

# The uses and implications of the Master/slave image in Alencar's novel *Senhora*

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## Resumo

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Este trabalho incide sobre o romance *Senhora*, de José de Alencar. Numa primeira parte, examinamos como a caracterização da personagem central, Aurélia, foge às convenções do seu tempo. A inversão do papel feminino tradicional permite ao escritor tecer uma forte crítica social. Numa segunda parte, demonstramos como a metáfora central do texto, a da escravatura, acaba por enredar Alencar em contradições insuperáveis, com resultados inesperados.

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José de Alencar (1829-1877) is generally held as one of the founding fathers of Brazilian Romanticism. In its European context, Romanticism had defended values of liberalism, individualism and freedom. But in Brazil, Romanticism's revolutionary ideas, so important in the process of consolidation of its 1822 independence, were pitched against one stark reality, the fact that 'slavery gives the lie to liberal ideas'.<sup>1</sup> Despite this blatant contradiction, 'the anti-slavery campaign there began extremely late and produced a scant handful of major works'. Castro Alves' famous poem "O Navio Negreiro", for instance, the first of these major works to expose the slave-trade in its full horror, was not published until 1868.<sup>2</sup> This was a mere three years before the Law of Free

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<sup>1</sup> Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, ed. and transl. by John Gledson, (London: Verso, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> David T. Haberly, *Three Sad Races*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 52. Haberly also dryly notes that the poem was not published in book-form until 1880.

Womb was passed in 1871, in response to international pressure. The law signalled a move towards emancipation, by declaring all children of slaves to be free, although it gave their owners the option to use their labour until they were 21. In practice, however, slavery still lived on for more than a decade and a half, until it was finally well and truly abolished in 1888.

Alencar was a Romantic and held humanitarian beliefs, but he was a conservative, politically speaking, and spoke publicly against the abolition of slavery.<sup>3</sup> This may contribute to explain why in a novel like *Senhora*, published in 1875, in other words only four years after the Law of Free Womb was passed, at a time when the anti-slavery campaign was therefore in full swing (though sadly not always in an enlightened fashion),<sup>4</sup> a novel moreover whose central metaphor is precisely that of the slave/master relationship, does in fact leave for the most part unexplored the question of actual slavery in nineteenth century Brazil. Indeed, the novel plays on the metaphor of the master/slave relationship as follows: the problematic hero,<sup>5</sup> Fernando Seixas, accepts a degrading offer of marriage, in which he alienates his freedom by selling himself for 100 contos to a young woman who, unbeknown to him, is no other than his ex-fiancé, Aurélia, whom he had discarded in favour of a more profitable match. Aurélia, having become a wealthy heiress, buys him out. Thus, to all intents and purposes, he becomes her slave, in what constitutes a complete reversal of traditional gender roles.

Much of the criticism on *Senhora* has tended to subsume any discussion of metaphor of slavery into the discussion of the gender role reversal in the novel, to draw out the implications of the latter in terms of Alencar's belief in Romantic love. Alencar's novel, according to most critics, reflects the fact that the ideal of true love, based on freedom of choice, was under threat in a society where relationships were increasingly mediated by the corrupting influence of money.<sup>6</sup> Thus Alencar, while advocating Romantic values, was exposing the constraints that a degraded society placed on both men and women. Relationships

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller description of Alencar's political beliefs see R. Magalhães Junior, *José de Alencar e a sua época*, 2nd edn. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> For further details see David Brookshaw, *Race and Color in Brazilian Literature*, (Metuchen/London: Scarecrow Press, 1986), especially Chap. 2.

<sup>5</sup> I am using here the terminology of Lukacs and Goldmann. Alencar, in the wake of Balzac and other mid-nineteenth century novelists becomes increasingly unable to believe in the uncompromising idealism of Romantic heroes. As a result, his plot features 'l'histoire d'une recherche dégradée, recherche de valeurs authentiques dans un monde dégradé lui aussi à un niveau autrement avancé et sur un mode différent'. Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.16.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular the articles 'O papel da mulher no mundo mercantilista de *Senhora*' by Claude Hulet and 'Relendo *Senhora*' by José Aderaldo Castello in *Miscelânea de Estudos Literários: Homenagem a Afrânio Coutinho*, (Rio de Janeiro: 1984), pp.119-131 and pp.223-228 respectively.

between the two sexes and by extension love are certainly the most central theme in the novel and, using this as my starting-point, I shall endeavour to show how the reversal of conventional gender roles in this work problematizes, amongst other things, any straightforward portrayal of Aurélia as an angel-woman. I shall also attempt, however, to discuss more fully the unexplored dimensions of the central master/slave metaphor in the second part of this essay, since the flaws and contradictions of Alencar's position on the question of slavery ultimately become surreptitiously encoded in the web of metaphor permeating his fiction.

Roberto Schwarz draws our attention to the disturbing fact that relatively few nineteenth century writers used slavery as a central motif, accounting for it as follows:

*Favour was our quasi-universal social mediation - and being more appealing than slavery, the other relationship inherited from colonial times, it is understandable that our writers based their interpretation of Brazil upon it, thereby unwittingly disguising the violence that had always been essential to the sphere of production.<sup>7</sup>*

This may contribute to explain why in *Senhora* the slave metaphor is displaced in a way such that on the surface it no longer bears any direct relevance to the arguably pressing issue of slavery in contemporary Brazil. Instead Alencar avails himself of the metaphor to reflect on social conventions rather more generically, as the novel sets out to probe whether we are slaves of gender expectations and slaves of our worship of money.

## **I. Slave of gender? Property and propriety and the metamorphoses of Aurélia**

In the novel, Aurélia Camargo is virtually the only character whose values remain untainted, who does not compromise her ideals. As she says of herself, in the 'vil prosa' of the world, she is by contrast 'a poesia que brilha e deslumbra'.<sup>8</sup> But, hardened by her experience of having being discarded by Fernando for being poor, when she unexpectedly inherits her grandfather's fortune, she is quite prepared to

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<sup>7</sup> Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, ed. and transl. by John Gledson, (London: Verso, 1992), p.22. Further references will be given in the main body of the essay by page number only.

<sup>8</sup> José de Alencar, *Senhora*, (São Paulo: Melhoramentos, 1975). Further references to this edition will be in the main text, by page number only.

play by society's rules, without losing her overall weary detachment. Thus, she observes that marriage is by and large viewed as a transaction, in which love plays no part. Marriage is seldom the union of two souls since, generally speaking, it is a deal from which both parties can capitalize, in other words it is simply a self-interested 'marriage of convenience'.

From the point of view of the woman, what young girls stood to gain was a respectable status. Indeed, aside from marriage, the roles available to nineteenth century women were dismally few, as is made abundantly clear in the novel: unmarried women could either remain respectable or defy the conventions of the period and be labelled as 'fallen women'. Options deemed honourable, though second-rate, included retiring to a convent (a possibility too frightful to contemplate in the novel), or ending up as spinsters of one kind or another<sup>9</sup>: as aunts, 'titia' (as Mariquinhas seems condemned to) or as paid companions, a 'mãe de encomenda' (as D.Firmina is forced to). Both options entailed relinquishing any thought of a love-life. By contrast, women who sought love outside marriage would be ostracized by friends and relatives alike (as was the case of Aurélia's mother, D.Emília, who despite her secret marriage was shunned by all, because appearances were against her) or would have to be content with being the mistresses of influential men, as some anonymous minor characters who make a fleeting appearance in the novel. The latter was an equally problematic status, given its uncomfortable proximity to that of the prostitute. Thus however rich and well-educated, the fact was that a young woman had no respectable status in society unless she was married: as Aurélia bluntly sums it up 'precisava de um marido, traste indispensável às mulheres honestas' (p.88).

From the point of view of the man, marriage often made sense as a good career move, since it had the potential to be immensely financially rewarding. Indeed dowries were nearly always on offer to ensure that young women tied the knot with young men with the right credentials, even if somewhat short of money. Therefore, most men without means of their own would be pushed into making a marriage of convenience to consolidate their financial position and, by extension, their career prospects. This was a direct consequence of the peculiar structure of nineteenth century Brazilian society which, to take up once more Roberto Schwarz's analysis, could be schematically summed up as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> A fate described as follows by Alencar: 'mesquinha sorte do aleijão social, que se chama celibato' (p.44).

*colonization produced three classes of population: the proprietor of the latifundium, the slave and the 'free man' who was in fact dependent [...] Neither proprietor, nor proletarian, the free man's access to social life and its benefits depended, in one way or another, on the favour of a man of wealth and power [...] Favour was therefore the relationship by which the class of free man reproduced itself. (p.22)*

In this context, the dowry, it could be argued, constituted yet another means of 'protection' or favour for aspiring young men.

Through his characters, Alencar succeeds in highlighting how relationships were distorted and mediated by economic imperatives, which instrumentalized both men and women. The possibility of romantic love is therefore called into question, as what is shown to bind couples together is mutual interest. Playing society by its own rules, by virtue of being both immensely rich and unusually strong-willed, Aurélia is in the enviable position of choosing her own husband, in other words, she is in a position to turn marriage conventions on their head. Women were normally little more than merchandise in effect, with a given market-value, which depended on a combination of their dowry and their looks. She, however, ruthlessly inverts the equation, acting instead from the premise that her 'dowry' puts her in a buyer's position. She can buy the husband she wants, if he is for sale. And her conviction, having seen the corrupting influence of money, is that nearly everyone is for sale.

Aurélia's cold-blooded plan to buy a husband denotes profound cynicism, and coming from a woman, it is likely to shock. This eloquently attests to society's double standards since, as has already been noted, the same fact viewed from the opposite point of view (a young man marrying to improve his social standing, ie selling himself) was deemed to be acceptable. But a woman was supposed to be sweet and loving, not self-seeking. Aurélia's calculating behaviour immediately obliterates her angel-like innocence, placing her into a category other than that of the angel-woman. By default, that category must be that of the 'monster-woman', who is power-crazy, despotic and vengeful. Thus Alencar uses adjectives such as 'satânica' to describe her, and frequently employs the metaphor of the cold, lifeless statue to convey the unfeeling nature of her manner. At one point, he specifically underlines her unfeminine behaviour as follows: 'o princípio vital da mulher abandonava seu foco natural, o coração, para concentrar-se no cérebro, onde residem as faculdades especulativas do homem' (p.26). Reason was a male attribute, feeling a female one: Aurélia's actions are tantamount to an unforgivable crossing of gender-boundaries.

Thus Aurélia's actions, rational at best, calculating at worst, momentarily exclude her from femininity. But significantly, in the course of the novel, this sporadic reification of Aurélia is seen as perversely attractive to those who have been corrupted by the power of money. This makes Aurélia very akin to the women described in Cesário Verde's poetry, 'Esplêndida' or 'Frígida', powerful and emasculating all at once: hence the scandal that greeted both Cesário's unconventional portrayals and, to a lesser extent, Alencar's *perfis de mulheres* which also refuse easy compartmentalization into good and evil women.<sup>10</sup>

However, ruthless self-command is only a product of Aurélia's inner suffering. Beneath the surface there is a deeply sensitive, loving woman who intermittently comes to the fore. Alencar deftly manipulates the presentation of information, so that after the novel's first part where the onus falls mainly on the heroine's indomitable spirit and manipulative skills, the flashback of the second part reveals her innermost sensitive and selfless nature. Furthermore, Alencar deliberately continues to juxtapose throughout the contradictory aspects of her personality, encoding them in the symbolism of the colour of her clothing, for instance.

Aurélia is nearly always seen wearing white, which on the one hand underlines her cold statue-like, inaccessible, subjugating beauty, but on the other hand is simultaneously a sign of the purity of her inner soul. This duality is similarly encapsulated in her very name: Aurélia contains the word *aurea*, gold, which on the one hand points to cold metallic money, but on the other suggests an unsoiled ideal. In a climactic episode, where she waltzes with Fernando, she is wearing a gold gown, a colour attuned to the dual symbolism of her name: hence she is 'fatal e deslumbrante', a temptress, but also ideally beautiful since her gown 'a vestia como uma gaza de luz' (p.237). The only other colours worn by Aurélia in the course of the novel are blue and green. Blue, worn on visits to the outside world, an 'azul entretecido de fios de prata', in other words the colour of the Virgin Mary, indicates celestial purity

<sup>10</sup> For further details on sexual role reversal in Cesário Verde, see Helder Macedo, *Nós, uma leitura de Cesário Verde*, (Lisbon: 1975). Alencar's works dealing with the figure of the prostitute, *As Asas de um Anjo* and *Luciola* both caused some scandal. *Diva*, which deals with a haughty woman eventually dominated by a display of virility, is tantalizingly evoked by characters in *Senhora*, where a nameless literary critic asserts that Emília's character is unrealistic, while Aurélia's defends her (p.222). As for *Senhora*, Aurélia's behaviour prompted criticism in the press, casting doubts about the nobility of 'o carácter de uma senhora capaz de insultar aquele a quem ama e amou' (p.280). Alencar replied to these criticisms under the pseudonym of Elisa do Vale, saying 'não concebo a paixão sem os ímpetos que subvertem a alma'. The underlying problem seemed precisely to be that Aurélia eluded easy compartmentalization into the category of either angel-woman or monster-woman, being both in turn.

amidst the general artificiality (p.187). Green, symptomatically worn on her wedding night and in the last scene (pp.85 and 270), as well as in a middle one, partakes of the same symbolism as blue but is significantly associated with nature. It highlights Aurélia's innocence, linking her with a green Eden, devoid of the corrupting influence of society, where she can be a fully loving woman: 'Seixas cuidou que assistia à metamorfose da ninfa transformada em loto. Mas logo depois [...] pareceu-lhe antes que a flor tomava as formas da mulher e animava-se ao sopro divino' (pp.163-4). But although the comparison endorses Aurélia with both innocence and sexuality, thus invalidating any attempt to compartmentalize her into good or bad, it does not altogether succeed in avoid the problem of presenting the woman as a creature belonging to nature, the object of a demiurgic male gaze, a male creation.

In Alencar's society, women were at the service of men and their whims, not only in marriage, but in every single relationship, as the relationship between Fernando and the female members of his family underlines.<sup>11</sup> But in the case of Aurélia, the tables are turned: as she is the one who purchases her husband, it is he who alienates his freedom. And since she exposes the so-called marriage of convenience as a contemptible sham, Fernando effectively has to see himself as 'her slave'. The entire novel plays on this unusual situation by transposing the metaphor of slavery onto the domestic realm. Suprisingly, critics have on the whole neglected to analyse this metaphor in greater depth, taking it at face value, but, as I hope to demonstrate, it has in fact particularly revealing implications.

## II. The slippery meanings of the slave analogy

Before her marriage, Aurélia, we are told, amused herself by treating her prospective suitors as merchandise, 'fazendo-lhes a cotação como se usava outrora com os lotes de escravos' (p.135). The comparison looks back to the degrading costum of public auctioning of slaves, to which Alencar had formally put a stop in 1868, when he had been Minister of Justice. It recalls Alencar's commitment to a more human treatment of slaves, but simultaneously unwittingly draws at-

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<sup>11</sup> The allegiance of his mother and sisters is strikingly encapsulated in the comparison of him receiving the loving attentions that his younger sister bestows on him 'como um sultão os receberia da sua almeia favorita' (p.37). Such a pattern would then be reproduced in marriage, where women would normally relinquish their freedom and devote themselves to pleasing their lord and master, as Aurélia's mother for instance had done.

tention to the flawed nature of slavery itself. Indeed it could be argued that Aurélia's suitors deserved her contempt and deserved to be objectified, insofar as she was merely reciprocating the fact that they, in the first instance, viewed her as an object, gauging her assets (financial and others). By contrast, slaves had done nothing that could justify their being treated as commodities. In other words, however well-meaning, Alencar's position ultimately only serves to reinforce their status as slaves, as would anything else falling short of complete restitution of freedom, it could be argued.<sup>12</sup>

Although Fernando sells himself, he shares Romanticism's belief that even when the body was shackled and prostituted, the soul could remain pure. This belief is of course subjacent to the leitmotif of the rehabilitated prostitute which Alencar himself has used in his earlier *Luciola*, but more importantly it is central to the depiction of the slave-woman in *A Escrava Isaura*, a novel by the abolitionist Bernardo Guimarães, coincidentally published the same year as *Senhora*. Thus Fernando's survival depends on the belief that his soul stays untainted. As he strives to redeem himself (both financially and morally) from his humiliating yoke, the possibility of his redemption also hinges on the knowledge that, in Brazil, slaves could buy their freedom for the sum for which they had initially been purchased. In practice slaves would seldom be in a position to find that money, but since Fernando is still a free man in the eyes of the outside world, he is able to gather the required sum by saving his salary and making money from an earlier financial speculation.

Significantly, as long as Fernando is stripped of his dignity, servile, powerless and therefore completely emasculated, the marriage remains unconsumated. For Alencar to have staged a sexually predatory woman and a sexually subservient man would have been completely unacceptable within the Romantic creed. Therefore the marriage can only consumated at the end when Fernando is eventually able meet on an equal footing with Aurélia. This explains why, when half-way through their mock marriage Aurélia offers him the chance of divorce, Fernando flatly refuses on the grounds that it would not really free him or restore

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<sup>12</sup> This is the view of the American slave, Harriet Jacobs, who reacts to her protector's offer of purchasing her freedom in the following manner: 'to pay money to those who had so grievously oppressed me seemed like taking from my sufferings the glory of triumph. I wrote to Mrs Bruce thanking her, but saying that being sold from one owner to another seemed too much like slavery'. in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed by Henry Louis Gates, Penguin 1987, p.511. I am indebted to Stacey Vally, from Reed College, Portland for sharing with me her thoughts on this North American slave narrative.



his dignity, since the only way for him to achieve this would be to buy his own freedom back.<sup>13</sup> Thus he asks her:

*O senhor tem o direito de despedir o cativo quando lhe aprouver ? [...] depois de privar-se um homem de sua liberdade, de o rebaixar ante a própria consciência, de o haver transformado em um instrumento; é lícito, a pretexto de alforria abandonar essa criatura a quem sequestraram da sociedade? (p.201)*

This is one of the few instances in the novel directly touching on the question of the abolition of slavery. Coherent with the position that he would maintain to the end (and here it might be relevant to remind ourselves that Alencar died in 1877, that is to say, more than a decade before the full abolition of slavery), Alencar stresses that masters have got duties towards their slaves. However, Fernando's comparison with the slave does not stand up to close examination: unlike a real slave, Fernando has alienated his freedom willingly, therefore only he can rehabilitate himself and he should not be denied that chance. By contrast, while masters have got a moral duty not to abandon slaves to fend for themselves overnight, it does not follow that they should not free them. After all, the slaves' plight was not of their own making.

But although Alencar is against the abolition of slavery, when it comes to free men (and women) he clearly does not endorse the complete subjection of one sex by the other. To make his point, he puts into the mouth of Fernando the spectre of a reversal in the power relations between oppressor and oppressed. Thus, as Fernando provocatively speculates, since men have used and abused women for centuries, there is absolutely no reason why women with power should not imitate them and follow suit:

*A senhora deve saber que o casamento começou por ser a compra da mulher pelo homem; e ainda neste século se usava em Inglaterra, como símbolo do divórcio, levar a repudiada ao mercado e vendê-la ao martelo. Também não ignora que no Oriente há escravas que vivem em suntuosos palácios. [...] Ora esse poder ou esse luxo que o homem se arrogou, por que não o terá a mulher deste século e desta sociedade, desde que lhe cresce nas mãos o ouro? (pp.231-2)*

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<sup>13</sup> In order to preserve his self-respect, Fernando could never love Aurélia before he had rehabilitated himself in her eyes, in other words, before he had earned his freedom again and thereby become once more her equal: 'ele julgava uma infâmia para si, envolver sua alma e afundá-la nessa transação torpe' (p. 248).

Alencar's point, conveyed by his inversion of the norm, is that it is almost inconceivable and would be morally wrong for a powerful woman to reduce a free man to the status of a slave. The unspoken conclusion on his part, therefore, seems to be that oppression within marriage is abject and should not be tolerated, irrespective of whether it comes from a woman or a man.

For Aurélia, a Romantic heroine, however, this sort of slavery is merely circumstantial, the product of a flawed society. To it, she opposes the only one absolute slavery, the slavery of love:

*Isto que o senhor chama de escravidão, não passa da violência que o forte exerce sobre o fraco; e nesse ponto todos somos mais ou menos escravos, da lei, da opinião, dos prejuízos. Escravos verdadeiros, só conheço um tirano que os faz, é o amor (p.232).*

Here, Aurélia dismisses institutionalized slavery or, more accurately, the somewhat more generic concept of oppression, out of hand and rather too speedily. Had she followed her reasoning to its logical conclusion, however, she would have realized that, since oppression is for the most part fostered by an imperfect society, it is man-made and therefore susceptible to reversal (as Fernando points out) or indeed transformation. This of course holds true both for the category of women and for that of slaves, which is no doubt why Alencar did not wish to explore the issue further. Thus, by a cunning sleight of hand, our attention is diverted as we are made to accept that although on the surface Fernando is a bought slave, in reality the true slave is Aurélia because of her unrelenting love for the ideal Fernando.

Following on from this, at the end of the novel, once Fernando has purchased his freedom and therefore becomes once more worthy of her love, Aurélia can show her submissiveness to her idol by kneeling at his feet 'aqui a tens implorando o teu perdão e feliz porque te adora como o senhor de sua alma' (p.277). It is telling that Alencar's ending does not stage Fernando simultaneously protesting his enslavement to Aurélia. This omission restores the balance, producing a return to more familiar ground, that of male supremacy. It must be noted that the underlying assumption is nevertheless the equality of the couple's status in love, an equality underscored by the shift to the use of the intimate 'tu' on both sides for the first time in the novel: 'implorando o teu perdão'; 'feliz porque te adora'.

As for real slaves, we must conclude that despite using the central metaphor of slavery, Alencar perhaps disappointingly, though predictably, sidelines the issue of their plight. At the end of the novel Aurélia casually summons her *mucama* 'para dar uma ordem à escrava' (p.275). Slavery is abject when imposed on an elegant, well-bred white man. Alencar also shows that it is uncivilized and barbaric to force women into the shackles of a loveless marriage, stripping them of freedom of choice. But beyond that, for the time being, some are assumed to be more equal than others.

## Conclusion

Alencar's novel is a seminal work on several counts: firstly, despite its sugary, conventional ending: 'As cortinas cerraram-se, e as auras da noite, acariciando o seio das flores, cantavam o hino misterioso do santo amor conjugal' (p.277), the novel courageously tackles head on the inequitable situation of women in nineteenth century society. This is because, as Schwarz notes, 'he only reconciles the situation at the end of the narrative and is non-conformist during its development, where he is bold and positively enjoys contradictions' (p.70). To that extent, *Senhora* shares the platform with another narrative masterpiece of the 1870s, *O Primo Basílio* by Eça de Queirós. Indeed, despite its equally contrived moral ending, culminating in the death of the adultress Luísa, Eça challenges the *status quo* by staging through an elaborate *mise en abîme* a different authorial choice, that of the playwright Ernestinho, who decides on the husband's forgiveness.

Secondly, while *Senhora* ostensibly skirts round the question of real slavery, pushing it back to the margins of the text, it does engage with problematic aspects of nineteenth century Brazilian society, other than the issue of women's position in that society. It could even be argued at a pinch, that the relationship between Aurélia and Fernando, beneath the labels 'slave and master' in reality evokes a relationship more akin to that of favour, where the dependent Fernando has to please the incomprehensible whims of his changeable patron, who can be benevolent one moment and caustic the next. Hence, confirming Schwarz's thesis, slavery is in some sense once more displaced, as the central motif in the text becomes the ins and outs of a seemingly arbitrary relationship based on favour.

Thirdly, and finally, while slavery is displaced and relegated to the margins of the text, it consistently refuses to stay there. As a result,

the subtext succeeds in deconstructing the overt message. To quote Gayatri Spivak's comments on Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

*If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression.*<sup>14</sup>

Having followed the adventures of the metaphor of the slave/master relationship through the text of *Senhora*, what transpires is that while Alencar had consciously placed 'the bourgeois reification of social relationships at the centre of the novel' (Schwarz, p.72), calling into question society's reification of both men and women (although women's angel-like integrity and redeeming powers remain ultimately unchallenged), what was concealed at the periphery, but became undone in the web of metaphor is the belief that slavery can ever be justified, patently undermining Alencar's own self-professed position on the subject.

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<sup>14</sup> Gayatri Spivak, Translator's Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, p. LXXV.