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WHIRLWINDS IN THE NARRATIVE OF *THE DEVILS OF LOUDUN*, BY ALDOUS HUXLEY: A STUDY ON TRUTH, FICTION, JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the “historical narrative” novel *The Devils of Loudun*, by Aldous Huxley, which tells the story of a supposed demonic possession case happened in a convent of Ursuline nuns in the beginning of the 17th century. It is about a real event that brings up a series of thoughts on the importance of the law, as well as the role of literature and philosophy, fiction, truth, justice and its relation with vengeance and revenge. The objective is to depart from the theory of law in order to study the literary work. Also, this paper aims at establishing to what extent the process of telling the truth can be twisted by revenge, as a primitive instinct of annihilating an enemy. It is a theoretical investigation, accomplished by bibliographic research, with an interdisciplinary approach between law and literature.

Keywords: truth; verisimilitude; literature; justice; revenge.

1 INTRODUCTION

The “historical narrative” novel *The Devils of Loudun*, by Aldous Huxley, tells the story of a supposed demonic possession case happened in a convent of Ursuline nuns in the beginning of the 17th century. It is about a real event that brings up a series of thoughts on legal philosophy. This paper analyzes the novel, with special emphasis on the concepts of truth,

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verisimilitude, the narrative aspects of the law, as well as the opposition between justice and vengeance.

The main question to be answered is the problem of truth in law. Would it be possible for the law to have an infallible statue for identifying truthful statements? Or, on the other hand, is the law doomed to dwell in doubt, in need for discursive constructions that could validate propositions and statements? In the first part of this article, we briefly discuss the ideas by Plato and Aristotle on the concept of truth, highlighting what they understood as *mimesis*. Based on these original ideas from early philosophers, we depart to a broader set of observations about the law, aiming at articulating them with the theory of literature.

As a consequence to the presented arguments, the second part of this paper focuses on the matter of lying as opposed to telling the truth. The plot of *The Devils of Loudun* makes it possible to see the tension generated by lies, which are reinforced by the time's law. It is a moral dilemma that demands a strong position of the legal professionals and scientists.

Another constant problem in this discussion is the relation between justice and vengeance, which is the topic of this paper's third chapter. It is one of the greatest challenges faced by humankind, which the law should deal with in attempt to pacify the conflicts. The analysis of *The Devils of Loudun* is an eloquent depiction of the vindictive instinct of men and their interference in legal decisions, led by temporal and historical circumstances.

Establishing borders between philosophy, literature, and the law is not an easy task. They are distinct areas with specific characteristics and parameters, seen by some as different and sometimes antagonist. This research, however, is related to the theory of law, philosophy and literature, and it aims at findings fundamental assets from these areas in order to develop the questions raised. The starting objective of this investigation is to establish an intersection between literature, law, and philosophy, as a means to understand literary expression regarding justice and legal representations in literature. It is indispensable to reflect upon topics that are crucial for a humanistic view of the law. Literature opens up horizons of restlessness, empathy with the narrated sufferings, and,

above all, of enlightenment towards the sense of justice and fairness of legal professionals.

2 FROM THE PLATONIC CONCEPTION OF TRUTH TO THE ARISTOTELIC CONCEPT OF *MIMESIS*: CONVERGING POINTS BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, AND THE LAW

Beauty, therefore, is an *object*, for us, because reflection is a condition under which we have the sensation of it, but it is, at the same time, a *state of our subject*, since feeling is the condition under which we have a representation of it (Schiller, 2001, p. 127, translated, originally emphasized).

We start from the question of truth in its most philosophical, or *jusphilosophical* sense. The topic of truth x illusion, true or theoretical knowledge (*epistémē*) as opposed to opinion (*dóxa*) runs throughout the history of Western thought. Law and justice follow this path, not exempt from contradictions and mistakes. As Joana Aguiar e Silva observes, the restlessness of the search for truth is of an ontological and epistemological character and constitutes “one of the most intriguing mysteries in the entire history of Western philosophy” (Silva, 2001, p. 34, translated).

We will not consider the conceptions of truth prior to Plato – truth as *alétheia*, revealed by the muses and the masters of the truth (Detienne, 1988, p. 17-18), and the idea of *phýsis*, which abandons its merely physical meaning and acquires a metaphysical connotation for the Pre-Socratic philosophers. In the cosmogonic poem *Teogonía*, by Hesiod, in which there is a genealogy of the ancient gods, there are two essential topics for further philosophical thought: the presence of the Muses and the revelation word of *Alétheia* (Truth), the meaning of *khaós* (chaos) in the creation of the *kósmos* (order, organization, cosmos), and the ordering force led by Zeus (1995). We will also not study the concept of *phýsis* (nature; process of birth and growth; the nature of a being; the originating principle). The traditional translation for *natura* presents a distortion of the primordial Greek notion, since the word *nature* starts to designate the research of the natural sciences, to be dominated by man through the improvement of technique. Certainly, it constitutes a reducing vision not

experienced by the Pre-Socratics who, on the other hand, attribute to *phýsis* a much greater amplitude, which could reveal fundamental speculative issues (Barnes, 1997, p. 13-15; Borheim, 1991, p. 11).

Plato systematizes the previous ideas and distances himself from the concept of *dóxa*. Actually, he expresses repudiation for the *eídolon* (image, simulacrum), banning from the republic the imitators who defile, with their ingenious technique, the *eidos*, that is, the visible forms, which are presented to the gaze of the theoretical man, of the “natural craftsman” (Book X, 597d, translated). Outcast of The Platonic Republic, poets and authors lose their status as *théoros* (spectators)², reduced to a mediocre and reprehensible role on the scale of values of the city governed by the philosopher-king. Plato annihilates them by placing them “three points away from the real, as it is easy to execute them even without knowing the truth, since they represent ghosts and not real beings” (Book X, 599a, translated). He transforms the talent of artists to ghostly entertainment, extremely harmful to the raising of young people.

How can one understand Plato’s intricate aversion to poetry and tragedy, as his work is distinguished by the remarkable use of imaginary resources, of memorable myths and the dramatic conception of his philosophical premises, which challenge human finitude? It is visible, especially in Book III, of the *Republic*, that Plato feels embarrassed to condemn Homer’s poetry, although he does not hesitate to consider it an addiction and purge it from his pedagogical project (Book III, 387b).

It is important to clarify Plato’s paradoxical controversy with the poetic arts. The main enemy is the power of seduction and the magic of *mimesis*, which creates a world of illusions, intractable to the development of intellect. Regarding that, Plato does not disagree with the Sophist philosophers. The sophists’ educational programme includes an attack against poets, which is recognized by Plato, in Book X, 600d, of the *Republic*, when mentioning Protagoras and Prodicus. Platonic speculation

² A term that comes from the verb *théorein*, which means *to see, to contemplate, to observe*.

aims at dispersing appearances and revealing the true links between things. It is an exhortation for man to acquire a superior intellectual vision, in order to instrumentalize him to capture the essence of things. The exaltation of sensory elements and the declining of reason are opposed to the development of a mental predisposition to travel the path of abstract thought.

Aristotle, on the other hand, sees that imitation has a different role than that conceived by Plato: There is an innate tendency of man to imitate. This idea is expressed in *Poetics* (1448b, 6, chapter IV). Benedito Nunes understands that imitation derivates from the will of man to acquire experience, which does not suppress the intellectual ability. According to Nunes, “In man, the imitative tendency is associated with Reason itself, and this is manifested in art, which is the correct, rational way of making and creating, according to the Aristotelian concept” (1991, p. 40, translated). Therefore, Aristotle’s conception distances itself from the Platonic view, which rejected the convergence of the intellectual and the sensitive aspects.

Thus, with Aristotle there is a valorization of reality, hence Antoine Compagnon’s assertion that “*mímèsis*, since Aristotle, is the most general and recurrent term under which the relations between literature and reality were conceived” (2012, p 95, translated). *Mimesis* is thus understood as imitation, representation, verisimilitude, fiction, illusion, lie, realism, until the moment when the supremacy of form prevails, that is, literature acquires autonomy in relation to reality (Compagnon, 2012, p 95-96)³.

As previously emphasized, the concept of *mimesis* in Aristotle is decisive for the development of literature. In *Poetics*, the main object of *mimesis* are the human actions, which is why the dramatic arts are valued, “because tragedy is the *mimesis* not of men, but of action and life” (1450a, 16, chapter VI, translated) says Aristotle. It is, therefore, the actions of an agent that are intertwined in the poetic composition, converting the

³ Due to the scope of this paper, it is not possible to make a long theoretical-literary study on *mimesis*; however, it is worth highlighting the work of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature* (1987), which outlines the evolution of Western literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf, constituting a breathtaking work on the representation of reality, as emphasized by Compagnon (2012, p. 95; 104).

representation of actions, in Compagnon's words, into a "narratology" (2012, p. 102).

A relevant aspect in Aristotle's *Poetics* is the return of the valuation of *dóxa*, of appearance, considered as inferior by Plato. Aristotle conveys the idea that the artist does not make an identical representation of reality, but positions him / herself in the shadows between truth and illusion, seeking the most essential form: "And it is evident, from what has already been said, also that the wording of what happened, it is not a function of the poet, but rather what could happen and the possible things according to the likelihood or the necessary" (1451a 36, chapter IX, translated). As Antoine Compagnon assesses, "*Mímèsis* is reoriented towards rhetoric and *doxa*, opinion. The credible [...] is acceptable by common sense, which is *endoxal* and not *paradoxical*, which corresponds to the code and norms of social consensus" (2012, p. 103, translated). And this perception is fundamental for the study of the language of law and for the search for its theoretical status.

It is also worth mentioning that *mimesis* is a learning process (Compagnon, 2012, p. 124), which puts it in straight connection to the world. According to *Poetics*, Aristotle observes that the act of imitating is innate to man and makes it possible to acquire knowledge since birth (1448b 6, chapter IV). In this view, *mimesis* is not a mere copy, a specter representation of something, but rather it perfects the people, their knowledge and their world.

Paul Ricoeur, in his trilogy *Time and narrative*, especially in volumes 1 and 3 (2010), understands *mimesis* as a form of *mythos*, that is, the "composition of the plot" (2010, 1, p. 56, translated). It refers to the concept map presented in *Poetics* (1447a, chapter I; 1450a, chapter VI e VII; Ricoeur, 1991, p. 168-171), by Aristotle, by using the concept of *mimesis* (*emplotment*) (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 140-144), which primarily constitutes the idea of sewing actions into a text, a plot, unifying the components of poetry-making. Such composition is defined by a poetic process of constitutively ordering divergent components, which is called by Ricoeur "disagreeing agreement" (1991, p. 141, translated), a characteristic trait of narrative that reaches its summit in the idea of "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (1991, p. 169, translated).

Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (2014, p. 168, 201-202), summarizes the main concepts presented in the *Poetics* of Aristotle: *mythos* (1450a, b, chapter VI); *dianoia* (1450b, 5, 15, chapter VI), which is the thought itself, that is, what one intends to say about the actions represented; and *anagnorisis*, which means recognition (1452a, 30, 35; 1452b, 5, 10, chapter XI), an important element for the adventures in a tragedy, and for philosophy, as it represents the passage from ignorance to knowledge. Anagnôrisis acquires enormous importance when it occurs with the adventures of a tragedy, the *peripecia*, as Aristotle says, meaning the recovery of identity and the achievement of a prominent philosophical sense. The emphasis given by Terence Cave (1988) to the notion of recognition is of particular interest for the development of this investigation, as it leads us to the novel by Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun*, and the technique used to narrate its episodes.

The intersection of philosophy, literature and law allows us to address crucial questions for a legal and philosophical reflection, of an ontological and epistemological order. The matter is so controversial that Herbert Hart in *The Concept of Law* expresses, at the beginning, the “Perplexities of the theory of law”, among them the question “What is the law?” (2012, p. 3, translated), which, according to him, surpasses any other literature pertinent to another science. The chosen literary text, however, restricts the scope of the matter in order to focus on the opposition of truth versus falsehood and verisimilitude, as a possibility for the law to reach some criterion of intelligibility. We start from the question: is it possible for the law, or the interpretation that is made of it, to obtain the truth? Does the law have the pretentiousness of finding an assertive truth, or is it a credible form of knowledge, based on the contingency of facts and temporal-historical circumstances? (Silva, 2001, p. 33-34).

Jesús Antonio Ruiz Monroy states that truth and the law have a strong connection, especially regarding legal cases that claim for the truthful facts (2016, p. 3). He questions whether it is impossible to univocally defining the truth and ponders that judges do not have conditions of predicting every variable in a lawsuit, but they should

control possible damages that might harm the rationality of a sentence (2016, p. 9).

The idea of truth elaborated by Plato in *Republic* is, thus, too far from reality, even though the intention is to propose an ideal city governed by a Philosopher-king and guided by the ideals of justice, virtuousness and truth. Later on, truth is seen as the adequation to intellect, an idea consolidated by Saint Thomas Aquinas⁴, following the Aristotelian view. It thus acquires a logical characteristic as the idea is to check veracity or coherence of statements to reality by analyzing true or false propositions (Cárcova, 2008, p. 288).

José Calvo González emphasizes the inventiveness of the judges in creating reports of the facts present in the lawsuits and, with narrative ability, being able to make fair and consistent decisions. It is not a mechanical interpretation, “theory of mechanistic interpretation”, applying the neutral subsumption of the law, which constitutes one of the tenets of juridical positivism (Bobbio, 1995, p. 133). In *Verdad [Narración] Justicia*, Calvo González traces a portrait of the judge’s performance in his / her role as a decision maker, subdued to emotions and preference:

With this objective, it now acts as an auditor-accountant and produces the “narrative adjustment”: the judge then reviews, compares, intersects, discriminates, refuses, and also prefers, opts, chooses, and equally admits, links, and elaborates, and harmonizes, until constructing the narrative coherence of what is discussed on the facts and, by narrative coherence, manufacturing the legal assembly tied to it; and so say the facts and says the law in a story, the verdict, which is the judicial truth (1998, p. 7-38, translated)⁵.

⁴ The controversy about the concept of truth presents a vast literature and it is not possible to thoroughly study it in this work. Mention is made of Saint Thomas Aquinas as the formulator of the expression *adequatio* as truth: “But, when it begins to judge the apprehended thing, then this judgment of the intellect is something of its own that is not outside the thing; but, when the adequacy is established to what is outside the thing, the judgment is said to be true; then the intellect judges the apprehended thing when it says that something is or is not, which is characteristic of the component and dividing intellect” (2002, q.1, art.3, p. 167-169, translated).

⁵ Originally: “Con este objetivo atúa ahora en función de auditor-contable y produce el “ajuste narrativo”: revisa, compara, interseca, discrimina, rehusa, e, también prefiere, opta, elige, e igualmente admite, e enlaza, y elabora, y armoniza, hasta construir la coherencia narrativa de lo discutido sobre los hechos y, por coherencia narrativa fabricar el ensamblaje jurídico anudado a ella; y así disse los hechos y disse el derecho en un relato, el veredicto, que es verdade judicial”.

The approximation between law and literature becomes clearer when observing the theory of narrative construction, which lead Calvo González to propose the Narrativity Theory of Law in the wake of studies on narrative coherence, based on the conceptions of Ronald Dworkin (1999, p. 271 -279), especially with the chain novel concept, and Neil McCormick (2006, p. 115-116), who proposes the “coherence” test to give veracity to narrated facts and to compose a *ratio decidendi* with the minimum criterion of plausibility. According to Calvo González, “[McCormick] conceives narrative coherence as a criterion for establishing the truth, in the absence of direct proof” (2013, p. 49). Calvo González’s narrative theory differs from those previously mentioned and believes in the “narrative triumph” (2013, p. 53) as a way of achieving meaning and justification, through deliberation and narrative discourse, without establishing a criterion of truth, but approaching the verisimilitude of the facts that compose the statements. However, the space for legal and philosophical concerns persists. Verisimilitude, as we discussed before, is accepted by Aristotle. The judicial discourse seems to be based on this idea of credibility. Joana Aguiar e Silva questions judicial evidences as opposed to scientifically based evidence, which always finds the truth. And she adds:

Law is built daily from rival versions of the truth, which are pragmatically argued before an audience that at all costs both sides seek to convince. We can even say that the great questions of Law gravitate towards a problem of argumentative communication. Now, does all this mean that verisimilitude outweighs the truth? Has opinion become more important than facts? (2001, p. 40)

These questionings are analyzed in the following part of this paper, based on the plot of *The Devils of Loudun*, by Aldous Huxley. Also, this article considers the distortions of truth presented in the judgement of Urbain Grandier, taken to the maximum degree of injustice due to the turbulence of the narrated events and the political-legal repercussion the case stirred at its time. Father Grandier, after a past of lust and explicitly anticlerical behavior, was accused of witchcraft; The trial was considered unfair since the truthful facts were completely deviated. He ended up

sentenced to death in a cruel and merciless way by the Inquisition in August 18, 1634.

3 LAW, TRUTH, AND THE TWISTS OF *THE DEVILS OF LOUDUN*, BY ALDOUS HUXLEY: HISTORY, FICTION, JUDGMENT

There is only one expression for truth: the thought which repudiates injustice. If insistence on the good sides of life is not sublated in the negative whole, it transfigures its own opposite: violence. With words I can intrigue, propagate, suggest; that is the attribute which entangles them, as it entangles all activity in the world, and is the only one which is understood by the lie. It insinuates that even when one contradicts the existing order, one is acting in the service of other, emergent powers, competing bureaucracies, and rulers. In its nameless fear, it can and will see only what resembles itself. Anything which is absorbed into its medium, language as mere instrument, becomes identical to the lie as objects become indistinguishable in darkness. But although it is true that there is no word which could not ultimately be used by the lie, the word's temper never gleams in the lie but only in the thought hardened in the fight against power. Uncompromising hatred of the terror inflicted on the last of the earth's creatures legitimizes the gratitude of those who are spared. Invocation of the sun is idolatry. Only the spectacle of the tree withered in its heat gives a presentiment of the majesty of the day which will not scorch the world on which it shines. (Adorno; Horkheimer, 2002, p. 182, emphasis added)

This beautiful excerpt by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, titled “For Voltaire”, included in the “Notes and Sketches” session of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, illustrates the ideas of truth, of lie, and of the means of language use that are able to subvert the human mind, which brings up great injustice. The story of Urbain Grandier and the sinister happenings in the Ursuline nuns’ convent generated a series of questions on to what extent the law should be allowed to legitimize untruthful reports.

The Devils of Loudun, by Aldous Huxley, is a novel written in 1952. It has the intention of being a historical narrative about a controversial demonic possession of Ursuline nuns, supposedly happened in the 17th century. The novel reveals Huxley’s vast knowledge of multiple areas, such as Medicine, mysticism, Psychology, thus making up a kaleidoscope of information, which is extremely rich for the reading plot. Huxley’s technique is based on mixing different ingredients in order to capture and illuminate the environment of perplexity, wrong conceptions and lust that was taking over that historical period (Smirnova, 2018).

Another relevant aspect is the use of references and passages from modern and contemporary literature and philosophy, which makes the novel surprising and pleasant. It is as if Huxley is talking to several authors and, with them, looking for the most appropriate explanations and definitions for the characters or situations. There are countless examples, such as the following: Laubardement, Commissioner of the King, compared to Uriah Heep, of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1987, p. 70); Hopkins, mentioned on page 78; Pascal (1987, p. 84); John Donne (1987, p. 88), La Fontaine, Corneille, Shakespeare, Gabriel Marcel (p. 95); Rudolph Valentino (1987, p. 118), Mallarmé (1987, p. 126), Baudelaire (1987, p. 128), Ben Jonson (Huxley, 1987, p. 188), and others. This structure is combined with the historical narrated facts, which do not follow a normal course, as they are intertwined with the comments by the reader Aldous Huxley (Carreira, 2013, p. 4).

As a historical novel, it is important to highlight that *The Devils of Loudun* creates a “fictionalization of real events happened in Loudun, [...] and approaches the narrative strategies of the micro-history method” (Carreira, 2013, p. 2). It should be said, Huxley pioneered the micro-history classics by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni of the end of the 1970s and the 1980s (Vainfas, 2002, p.106), as his novel was published in 1952. The subject is extensive, but one can summarize the conceptualization of the micro-history method and the role of its historian as “a researcher of peripheral evidence, apparently banal, uncertain, but capable, if gathered in a logical plot, to reconstruct the structure and dynamics of their objects” (Vainfas, 2002, p. 109). Therefore, a micro-history narrative starts from the evidence of a particular case, as if the historian were a detective, in order to find the supposed truths of the fact.

It is interesting to note that Terence Cave in *Recognitions: a study in poetics* mentions Carlo Ginzburg as a suitable example to demonstrate the sign of recognition in dramatic and narrative fiction. He identifies this model with the primitive hunters, who checked the tracks left by the animals. Cave comments that “Tracking is like the reading of a narrative,

and vice-versa: the hunt is in fact a recurrent theme and a metaphor of dramatic and narrative literature” (1988, p. 251). This model is called the “index paradigm” (1989, p. 177), according to the thought of Carlo Ginzburg. Huxley uses this procedure when studying the entire history of the event in Loudun and deciphering the truth of the facts.

Urbain Grandier joined the Jesuit college in Bordeaux, receiving a thorough education. He revealed tremendous oratory skills, which led him to become a priest. After taking the vows, he was appointed to the parish of Saint-Pierre-du-Marché, in Loudun. It is suggestive that, when entering the city, Grandier saw “at the city gates a corpse or two hung, moldering, from the municipal gallows” (1984, p. 10), an anticipatory indication of what would happen to him. In addition, his impressive physical description when arriving in the city aroused the curiosity of the dwellers for his majestic size; however, Huxley also foreshadows his controversial character when saying: “To post-Faustian eyes his portrait suggests a fleshier, not unamiable and only slightly less intelligent Mephistopheles in clerical fancy dress.” (1984, p. 12).

On the other hand, his seductive and volatile nature, contrary to the vow of celibacy, aroused the attention of several women, who became completely in love with Urbain: maids, widows, married women and even maidens. The inappropriate acts practiced by Father Grandier unleashed the fury of many inhabitants, who disliked the cleric’s amorous adventures and envied his oratory skills. Other enemies arose because of his irrepressible impetus for quarrels, as he seemed unable to overcome disagreements peacefully. Grandier longed for power with all his might and did not allow others to stand in his way.

Grandier made the mistake of seducing the daughter of the public prosecutor, Trincant, of whom he was a friend. Madeleine became pregnant and Grandier denied that he had seduced her. In this episode, a whole plot begins in order to condemn Urbain Grandier. It should be mentioned that, to justify the birth of Madeleine’s son, Trincant set up an arrangement to blame a daughter’s friend and make her assume

motherhood. Huxley describes the episode with a critical eye on the perverted legal system, when used improperly for twisted purposes:

the Public Prosecutor resorted to a peculiarly odious legal stratagem. He had Marthe le Pelletier arrested in the open street and brought before a magistrate. There, under oath and in the presence of witnesses, she was required to sign an act, whereby she officially recognized the child as hers and accepted the responsibility for its future maintenance. Because she loved her friend, Marthe signed. One copy of the act was filed in the record office, the other M. Trincant triumphantly pocketed. *Duly attested, the lie was now legally true. For minds trained in the law, legal truth is the same thing as truth without qualification* (1984, p. 39, emphasis added).

In another excerpt, Huxley adds that the residents of Loudun were sure that the child was Grandier's son, but there was no proof left: "All we know is that, like Trincant, they were strong believers in the power of legal truth to take the place of truth unqualified. *Magna est veritas legitima, et praevalerebit*" (1984, p. 44). Out of dishonor with his daughter, Trincant began a demoralizing movement for Grandier, grouping a number of the priests declared enemies. The parish suffered serious accusations for indecent conduct, but he ended up acquitted.

The Ursuline convent housed girls from the nobility and high social class. The central character of the plot is Jeanne des Anges (her religious name), daughter of a baron. Jeanne des Anges's description is the opposite of the one drawn for Urbain Grandier: she had a trace of dwarfism, a visibly deformed body, despite having a superior intelligence. Her temper was, however, irascible and resentful, and prone to lying (Huxley, 1987, p. 108-110). She had the ability to manipulate people to suit their desires and goals. She became a mother superior by designation of the previous prioress due to the maneuvers she did to deceive and stand out from other nuns.

Sister Anges began to show symptoms of emotional imbalance from the moment she became aware of Grandier's sexual deeds, which were advertised by several women. At the same time that the reports aroused her envy, she began to experience intense sensations of a woman in love.

Upon the death of the Ursuline director, Anges imagined the possibility of the priest being replaced by Grandier, who replied dryly and politely that he could not abdicate his parish obligations. This generated an emotional whirlwind in Anges, who began to hate Grandier, vowed revenge, however, without ceasing to feel the same obsessive desires. At that moment, ghosts began to invade the convent, leaving the nuns in a complete state of hysteria.

This is to contextualize the fact that a set of factors contributed to trigger such intense and uncontrolled reactions. A plot of strong unrest was on the move. The nuns were taken by diabolical spirits, and were in a state of convulsion, subjected to exorcism by Father Mignon, who envied Grandier. As the confessor of the nuns, he went on to disclose that the demons were minions of the parson of Loudun. The exorcism was done with the accompaniment of Father Barré, a loyal supporter of exorcism. This practice makes the person less than human, no longer a subject, but an object with strong sensations, as stated by Huxley (1984, p. 100), and exposes the exorcized to the worst humiliations.

Indeed, the nuns were shown in public to the scrutiny of all and invoked the names of demons, which terrified everyone and brought them down to a condition of slavery to uncontrollable passions. Anges, writing her biography years later, said that her mind was very confused and that she did not remember the events that had happened then. The process of covering up and forgetting reality may have influenced Anges, as the whole episode ended up being a mortification for the body and the spirit. Huxley's account of one exorcism scene is impressive:

as some queer kind of animal, to be exhibited to the rabble like a performing ape, as a less than personal creature fit only to be bawled at, manipulated, sent by reiterated suggestion into fits and finally subjected, against what remained of her will and in spite of the remnants of her modesty, to the outrage of a forcible colonic irrigation. Barré had treated her [Jeanne des Anges] to an experience that was the equivalent, more or less, of a rape in a public lavatory (1984, p. 100).

Urbain Grandier was formally accused of witchcraft. He was arrested by order of Richelieu, through Laubardemont, and, in the legal-ecclesiastical trial to which he was submitted, several witnesses appeared and many versions were elaborated to be able to incriminate the parish priest definitively. All the nuns involved accused Grandier of witchcraft. One piece of evidence that appeared during the exorcism sessions showed “two diabolic ‘pacts’” (Huxley, 1984, p. 103), in which Anges appeared with three thorns and a bouquet of roses, which disturbed her in her prayers. Asked about the origin of the roses, the prior answered without hesitation that they had been sent by *Urbanus*. The devils became suitable witnesses to blame Grandier: “These truths had been vouched for by the devils themselves, and were therefore beyond doubt” (Huxley, 1984, p. 124).

It should be emphasized that Grandier does not at any time confess to the crime of which he was being accused, even because he probably had not ever been in contact with the Ursuline nuns. Despite being tortured, in the process of vivisection to identify the marks pointed out by the devil, Grandier resisted and did not utter a word of confession. And, when placed before the nuns, they vehemently accused him of being responsible for sending diabolical spirits to utter obscenities and provoke a general emotional imbalance. “Factually, theologically and now legally, it was all true” (Huxley, 1984, p. 134), Huxley concludes. All instances were judged and reviewed and the final truth was declared.

It should be highlighted in this respect the premise considered unquestionable by the doctrine of the Inquisition: “when duly constrained by a priest of the Roman Church, devils are bound to tell the truth” (Huxley, 1984, p. 132). It seems unbelievable that such an idea sounded convincing and led so many proceedings to obtain the truth. Many people were sentenced to death due unfounded suspicions or hostilities between conflicting parties⁶. Urbain Grandier is sentenced to die at the stake, he is

⁶ Several authors turn historical facts into fiction to denounce the arbitrariness committed by authoritarian regimes. Recall Arthur Miller’s novel *The Crucible*, which portrays the accusations of witchcraft in the late 17th century, corresponding to the political facts of the United States of America in the early 1950s. Due to this equivalence the movement became known as Mc Carthy’s witch hunt, even though it aimed basically at repressing communist ideas.

denied clemency and realizes that he was trapped (Huxley, 1984, p. 171). In a pathetic and contradictory way, Laubardemont watches Grandier's execution, thus revealing that the truth told in the trial could be irremediably unfair:

Laubardemont was greatly disturbed. Nothing was going according to plan. Better than anyone else he must have known that Grandier was not guilty of the crimes for which he was to be tortured and burned alive. And yet, in some sublimely Pickwickian sense, the parson *was* a sorcerer. On the basis of a thousand pages of worthless evidence, thirteen hireling judges had said so. Therefore, though certainly false, it must somehow be true (Huxley, 1984, p. 176, emphasis added).

Huxley's study of the events in Loudun ends up privileging the version that Jeanne des Anges had an overwhelming passion for Grandier, transformed into an emotional disorder of great impact by the refusal of the parish priest to transfer to the Ursuline convent. Through this panorama, Huxley analyzes all the psychic transformations caused by rejection as well as the desire for self-transcendence, which means crossing the limits of existence and reaching a higher sphere, a place where some would reach self-affirmation. A passion that led to her own annihilation, although she tried to rehabilitate herself in the future. The hideous, unremitting shadow remained, an inescapable thought that "the most monstrous of lies" (1984, p. 162), converted into truth under the seal of the Church, condemned an innocent man to a monstrous death.

4 WHIRLWINDS OF VENGEFUL JUSTICE IN *THE DEVILS OF LOUDUN*

use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say,
the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget
a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it
offends me to the soul to hear a robustious
periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to
very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who
for the most part are capable of nothing but
inexplicable dumbshows and noise (Shakespeare, Act III, Scene II)

The link between law and justice is of fundamental importance. It is a core concern for the Philosophy of Law, and it is equally controversial in several aspects. It is important, thus, to observe the possibility of morally

basing the Law by understanding the axiological content of the law. John Rawls mentions this matter in his Preface to *A theory of Justice*: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (1999, p. 3). Consequently, the link between law and justice presents crucial questions to be reflected upon and solved in the context of the various “contexts of justice”, a formulation given by Rainer Forst (2010, p. 9, translated) to answer the central problem of a theory of justice: the justification of legal, political and social norms in a political community.

As highlighted, the matter is problematic. Tercio Sampaio Ferraz Jr. summarizes it: “In short, justice is both the rational *principle* of the meaning of the legal game and its permanent significant *problem*” (2011, p. 331, translated, originally emphasized). Questions that perpetually instigate the law students, who focus on a panel of theorizations about justice from the thinkers of classical antiquity (Plato (1996), Aristotle (1973)) to modern philosophers (Kant (2003; 2005), Hegel (1990)), and contemporary ones (Perelman (1996), Rawls (1997; 2000), Dworkin (2005); Ricoeur (1995 ; 2008a, 2008b)), among several others, with aims to find rational explanations for disturbing realities of unfair laws. That is to say, the search for the foundation of legal, political and social relations constitutes the axial point of a theory of justice.

It is important to emphasize the permanent trait of vengeance and revenge in law and in human relations. It is noticeable that the persistence of man’s inclination towards revenge is a feature of the human condition, not yet overcome. Francis Bacon, in his *Essays*, states that “Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man’s nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out” (1908, p. 19). In literature the topic is recurrent and abundant. In the law and literature movement, the theme is quite fruitful as it clarifies the very conception of justice related to its vengeance and retaliation sense, following the vertical model analyzed by Tercio Sampaio Ferraz Jr. based on the studies of Walter Burkert, which denotes the idea of strength and power, opposed to the horizontal model, which aims at a more socialized sanction (2009, p. 232-238; Silva, 2008, p. 131-133).

The examples in the literature are extraordinary, and Richard Posner considers that “revenge is one of the great themes of literature” (1988, p. 25, translated), reputed as a legal prototype and literary genre (2009, p. 75). Indeed, the exploration of revenge crosses not only the epic genre, the classic and the modern tragedies, but also novels, covering, therefore, a significant spectrum of the structure of human relations, still driven by the thirst for vengeance. A classic example is the Greek tragedy *Oresteia*, by Aeschylus (1996), composed of the tragedies *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*, written in the 5th century BC. It represents the vindictive system practiced with absolute normality by the characters, as it constitutes the most forceful expression of revenge (Silva, 2008, p. 136). In fact, François Ost begins his presentation on tragedy by saying that it describes “the problems of the retaliation law” (2005, p. 105, translated), as the purely vindictive justice is put in check by the emergence of human justice, with deliberative force to try blood crimes.

Eric Havelock analyzes Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* trilogy as a dramatization of the law of retaliation, in which each homicide attempts to restore balance, that is, “to practice justice” with one’s own hands. The struggle between the two conceptions of Justice, represented in *The Eumenides*, corresponds to the dramatic climax of the trilogy elaborated in the form of a “legal transaction” or “negotiation”, a culminating moment for the symbolic passage of Justice understood as legality (1978, p. 279 -281).

The question is: when will humanity end the “short circuit of revenge” (2008a, p. 6, translated), according to the description by Paul Ricoeur? Or, is man destined to always be captured by these destructive forces and bound by the model of punitive justice? *The Devil of Loudun*, by Aldous Huxley, is an invitation for the reader to see a “vengeful short-circuit” of high intensity, with characters that are solely driven by revenge, taken to extremes by their primitive desire of making the others pay for their (supposed) offenses. The novel is an experience of overwhelming vengeful spirit, put together by an elegant writing with clever and intelligent mentions made by Huxley.

One of the central topics of the book, hence, is revenge. Hamlet foreshadows in the epigraph the devastating effects of vengeful justice by imitating the evils of unrestrained passion. Perhaps revenge is the main character of the novel *The Devils of Loudun*. And the target is Urbain Grandier, to whom all the hatred and all the passions were directed. Upon arrival in Loudun, the parish priest conquered countless enmities, not only due to his personal qualities but also for his mastery in oratory. Urbain did not have the gift of prudence and, instead of appeasing hostilities, he provoked more feuds (1987, p. 24-25). When imprisoned for improper conduct, he wrote to the Bishop, Mr. De la Rochepozay, and claimed that “his hate has been turned into love, *his thirst for vengeance into a desire to serve those who have wronged him*” (1984, p. 49, emphasis added). Huxley, with insight, states that literature and life are not the same, and that, therefore, Grandier’s words of remorse and moderation were not true.

With regard to the personality of Jeanne des Anges, there is an inclination towards cynicism and revenge, despite her being in a convent of nuns, supposedly dedicated to the Christian faith. Her deformity put her at a disadvantage with other people, especially to be desired by a man, despite her aristocratic lineage. The following excerpt illustrates her personality in this sense and foreshadows the harm she could do:

Very different from any of these [good-natured laughs of humanity], Jeanne’s laughter was either of derision or of cynicism. Directed against others, never against herself, *the first was a symptom of the unreconciled hunchback’s desire to be revenged on destiny* by putting other people in their place—and their place, in spite of all appearances, was below her. Motivated by the same craving for compensatory dominance, the second was a more impersonal jeering and joking at all that, by current standards, was most solemn, lofty and grand (Huxley, 1984, p. 85, emphasis added).

Hence the conclusion that Jeanne des Anges was driven by her revenge thirst due to the rejection she received from Grandier. Conscious or not, Anges knew that she could harm Grandier and even cause his death. This predisposition of the prioress was followed by a procession of people who wanted an opportunity to take revenge on the parish priest:

Trincant, Mignon, Laubardemont, Cardinal Richelieu, and others. In other words, Grandier was not reconciled with his enemies and ended up suffering the hardships of a violent persecution, which would lead to his total annihilation. In the vivisection he was subjected to, the surgeon was present, a man named Mannoury, who had been called a fool by the priest in the past. In the upsetting scene, Huxley describes:

Ten years before, in Trincant's drawing room, the parson had made fun of this ignorant and pompous ass. *Now the ass was getting his own back, and with a vengeance.* The pain was excruciating and, through the bricked-up windows, the prisoner's screams could be heard by an ever-growing crowd of the curious in the street below. (Huxley, 1984, p. 133, emphasis added)

Another excerpt that strongly expresses the celebration of punitive justice, of revenge perpetrated mercilessly, is the moment when Grandier was led to execution and is greeted mercilessly by his enemies. They are rejoicing at the parish priest's punishment: "At the sight of that pale, hairless clown, several of the ladies giggled hysterically" (1984, p. 175). Such an attitude of contempt for human life deserves disgust, despite the fact that we still witness, sadly, scenes like these in the present.

Huxley uses the terms *Hubris* and *Nemesis* at the end of the novel, referring to Richelieu (1984, p. 223). The Ancient Greek words are closely associated with the discussion of the concept of justice. Indeed, *hýbris* means excess, excessive, and is associated with an action that goes beyond human limits, causing some harm to someone. Thus, *hýbris* is fundamentally injustice. The sense of balance, of harmony requires the one who practices *hýbris* to be punished, to restore the damage done and, above all, to become aware of the excessive behavior (recognition). Hence its intrinsic relationship with *Dike*, Justice. And these words are related to the tragedy, understood as the essence of the phenomenon that appears in several narratives.

According to Louis Gernet (1917, p. 30), *hýbris* is an affirmation of exacerbated individualism, in which man is the only author and guilty of his misfortunes. The tragedy, in summary, captures, more than any other cultural manifestation, the profound transformations that occurred in the

anthropological and juridical levels, having in the tragic protagonist a privileged character for a radical questioning on the dilemmas raised by antagonistic worldviews.

The Devils of Loudun is considered a historical novel, predecessor of micro-history. It is, fundamentally, a narrative about real, distressing and intriguing facts. It is an indispensable narrative for a legal-philosophical reflection, as it puts us face to face with greatly challenging matters. It is, essentially, a novel with strong contours of tragedy, which presents the human condition and the world of appearances, fictionalized, exposed to the maximum limit of concealment of truth and unreasoning.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the historical novel *The Devils of Loudun*, by Aldous Huxley, aiming at observing the constitutive elements of the fictional representation. From it, the objective is to verify the fundamental legal-philosophical matters that are presented: the question of truth as opposed to lies, and the notion of vindictive justice, still prevalent today. This study is justified by its philosophical, legal and political importance, insofar as the law must keep a commitment to ethics and justice, and must not renounce its civilizing project in order to defend fundamental freedoms.

It is noticeable that the law fails to formulate a univocal definition. Its tendency to doubt and ambivalence creates the need for the judge to establish interpretive standards in line with the need to deliver fair sentences. Hence the obligation to achieve narrative coherence through the facts gathered in a trial, in order to guarantee the plausibility and rationality of final sentences. In *The Devils of Loudun*, lie is the main norm, as it distorts and destroys the possibility of minimum defense. It is a true case, which impresses by the asphyxiating sensation that the law authorizes the practice of insanely abominable acts.

Finally, punitive justice finds, in *The Devils of Loudun*, the privileged stage for the full exercise of terror and intimidation. There is a convergence of repressed desires, resentments, which are communicating

vessels for the spread of hatred and false convictions. It is a whirlwind of uncontrolled passions, of cunning tricks, fictionally constructed by Huxley to portray a true case and draw attention to the dangers of intolerance. The question that remains unanswered is to know when this “short-circuit of revenge”, in the expression used by Paul Ricoeur, will be definitively hindered with in order for humankind to reach more peaceful forms of reconciliation.

Our intention is also to present a pedagogical aspect, with this reflection, especially for the legal area, aiming that undergraduate and graduate students become able to have a more humanistic view of the law. Literature, like the arts in general, is said to be essentially emancipatory, and goes beyond the limits of an instrumental view. According to a thorough analysis by Antonio Candido, the right to literature (2011) is crucial in educational training, and it is also a way to discover the obscure reasons that currently lead human beings to practice so many inequities.

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