middle ground where the actualization of human-nature interdependence comes to being. The ideas are shared as part of a common human experience, and it is the fluctuation of these ideas that enables humanity to rethink its position in society, the historical continuum, and the world.

By exploring different literary approaches and stories in the teaching process, the student becomes aware of the simple fact that his awareness is not conditioned by the methods the teacher uses in the process, but by his willingness to participate in this process and to become its vital part. This aspect can be seen in the light of the theories about mirror neurons and perspective/intention sharing as empathy. Gregory Hickok in the study *The Myth of Mirror Neurons* argues that the motor system of the brain is not strictly involved in the processes that condition empathy, since the “motor cortex was more reliably activated when processing nonsense words (80 percent of activations fell within the likely boundaries of the motor system) than when processing action-related words” (Hickok 2014: 110). Since mirror neurons are directly related to the process of mimicking other’s actions and evoking sensations derived from action-like concepts, their role in the process of understanding nature-human relation becomes indubitable. In the light of what empathetic concern entails, the student is propelled to a more profound understanding of human intentions and the consequences they lead to. When analyzing the role of the student and the teacher in the educational process, one should avoid underestimating the utmost importance of their interchange as a realm where projected desires and enunciations reveal intentions more explicitly. By paving the way to a more productive dialogue where everything that is placed under the label “other” reveals itself as substantial to knowledge and human thinking, literary education becomes a key to the proper understanding of the self and the world.

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