

Brian Gallagher's Fiction

Noélia Borges

Brian Gallagher. *The Feng-Shui Junkie*. Translated into Portuguese by Maria Silvia Mourão Neto. (Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 2001. pp. 520).

Brian Gallagher's *The Feng-Shui Junkie* invites us to think that another talented Irish writer is coming to stay. To begin with, Gallagher surprises the public by the dynamic of his narrative structure, acid humor and well-built characters. It is interesting to note here that the novel has the power to arouse the reader's curiosity and interest for reasons which become evident. Initially, as we see our own eyes in the front cover we may realize that the author gets a ride in the fashion of esotericism by the title the writer gives to his fictional work. The sensuous image of a mouth with a protuberant, stretched red tongue stamped on the front cover of the book is the first spicy element which arouses our senses. Still, a 'fashionable' glittering piercing which appears entrenched in the tip of this tongue is another appealing item. Thus, by seeing some selected elements together, either on the cover or in the text, the reader inevitably infers that the author takes advantage of feng shui – an esoteric recipe which has strongly influenced and fascinated those who have turned the millenium with the hope of attracting the energy of happiness, love and long life.

In examining the front cover of *The Feng Shui Junkie*, we see that many purists may consider Gallagher a professional (as any other) inscribed in the capitalist and bourgeois world and, hence, has responded to the demands of the market. That is to say, someone who produces something, expecting a quick financial return. Those people will certainly be aligned with the ones who have analyzed the Harley-Davidson's motorbikes and Giorgio Armani's exhibition in the Guggenheim Museum in New York and expressed their disappointment, taking into account the use of these items in the temple of the art as a profanation of its own *status quo*. As a matter of fact, Gallagher does not express so explicitly his commitment with capitalism as the Brazilian poet, Fagundes Varela, did in the lines: "I write poems to the blond and to the brunette/ I do not care about inspirations/ I want money" (translation is mine). Being a modern writer and leaving aside the romantic aspect of individualism, Gallagher seems unable to resist the powerful force of the alternative doctrines which invade our everyday life, and

more particularly, the book market. Thus, the connection between the two universes does not offer any risk of imbalance. On the contrary, the frontier between the world of art and the world of commodities is quite fluid and it would be disrespectful to reduce his literary work to the simple lessons of feng shui. In fact, *The Feng Shui Junkie* underlines and denounces a world in which the objects of our everyday life (even the commonplace ones) twist around artistic materials, in an ambiguous and awkward way.

The reader must be curious to know how feng shui comes out in the text. In fact, feng shui holds the plot together. It starts when Julie, the heroine, breaks into her husband's lover's house – the pretty blond Nicole –, who is addicted not only to the feng shui doctrines, but also to Julie's husband – Ronan. From that time on, the feng shui lessons spreads out in the text, together with Julie's unexpected and disastrous strategies of vengeance, which certainly appear to be arranged with the purpose of disrupting some of the concepts of the esoteric fashion.

As we are concerning here with an Irish novel, it is worth drawing the reader's attention to the fact that Gallagher's formula is not the same as that of traditional Irish fiction, in which human problems are strongly interconnected with the inexorable commandment of the national question. Undoubtedly, the streets of Dublin (Ireland) come to be the scenery in which the history takes place and the humor – one of the features of the Irish nature – is constant in the text, although in a hyperbolic, sarcastic and erotic way.

It is interesting to observe that, by trying to follow the line of the history, an inattentive reader may not perceive what lies beneath the author's point of view. The fact is that, although the writer transvests himself into a woman's skin, we may curiously see that phalocentric lenses pervade the text surreptitiously. That is to say, the author is not a defender of women as he seems to show. The fact is that, though he gives prestige to the feminine representation in his text, by selecting more women than men (four women and two men) to adorn it, we see that three of them (the wife, the mother-in-law and the lover) represent the image of the serpent – the one who poisons and devours. That is the case of Julie, his mother and Nicole (particularly, for her sexual appetite). Julie's husband, Ronan – the masculine figure – is quite an anonymous agent (as is Nicole's husband), dissolved and engulfed by Julie's subsequent destructive attitudes and also by the demanding position his mother-in-law assumes in his own house. Furthermore, the image of the woman stressed by Gallagher is not that of an angel, but of a serpent, a witch, a psychopathic person. Within this perspective, we see that Gallagher gives special attention to the binary opposition, which is connected with Jungian theory of archetypes. That is to say, women's behavior and attitudes are regulated by their emotion and instincts, whereas that of men by reason and logic.

The story starts when Julie arrives home after her holiday and comes across a lemon-yellow bra hung in the front door-knob of his house in Dublin. The inescapable truth about the existence of another woman sharing her own bed with her husband makes Julie adopt violent attitudes of vengeance – ones which may lead the female

public, especially those who been in the same situation, to identify with Julie's attitude and enjoy the pleasure of her instinctive and brutal action. The scenes are so real and amazing that we inclined to think that they must stem from the author's experience as a lawyer. By dealing with different clients' cases, he could take advantage of the fertile material of his everyday occupation and write the novel. In short, the whole paraphernalia of exhilarating and unexpected actions planned to end up Ronan and Nicole's relationship is so vividly narrated that the reader is able to figure out, as if he/she were seeing a film.

The power of the novel is concentrated in the narrative of the actions in which the plot is structured. The feminine archetypal world, (where the instincts – the negative side of the human being – lie unmasked) overlays the image of docility, kindness, affectivity, which is said to be part of the feminine nature. The chromatism of the language, stuffed with humorous and erotic comparisons, seems to be peculiar to the author's style, giving the story an exhilarating tone, as happens in a comedy. The temporality of the fictional experience does not come only from the chronological space-time measure, but the phenomenological and the chronological experiences are stitched together and pervade the whole text.