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No Círculo do Uroboro: Articulações Identitárias na Narrativa de Milton Hatoum

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Abstract
This dissertation examines the four novels published to date by Milton Hatoum, a contemporary Lebanese-Brazilian author from the Amazon region. There are a great number of critical readings of his work that foreground the postmodern dissolution and fragmentation of the self, of human relationships, and also of national identity. In contrast to such approaches, I propose what I call a reading of hope. I argue that Hatoum is at the forefront of a shift in sensibility in Brazilian literature, one that simultaneously demonstrates certain aspects of postmodernism, but also breaks with other elements of it. In order to illustrate this issue, I analyze how Hatoum's characters forge personal identities, utilizing the mythological symbol of the uroboro (the snake that bites its own tail) as the organizing structure of my analysis. The uroboro has historically been used to represent circularity in the cycles of nature, communal and personal renewal, the return to origins, and self-reflection. In addition to circularity, the symbol has also been visually depicted as half black and

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half white, creating a duality that stresses interdependence rather than binary logic. With the above characteristics of circularity and duality in mind, the postmodern aspect that I analyze in Hatoum's work is its break with binary logic. First, I identify a variety of dualities extant in the novels, from language and silence to myth and reality, that instead of canceling each other out complement one another and emphasize identity's inherent ambiguity. Next, I analyze the rupture with postmodernism, which comes with Hatoum's characters' perpetual search for a more meaningful relationship with others, the environment, and themselves. As a consequence, the postmodern rootless and unstable characters give way to individuals that express more humane concerns (the recovery of the past as a value, self-reflection, and the search for familial bonds as well as for a connection with beauty and aesthetic pleasure through the arts). The symbol of the uroboro thus provides a graphic means of metaphorically representing not only the characters' identity as ambiguous and self-reflective, but also Hatoum's novels as simultaneously working within and breaking with postmodernism.

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