



# The smell of time in Ana Margarida de Carvalho's *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato*: an outline of the human condition

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**ABSTRACT.** This article analyses the olfactory landscapes represented in the novel *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato* (You can't live in a cat's eyes) by Ana Margarida de Carvalho (2016) reflecting upon the way in which the various smells described 'presentify' the multiple memories of the characters, emphasising their human dimension in a confinement scenario predisposed to completely dehumanising them. Using the theoretical contributions of Drobnick (2006a, 2006b), Reinartz (2014) and Byung-Chul Han (2015) among others, we examine how the smellscape contribute to the construction of the characters' identity memory giving the narrative temporal cohesion.

**Keywords:** smellscapes; identity; memory; time; past.

## O cheiro do tempo em *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato* de Ana Margarida de Carvalho: um esboço da condição humana

**RESUMO.** Este artigo analisa as paisagens olfactivas representadas no romance *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato* (2016) de Ana Margarida de Carvalho, equacionando o modo como os diferentes odores descritos presentificam as múltiplas memórias das personagens acentuando-lhes a dimensão humana num cenário de confinamento susceptível de os desumanizar completamente. Mobilizando os contributos teóricos de Drobnick (2006a, 2006b), Reinartz (2014), Byung Chul-Han (2015), entre outros, veremos como as paisagens olfactivas conduzem à construção de uma memória identitária das personagens, conferindo também uma coesão temporal à narrativa.

**Palavras-chave:** paisagens olfactivas; identidade; memória; tempo; passado.

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### Introduction

In today's technology-dominated society the sense of smell, considered the most basic and primitive of the senses (Porteous, 2006, p. 89), has gained increasing importance. The popularity of a wide variety of products related to aromatherapy and perfumery are proof of the increasing importance of smell in our society. As Jim Drobnick states: "It seems that smell is now the first and most popular sense people wish to 'indulge'". (2006b, p. 2, Drobnick's underline). Undoubtedly, our sense of smell allows us to acquire deeper knowledge of the world that surrounds us and literature bears witness to this through the representation of smellscapes endowed with specific functions. In the given context, it is important to first explain the concept of 'smellscape' since, according to Porteous (2006, p. 91), "[...] like visual impressions, smells may be spatially ordered or place-related". Although these smellscapes are discontinuous, fragmentary in space and episodic in time, as Porteous goes on to say, they contribute to an enrichment of our sense of space and a more complete and in-depth characterisation of places, characters and visual landscapes. In this way, "[...] the use of odor in literature emphasizes that, while one may stand outside a visual landscape and judge it artistically, as one does a painting, one is immersed in smellscape; it is immediately evocative, emotional and meaningful" (Porteous, 2006, p. 92).

Thus, unlike visual landscapes, aromatic landscapes enable the reader to become 'immersed' in the space described. The immersion in smellscapes (both pleasant and repulsive) is frequent in Ana Margarida de Carvalho's novel *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato* (You can't live in a cat's eyes), which has won two literary awards – Associação Portuguesa de Escritores / Direção Geral dos Livros e Bibliotecas (Portuguese

Writers Association / General Directorate for Books and Libraries) (2016) and the Manuel de Boaventura Award (2017). The story centres on the shipwreck of a clandestine slave ship off the coast of Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. The survivors are the overseer, a slave, a servant (José, who we later discover is in fact a woman called Clara who has escaped prostitution), a priest (Marcolino), a young recluse (Nunzio), the shipowner's wife (Teresa), her daughter (Emina) and a little boy about one or two years old (Henrique) who is the son of a slave. All these characters take refuge on a deserted beach that is covered by rising tides four times a day. Here, they live in a state of extreme exile characterised by a seeming suspension of time as if they were living in an eternal present. In this context, the representation of the smellscape underpins the reconstruction of the memories by which the characters' various identities have been formed, thereby revealing their different trajectories and ensuring temporal cohesion in the narrative.

### The smells of survival and memory

The figuration of the smellscapes starts in the first chapter and is centred on events that take place on the slave ship before the shipwreck, thus lending greater authenticity to the revelation of the atrocities committed against the slaves and the sailors. An emblematic episode occurs when some sailors, driven by hunger, kill a horse to eat without the captain's authorisation. When the captain realises they have eaten the animal, he tortures them by refusing to give them any food while he and Teresa, the wife of the ship's owner, together with some other privileged characters, feast on a capon's leg and other delicacies. Teresa suggests finding out who is guilty of killing the horse through smell: "[...] she knows well how hunger lingers on the breath. And she offers to smell the breath of the sailors' voracious mouths one by one (Carvalho, 2016, p. 27-28)<sup>1</sup>. What is evidenced here is the fact that smell can assume the role of a revealer of truth, like an element in an investigation, following Reinartz's line of thought:

Smells are thought to reveal things about the objects, people, and places from which they emanate. In their sweeping survey of aroma, Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott remind us that smells are drenched with meaning, often viewed as 'intrinsic essences' with the potential to reveal inner truths. [...] In contrast, bad smells regularly carried negative connotations, signaling illness, disorder, decay, divine disapproval, destruction, and, ultimately, death (Reinartz, 2014, p. 25, Reinartz's underline).

Here, the unpleasant smell underlines precisely the negative aspect connoted with disorder and decay that leads to death; the stench that characterises the slave ship corroborates this idea. Teresa's attitude is therefore seen as an affront by the sailors, and, in turn, she "[...] protects her hooked nose with a small perfumed handkerchief after receiving the blast of air each directs at her (Carvalho, 2016, p. 28)<sup>2</sup>. In this instance, smell functions as an element that identifies social class, gender and race. In fact, as Reinartz comments, the sense of smell can be considered the most elitist of all the senses since the most pleasant smells can be connoted by elegant perfumes, the privilege of the rich, as is the case with the perfumed handkerchief that Teresa uses to try to reduce the disagreeable smell. As Reinartz states: "[...] like race and gender discrimination [...] olfactory codes enforced class boundaries, often functioned subconsciously, and were quickly regarded as truisms, impervious to rational challenges" (2014, p. 145).

Likewise, gender boundaries are also marked by smell. Teresa comes to regret her audacity, as "[...] male smells assail her nose, this makes her cough, she can't stand it (Carvalho, 2016, p. 28)<sup>3</sup>. Her attitude leads to an irreversible injustice: a young sailor dares to laugh in front of the captain and is thrown into the sea as punishment. At this point in the narrative, another representation of a smellscape appears. Before the punishment is inflicted on him, and when faced with the inevitability of his death, the boy's thoughts go to the image of his mother and "[...] the smell of a certain orange grove in Lisbon (Carvalho, 2016, p. 29)<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the evocation of the smell of the orange grove becomes an "[...] archivist of the ephemeral" (Muxel, 2007, p. 99) by reconstructing a significant past experience of the character. The image of his mother, associated with the smell of the orange grove, acts as a refuge, a pleasant memory with a protective function that aims to mitigate the agony at a tragic moment.

A similar maternal memory, also represented by smell, is evoked in Nunzio, the young reclusive passenger, who lost his mother at an early age and was ill-treated by his father and his schoolmates. In this

<sup>1</sup> "[...] ela conhece bem os hálitos da fome. E propõe-se a cheirar um a um os sopros das bocas roazes dos marinheiros"

<sup>2</sup> "[...] protege o adunco nariz com um lençinho perfumado, depois da baforada que cada um lhe lança".

<sup>3</sup> "[...] vêm-lhe cheiros de macho ao nariz, faz que tosse, que não aguenta".

<sup>4</sup> "[...] o cheiro de um certo laranjal em Lisboa".

case, the memory of Annunziata, his mother, is retained through the smell of the roses that she grew. To protect herself from her husband, she wore “[...] a little bag of dried herbs that stank of chastity” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 62)<sup>5</sup>. Here, the metaphor associating the smell of herbs with chastity allows us to envisage why she used it. In fact, to discourage her husband when he was spending a lot of time at home, she also “[...] ingested powdered dried goat dung because it was good for the intestines and left her with foul-smelling breath” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 63)<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, every two years “[...] she made herself smell nice with infusions of sage, wormwood and mint, and then she would disappear for an hour or two” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 64)<sup>7</sup> to meet her cousin, who was in the navy and came from Europe. Thus, the smells reflect Annunziata’s sentimental life and her feelings, with the unpleasant smells being linked to the rejection of her aggressive husband and the pleasant ones to her desire to seduce her cousin. Besides this, the delicate perfume of her roses represents the recovery of a lost time for Annunziata, that is to say, the evocation of her childhood in Italy transposed to the lands of Brazil through the familiar perfume of roses. Moreover, there is a clear contrast between the land of origin and the land of emigration, seen in the difference between the smells, as the delicate perfume of the roses contrasts with the smell “[...] of the fibrous, pulpy tropical flowers with their depraved odours” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 63)<sup>8</sup>.

Nunzio inherited from his mother as a protective charm “[...] a very old rosary [...] next to the crucifix of which his mother had tied the amulet of lethally smelling dried herbs inside a little gauze bag” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 65)<sup>9</sup>. In addition to this affective maternal memory, Nunzio also recollects through unpleasant smellscapes the presence of a young hunchback who ill-treated him in his childhood and whom he associates with the hunchback who looks after the horses on the shipwrecked ship: “The olfactory memory of the hapless boy now came to him, a whiff of manure as he walked past. [...] The sea air made him feel sick, as did the boy’s manure smell. He let himself fall face down once more, indifferent to the fate of the unfortunate wretch” (Carvalho, 2016, pp. 71-72)<sup>10</sup>. Here, the unpleasant smell of manure synthesises and represents a situation of bullying experienced by the character in the past. In this line of thought, as Wagschal (2012, p. 131) declares, “[...] olfaction [...] is an important part of the rich human experience of the senses and of conceptual understanding, partaking in the development of the structure of human reality”.

In turn, Teresa, who loses her baby son in the shipwreck, preserves his memory by recalling “[...] his sour smell of the nursemaid’s milk” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 100)<sup>11</sup>, which reveals her desperation at being unable to remember the colour of his eyes. Here, as Tuan (1990, p. 10) observes, “[...] odor has the power to evoke vivid, emotionally-charged memories of past events and scenes”. In this way, the frequent references to smells in the descriptions contribute to the transmission of ephemeral and intense emotions, which confer greater realism on the events since, as Drobnick notes: “[...] smell is a sense deemed immediate and believable, hence rendering it the perfect means to connote ‘realness’. No one suspects smells.” (2006a, p. 347, Drobnick's underline).

Furthermore, in this scenario of extreme isolation, the characters try to survive in the most adverse conditions. One example is the hypnotic effect that the smell of food being cooked exerts on them. It commands their gestures and their will, as happens to Father Marcolino: “He let himself fall onto the sand, he felt dizzy by the smell of cooked food [...] and he realised that his own hand was moving, spontaneously, without asking for his permission, but hunger commands [...]” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 109)<sup>12</sup>. As a result, for these shipwrecked castaways of different social classes, genders and races, who show an aversion to each other suggesting they are still influenced by the prejudices brought from the world in which they previously lived, the smell of food cooking seems to be the first element to unite them and make them forget their prejudices: “The smell of the fish made them all go mad with desire and forget the rest because when you are starving, only hunger exists” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 116)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the smell drives the characters to plunge into their own reality, oscillating between humanity and animality:

<sup>5</sup> “[...] um saquinho de ervas secas que fediam a castidade”.

<sup>6</sup> “[...] ingeria esterco de cabra seco em pó, porque fazia bem aos intestinos, e a deixava com um hálito pestilento”.

<sup>7</sup> “[...] tornava-se cheirosa, com infusões de salva, losnas e hortelã e desaparecia por uma hora ou duas”.

<sup>8</sup> “[...] das flores tropicais, fibrosas, polpudas e com cheiros viciosos”.

<sup>9</sup> “[...] um rosário muito antigo [...] em que junto ao crucifixo a mãe tinha atado o tal amuleto de ervas secas dentro de um saquinho de gaze e de cheiro letal”.

<sup>10</sup> “Vinha-lhe agora a memória olfactiva do infeliz, um travo a estrume quando passava. [...] A maresia enjoava-o como o cheiro a estrume do rapaz. Deixou-se cair de borco novamente, indiferente ao destino do desgraçado”.

<sup>11</sup> “[...] seu cheiro azedo do leite da ama”.

<sup>12</sup> “Deixou-se cair na areia, sentia-se atordoado com o cheiro a alimento cozinhado [...] e ele a dar conta de que a sua própria mão se movia, por acto espontâneo, sem lhe demandar permissão, a fome comanda [...]”.

<sup>13</sup> “O cheiro do peixe que a todos entontecia de vontade e fazia esquecer do resto, porque quando se tem muita fome só há fome”.

[...] the smell of grilled fish, the whiffs that wafted over them all and already assuaged their hunger through their nostrils, the bits of food distributed by the overseer and thrown onto the sand as with animals, the taste of the cooked food brought them some humanity, but this was then taken away in the same minute by impatience, the rush to grab their chunk before the castaway next to them [...] in that collective drunkenness (Carvalho, 2016, p. 110)<sup>14</sup>.

At the same time, the overseer's leadership and superiority over the other members of the group is clear. His use of survival tactics and the subjugation of the 'other' that allow him to control essential supplies like drinking water and food from the moment they arrive at the beach are noticeable. Later, the 'leadership' is shared with Teresa, but in the end it is the slave, the most unlikely of leaders, initially treated like an animal, who emerges and takes control. This unexpected development reveals the desire to grant a voice to the 'subaltern' (*sensu*) (Spivak, 1993) and to give value to those who are victims of the most unjust discrimination and prejudice.

At a certain point, one of Teresa's locked chests washes up on the beach, and in a fit of madness, she thinks that her lost son might be alive, hidden inside. However, the trunk only contains the clothes she had taken on the voyage. Teresa's cruel disillusionment contrasts with the others' intoxication when they encounter "[...] the clean perfume of lavender" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 166)<sup>15</sup>, which is contrasted with their "[...] olfaction impregnated with the smell of the sea, fish scales [...]" and the "[...] foetid smell of death, gangrene and decay coming from the bottom of the galley" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 166)<sup>16</sup>. Thus, it was "[...] as if that odour restored a little bit of their humanity, and smells can be more fortifying than food" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 166)<sup>17</sup>. The contents of the trunk become a motive for conflict as everyone wants to claim them for themselves. In this instance, we can observe that the smell of lavender is associated with the upper social class to which Teresa belongs. So, once again we can see the connection between the idea of smell and subordination or inherited leadership. Teresa's previous position did not guarantee her any privileges immediately after the shipwreck, but during the narrative we observe that she begins to assume a kind of leadership in the group. At the same time, the floral essence of the smell of lavender evokes the cleanliness and memories of a past that is very different to the difficult present experienced on that beach.

However, the majority of the smells that mark the struggle for survival are unpleasant, which emphasises precisely the state of decadence and despair that the characters have reached. In fact, their state is reflected in the smell of the decomposing body of the dead horse, which, despite its state of decay, Teresa utilises with a stoical and pragmatic sense of survival:

A sickening smell of putrefying, repulsive, rancid tissue emanated from the horse's entrails, things that were swarming with life, numerous molluscs and crustaceans, small fish feasted on what was left of its viscera in a greed of contortions, a bustling of parasites [...] because those are the rules of the sea. Everyone moved away in the final agony of smell and sight, the inside of the horse emptied, its ribs on show, the arch of bones like a bombed cathedral, with no heart or lungs already, with all the soft tissue hacked away by pincers and gnawed by greedy mouths of fish, a sad carcass, deep holes, with no eyeballs or tongue or lips, only teeth. Teresa didn't let herself be shocked, she felt with her fingers, evaluated how some edible meat could still be removed from the horse's rump, while with the rest they would make bait to catch fish (Carvalho, 2016, p. 175)<sup>18</sup>.

We can see here once again how in a group characterised by patriarchalism, Teresa stands out with her courage and practical mind, both essential for the survival of this unlikely community, ultimately united and stripped of the most varied prejudices by the daily challenges. This becomes evident after the characters, together, kill a baby cachalot that swam too close to the beach before the very eyes of its despairing mother. This bloody scene symbolises the sudden unity of the characters in the fight for survival as the animal provides them with the food that they need. As a result, the smell of the whale's blood and the red in which they are covered brings them closer together: "[...] everyone had the same skin colour, a strange feeling of belonging and unity now linked them, perhaps for ever. Everyone had the same smell again, indistinguishable" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 226)<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> "[...] o cheiro do peixe grelhado, as baforadas que os cobriam a todos, e já se saciavam pelas narinas, os bocados de comida distribuídos pelo capataz atirados à areia, como se faz aos animais, o gosto da comida cozinhada trazia-lhes alguma humanidade, que lhes era retirada no mesmo minuto pela sofreguidão, a pressa em apanharem o seu naco antes do naufrago do lado (...) naquela embriaguez colectiva".

<sup>15</sup> "[...] um aroma limpo de alfazema".

<sup>16</sup> "[...] olfacto impregnado de maresia, escamas de peixe [...] cheiro fétido a morte, gangrena e podridão dos fundos da galé".

<sup>17</sup> "[...] como se aquele odor lhes resgatasse um pouco da humanidade, e os cheiros podem ser mais fortificantes do que comida".

<sup>18</sup> "Um cheiro nauseabundo de tecidos putrescentes, repulsivos, azedos, saiu das entranhas do cavalo, coisas que se revolviavam de vida, números moluscos e crustáceos, pequenos peixes banqueteavam-se com o que restava das suas vísceras, numa avidez de contorções, burburinho de parasitas [...] porque são as regras do mar. Todos se afastaram na agonia do olfacto e da visão, o cavalo esvaziado por dentro, costelas à mostra, a arcadura de ossos como uma catedral bombardeada, já sem coração nem pulmões, com todas as partes moles corroidas de tenazes e bocas sófregas de peixes, triste carcaça, fundos buracos, sem globos oculares nem língua ou beiços, apenas dentes. Teresa não se deixou impressionar, apalpou, avaliou, que da alcatra do cavalo ainda se poderia retirar alguma carne comestível, do resto fariam isco para os peixes".

<sup>19</sup> "[...] todos com o mesmo tom de pele, uma estranha sensação de pertença e unidade ligava-os agora, talvez para sempre. Todos tinham, outra vez, o mesmo cheiro, indistinguível".

Teresa makes use of almost the entire animal, including some whitish matter, with a sickening smell extracted from its intestine that the sea threw back with a dark amber form. She makes this into a sort of malleable soap with which she washes all the members of the group. A disgusting material smelling like sulphur is converted into a product that is useful to the community and smells, according to Nunzio, like the aroma of his mother's rose garden (Carvalho, 2016). Unfamiliar smells are described through their similarity to a familiar smell from the past. Moreover, the transformation of an unpleasant smell into a pleasant one, owing to Teresa's persistence, illustrates the evolution of the relationship between the characters from distrust and hostility to a sense of community. In fact, the shared bathing seems to wash away the prejudices and hostility among the characters, who thus overcome the barriers that led to a rejection of the 'other', now perceived not as an enemy but as someone akin. In this way, "At night, snuggling against one another, all felt a brotherly link, as they now all smelt the same again" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 239)<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, smell accentuates an instinctive and almost primitive side of the characters, functioning as an element of harmony and unity between the members of this diverse community.

Similarly, when we analyse the evocations of the characters' pasts, we notice that smells shape their memories, enabling a clear reconstruction of the past and a temporal cohesion marked by nostalgia, in the line of thought of Svetlana Boym, who defines it as follows:

Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history (Boym, 2001, p. 8).

Here, the concept of 'nostalgia' is seen as a feeling of loss, displacement and anxiety about the past as well as a romantic attraction to fantasy itself (Boym, 2001). Intertwined with this is therefore a longing for a different time (frequently childhood) and a different place. In this context, Boym distinguishes two types of nostalgia. One is restorative nostalgia, a characteristic of nationalism that formulates conspiracy theories and fabricates historical myths, for instance, by restoring monuments (Boym, 2001). The other is reflective nostalgia, which is what interests us here, as it comes about through the characters' memories, formed by the individual's narratives. Reflective nostalgia gives value to fragments of memory, reveals details and temporalises space, being at times ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary (Boym, 2001). The first example is an evocation made by the priest:

It was from that winter that Marcolino kept the most pleasing memory of his childhood, a bitter happiness, as sometimes good memories do not come with the delicate flavour of madeleines or with floral aromas. Rather, with the ferrous taste of blood and the sweaty smell of adrenaline (Carvalho, 2016, p. 112)<sup>21</sup>.

In this evocation, we find an allusion to *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* by Marcel Proust. In the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*, the narrator remembers his childhood in Combray through the smell and the taste of the little cakes called 'petit madeleines'. In this way the awakening of his involuntary memory through smell is evidenced. In the above excerpt, however, although the Proustian aesthetic for the recovery of lost time through the reference to the madeleines and the floral aromas (emblematic of the upper class) that characterise the evocation of the past as woven by Proust's narrator comes through, these pleasant aromas are completely subverted. As a result, a new dimension of memory is transmitted to us, one rooted in a textual olfactory imagination that distances itself from the pleasant smells typical of the privileged classes. Once again, the desire to give voice to the disadvantaged emerges – but this time, to those coming from a rural environment that is often ignored or forgotten. Thus, in Marcolino's case, his happy memory is impacted by a scenario of hunger back in his home village and the moment when he and his father managed to steal a hare from a wolf. We can note in this instance that, as Byung-Chul Han postulates, the smell, impregnated with images and history, restores stability to an 'I' threatened by dissociation, marking his identity. A return to the self is thus involved, as he declares: "Where there is smell, there is recollection" (2015, p. 67)<sup>22</sup>.

It is the same smell connoted by misery and poverty, albeit with different characteristics, that marks Maria Clara's evocation of the past. Her childhood smells of the mud of the banks of the Mondego River in Coimbra, where she survived with her sister without their mother's care, who they were told was in prison.

<sup>20</sup> "À noite, embrulhados uns nos outros, todos se sentiram irmanados por terem, novamente, o mesmo cheiro".

<sup>21</sup> "Foi desse Inverno que Marcolino guardara a sua lembrança mais grata da infância, uma alegria amarga, que por vezes as recordações boas não vêm com gosto delicado de madalenas nem de aromas florais. Mas de sabor ferroso do sangue e do cheiro a suor da adrenalina".

<sup>22</sup> "Donde hay aroma hay recogimiento".

We are given this description: “A warm gust wafting up from the river brought to her the smell of mud from her childhood and with it a bit more courage” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 252)<sup>23</sup>. This is another earthy smell that represents a reality blighted by poverty. Having run away from a convent and been forced into prostitution after being rejected by her sister, who is also a prostitute, Clara had the ability to detect the smell of death: “[...] and then she smelt the woman’s breath, a smell of rotting apples that throughout her life she had come across in many fat people when they only had a short time left to live” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 253)<sup>24</sup>. We can see then that death is announced by the unpleasant smell of putrefaction of a fruit. Moreover, odour is the means by which she recognises and distinguishes the types and characteristics of the men to whom she gives herself in order to survive:

She remembered their breath. Fat men’s breath smelling of rotting apples, the breath of wine of violent men, the breath of broccoli, the breath of manure of ploughed fields, the breath of old olives, the breath of prolonged fasting, the breath of dried vomit, the breath of scurvy, the breath of rancid sweat, the breath of old urine, the breath of other women, the breath of blood, the breath of menstruation, the breath of the river mud (Carvalho, 2016, p. 260)<sup>25</sup>.

Once again, the odours ‘presentify’ and authenticate realities characterised by profound decay. In fact, this reconstruction of Clara’s past of misery, poverty and orphanhood allows us to understand her protective attitude towards the little orphan Henrique, the son of a slave who vanished in the shipwreck, as well as the relationships she establishes with the other characters.

Generally speaking, the representation of smells is seen as a reaction against the *destiempo* (a sort of timelessness) that marks the unfolding of the action in the characters’ exile on the deserted beach, as if the smells allowed them to overcome the contingency and tyranny of time, taking refuge not only in a *sui generis* space but also in another time dimension. As mentioned: “They saw time passing, passing, passing, but time did not see them [...] Until time found them, they would remain safe in this transitive state of shifting sands, improbable survival, implausible community” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 179)<sup>26</sup>. This notion of *destiempo* goes beyond what was defined by the Polish poet Wittlin (1957), for whom an exiled person is deprived not only of his land of origin but also of time, thus finding himself exiled both geographically and temporally. As Wittlin (1957, p. 105) remarks,

[...] in Spanish, there exists for describing an exile, the word *destierro*, a man deprived of his land. I take the liberty to forge one more definition, *destiempo*, a man who has been deprived of his time. That means, deprived of the time which now passes in his country.

In *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato*, this *destiempo*, albeit also connoted by a situation of exile, fits within Byung-Chul Han’s concept of a time that flows openly, without holding back, without destination, in a disjointed process (2015). Using presuppositions from Heidegger and Nietzsche as his basis, Byung-Chul Han points to the absence of an ordering force for time, which makes life lose its decisive or significant moments, passing from one present to another. It is then as a reaction to this *destiempo* that we find the significant moments of the past reconstructed, pivotal points that enable us to understand the characters’ behaviours and interactions.

In this respect, Teresa recalls the smell of the past in the hard and timeless scenario of the deserted beach through the smell of the last of her clothes, which she ultimately has to abandon: “And she went back to her bundle and breathed in the last trace of freshly laundered clothes, of home with the attic scrubbed with soap in the mornings, even before the sea air seized it with all the presumptuousness of sovereigns in their domains” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 169)<sup>27</sup>. This smell seems to function as the last remnant of her former dignity.

Near the end of the story, when the overseer and Julien the slave have begun to devise a plan to escape to another beach, smells become simultaneously an omen for Teresa and an anchor that ties her to the past. In this case, it is her experience of the past that gives her the key to unlock the future, as, observing their actions, she once again recognises in them a certain smell:

<sup>23</sup> “Um sopro quente, vindo do rio, trouxe-lhe o cheiro a lodo da infância e com ele um pouco mais de coragem”.

<sup>24</sup> “[...] e então sentiu o bafo da mulher, o hálito de maçã podre que ao longo da vida foi encontrando em muitas pessoas gordas, quando já pouco tempo lhes restava de vida”.

<sup>25</sup> “Fixava-lhes o hálito. O hálito a maçã podre dos homens gordos, o hálito a vinho dos homens violentos, o hálito a brócolos, o hálito a esterco dos campos lavrados, o hálito a azeitonas antigas, o hálito a jejum prolongado, o hálito a vômito seco, o hálito a escorbuto, o hálito a suor azedo, o hálito a urina velha, o hálito a outras mulheres, o hálito a sangue, o hálito a menstruação, o hálito a lodo do rio”.

<sup>26</sup> “Eles viam o tempo passar, passar, passar, mas o tempo não os via a eles [...] Enquanto o tempo não os encontrasse, eles permaneceriam a salvo, neste estado transitivo sobre areias movediças, improvável sobrevivência, inverosímil comunidade”.

<sup>27</sup> “E voltou para junto da sua trouxa, e ainda respirou o último laivo de roupa lavada, de casa com o sobrado esfregado com sabão pelas manhãs, ainda antes de a maresia o capturar com toda a prepotência dos soberanos em seus domínios”.

The smell that men give off when they are shaking, scared of something; she had learnt to know the smell of fear in the pavilions housing the newly arrived slaves. It was a different sweat, a mixture of cat urine and fish that had been caught many days before. And this was what the two men smelt of at that moment at the water's edge. Teresa guessed that the escape was going to happen soon, the days remained calm [...] (Carvalho, 2016, p. 323)<sup>28</sup>.

At the end of the novel, the group move towards a possible evasion but Nunzio, the loner, is murdered by Julien as his weakness and the fact that he is injured might prejudice the others' resolve to escape. We become witnesses to the inhumane elimination of the weakest link in the community, an act committed by the 'subaltern', the slave-turned-leader after the death of the overseer, owing to his strength, resilience and daring. Again, the pleasant scent of roses appears as a soothing balm, as a refuge in the final moments before death, but in this case, in the form of a hallucination: "And suddenly a sort of joyful dizziness, a smell so familiar, so sickly, your garden, mother. And Nunzio smelt the perfume of dried roses" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 350)<sup>29</sup>. This final smell recalled by Nunzio transforms the familiar delicate scent of the roses into something 'sickly'; the roses are "dried", in other words, devoid of life, thus functioning as a foretaste of death.

### Final considerations

The various smellscapes represented in *Não se pode morar nos olhos de um gato* can mostly be divided into pleasant smells connoted by happy moments from the past and with a higher social status (for example, Teresa's lavender or Nunzio's mother's roses) and smells that evoke a tellurian poverty (such as the mud of Coimbra for Maria Clara or the hare's blood for Marcolino). Besides these, we more frequently find unpleasant or even disgusting smells that represent not only poverty but also the decay and chaos experienced both at the beach and in the miserable pasts of the lower-class characters, as in the case of the slave Julien.

In effect, all these smells act against temporal dissociation throughout the narrative, that is to say, against the *destiempo* marked by the frequency of the tides on the deserted beach. Thus, the smells generate ample temporal spaces in that a single odour, as Byung-Chul Han (2015, p. 66)<sup>30</sup> posits, can bring back the world of childhood, the past, since smells "[...] are islands of duration in the rushing flow of time". In this way, the representation of smells lends greater humanity, realism and consistency to the memories evoked in the characters, providing more in-depth depictions. As Byung-Chul Han (2015, p. 67)<sup>31</sup> puts it, "[...] the scent of time is a manifestation of duration [...]", or rather, the aromatic essence of time becomes an element that liberates temporal events as a reaction to progressive detemporalisation. Albeit ephemeral, the 'smells of memory' are an open door to memorialist, identitary reconfigurations, to immersion in a past and a present that involves a sense of belonging in a constant and parallel discovery of the 'other' (Gago, 2018, p. 84). In this regard, if on the one hand smells can at times act as markers of gender and social class, on the other hand, they can also be described as an element of similarity, of proximity, since the fact that at certain moments of the action the characters have 'the same smell' establishes a feeling of community belonging, as probably "[...] those stateless people had reached a possible home" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 314)<sup>32</sup>. As a result, we discover a sensory textuality through which the representation of the characters' olfactory experiences reveals an understanding of the structure of reality in a clear and specifically human way, as "[...] the past is a ground full of memories only trodden down, not buried" (Carvalho, 2016, p. 313)<sup>33</sup>. Actually, the sense of smell is, as Herz mentions, the sense most linked to the emotions "[...] because of its neuroanatomical relationship with the amygdala-hippocampal complex, critically involved in forming and remembering emotional associations" (2006, p. 194).

Ignited by smell, the memories of these pasts are reborn, tracing the most diverse imperfections, dramas and tragedies that live within the characters, turning them into a solid image of the human condition, represented in its diverse facets through the stages of life experienced by the community – the death of Teresa's son in the shipwreck, the birth of Emina's daughter, the growing up of Henrique, the daily struggle for survival and the constant choice between good and evil. Undoubtedly, evil and suffering are the main constitutive elements of the past lives of the characters.

<sup>28</sup> "Aquele que os homens deitam quando estremeçam de algo, aprendera a conhecer o cheiro do medo nos pavilhões dos escravos recém-chegados. Era um suor diferente, mistura de urina de gato e peixe com muitos dias de pescado. E era a isso que cheiravam os dois homens naquele momento à beira-mar, Teresa adivinhava que a evasão estava próxima, os dias mantinham-se serenos [...]".

<sup>29</sup> "[...] e de repente uma espécie de vertigem feliz, um aroma tão familiar, tão enjoativo, o teu jardim, mãe. E Nunzio sentiu o cheiro de rosas secas."

<sup>30</sup> "[...] son islas de duración en el caudaloso curso del tiempo".

<sup>31</sup> "[...] el aroma del tiempo es una manifestación de la duración".

<sup>32</sup> "[...] aquela gente sem pátria tinha chegado ao lar possível".

<sup>33</sup> "[...] o passado é um chão de memórias calcadas apenas, não sepultadas".

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