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The Political, Social, Historical, and Literary Significance of the  
Writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus

Kristin A. Brown

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### The Political, Social, Historical, and Literary Significance of the Writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus

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The writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus, specifically *Quarto de despejo*, *Casa de alvenaria*, *Diário de Bitita*, and poetry selections from her collection *Minha antologia* are oftentimes excluded from “canonical” literature. Many critics both in the press and in academic circles refuse to recognize her writings and story as works of merit, focusing primarily on surface issues without addressing the content of her works. The reason for this is complex, spanning the issues of race, education, socio-economic status, and gender. Contrary to the arguments of many critics over the past sixty years, Carolina’s writings are valuable in a political, social, historical, and literary sense. She wrote of her fight against hunger, poverty, and prejudice, and spoke out against the practices of politicians and members of the middle and upper classes towards the poor. Her works contain experiences from a member of Brazil’s marginalized population during the mid-twentieth century, something that had never before been published.

Keywords: Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Quarto de despejo*, *Casa de alvenaria*, *Diário de Bitita*, favela, Brazil

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## Introduction

The writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus have been both disparaged and revered. Her collection of works has been called many things; the ramblings of a poor woman, a lesson on the perils of capitalism, and a testament of the hardships of living in Brazil's "Quarto de despejo"—the *favela*. Her first published work, *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*<sup>1</sup>, competed with well-known authors such as Jorge Amado, according to Robert M. Levine, and was published in 40 countries in 15 different languages. Levine writes, "No espaço de um ano ela havia se equiparado, em vendagem, a Jorge Amado, e com ele se transformando no mais traduzido dos autores brasileiros de todos os tempos" (*Cinderela negra* 25-6). Though she enjoyed success within Brazil, the polarizing effect her writings have among her own countrymen should be noted; some look at her works as nothing more than a poor woman masquerading as legitimate writer, and others see her diaries and poems as a fresh look into a life that many live as marginalized members of Brazilian society but few write about. In fact, Levine writes in the introduction to her memoirs:

Of the tens of millions of Brazilian descendants of African Slaves, only one, Carolina Maria de Jesus, ever wrote and published about her life. Briefly famous when she was discovered by a newspaperman, who first serialized and then published in a book form her diary entries, she died in nearly the same obscurity as she had lived, struggling to raise her children in an urban shantytown, and living by scavenging in the trash of the city's streets. (*Life and Death* xiii)

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<sup>1</sup> *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada* will be referred to as *Quarto de despejo*.

Carolina's historical and literary contributions to Brazilian society during the mid-twentieth century should not be overlooked. As Levine points out, she was a singular and unique voice during her lifetime, and her works continue to cause controversy over fifty years after their first publication.

In writing this thesis I will explore the works of Carolina Maria de Jesus, and the effect her works had on both society and literature of her time period. Carolina wrote during an interesting time of Brazilian history; both in social and economic terms, many things were changing throughout the country and especially in São Paulo. Focusing on her most known work, *Quarto de despejo*, supplemented with her other diaries and literary works, I will review the importance of her works in a historical and literary sense. My review will heavily be based on the analysis of Robert M. Levine,<sup>2</sup> other scholars who have devoted their studies to her works, and those who discredit both the authenticity of her works as well as their importance. I feel it necessary to include both ends of the spectrum in order to adequately portray the polarizing effect her works had, and continue to have, in Brazil.

Carolina Maria de Jesus had a humble upbringing, born to descendants of slaves in a small town in rural Minas Gerais. In *Bitita's Diary: The Childhood Memoirs of Carolina Maria de Jesus* she speaks fondly of positive influences in her life such as a caring white woman, who gave her a goal to gain an education and make something of herself. She repeatedly mentions the desire she had as a young girl to continue her education past fourth grade, which is where many poor students terminated their studies, and continue studying until she completed college; she wanted to be a *Doutora*.<sup>3</sup> Her high hopes and dreams were short lived as she was only able to

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<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Levine was a Professor of Latin-American History who focused a great deal of his studies and research on the life and writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus. He is considered an authority on Carolina's works as well as her personal history.

<sup>3</sup> *Doutora* means "Doctor" which in Brazil indicates someone of advanced formal education.

complete two years of education, where she learned to read and write. Her love for writing came as early as her educational ambitions, and it is clear in her memoirs that she also quickly recognized the social and economic disparity that most blacks faced in Brazil. She repeatedly mentions listening to readings from the *Estado de São Paulo*, one of Brazil's most circulated newspapers, commonly read aloud during her childhood years, and hearing the plans and revolutionary ideas of Rui Barbosa on educating the large Afro-Brazilian population. Even as a young girl she understood that most blacks in her community and in her country worked hard, gained little, and lived an unbreakable cycle of poverty.

Her diary writing began many years later as she was destitute in the quickly expanding metropolis of São Paulo. Originally, she moved to the city to work in the homes of some of São Paulo's wealthiest members of society, though after an unexpected pregnancy she was out of a job, a home, and without a skill set to fall back on. She eventually found her way to the *favela* Canindé, where she built a home of scrap wood and heavy cardboard and set out each day to collect scraps of paper in the streets which she could sell at the end of each day for a meager amount. It was with these same scraps of paper that she sewed together her first diary and began writing down her day-to-day experiences from the streets and the *favela*. More than anything, she used her diary and writings as an escape from her circumstances, and the cruel life she was faced with in the *favela*. This escape from reality led to her recognition from people throughout the country and a life completely different from what she knew in Canindé.

In the first chapter I will conduct an analysis of the polarizing effect her works had on those in Brazilian society, and more specifically, within literary circles. Though her first diary is considered one of Brazil's all-time best sellers, most people were buying it, as reported in newspapers, as a form of entertainment rather than a respected work. Many readers laughed at



her rudimentary grammar and spelling, instead of seeing a greater need for education among the marginalized populations of the country. Others scoffed at her life in the *favela* and read only what they wanted to read – the stories of drunken neighbors, bloody fights, and nude women running in the streets. Such biased reading reinforced stereotypes, instead of helping people realize that Carolina is a voice of those who are genuinely good people in a poor situation. The diary's effect as a catalyst for social change will be discussed in detail in the first chapter. Also, I will focus a portion of the chapter on the reception her work had in literary circles, and the allegations made concerning the authenticity of the diary and her other works. Finally, I will touch on the impact her works, mainly *Quarto de despejo*, had throughout the rest of the world, and how the diary spawned differing perspectives on Brazilian poverty

In the second chapter I will discuss her childhood and upbringing, as many of the experiences she had as a child and during her early years shaped her view concerning various aspects of life in Brazil. The material used in this chapter will primarily come from *Diário de Bitita*, Carolina's memoirs which she wrote after the publication of *Quarto de despejo*, but was only published years later posthumously. This chapter will also reference a biography written about her life, *The Life and Death of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, written by Robert M. Levine and José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy, as well as interviews with her children as important sources of information. Using these sources I will take a look at the aspects of her personality in her younger years that become so prevalent in her diaries later on. There are also many experiences she writes about in her memoirs that shaped her view on race relations, economic stability, social standing, government, and the role of the Catholic Church in Brazil. These life experiences contributed to Carolina's views later on, her fierce independence, and her devotion to her children and her works, and therefore need to be assessed before addressing her later writings.

Without these essential pieces of her life, many entries in her diary and aspects of her personality seem disjointed and without merit.

In the third chapter, I will analyze her diaries and poetry. Specifically I will use the diaries *Quarto de despejo* and *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada*<sup>4</sup>. I will be focusing primarily on the poems “O colono e o fazendeiro,” “Súplica do mendigo,” “Rico e pobre,” and “Súplica do encarcerado” from her work *Minha antologia*.<sup>5</sup> With these works, I will review the importance they lend to the time period in historical and literary terms, as well as the insight they give into the life of the marginalized portion of Brazilian society. The first diary, *Quarto de despejo*, spans the years of 1955 to 1960, a time characterized by Juscelino Kubitschek’s election and the “Fifty Years in Five” nationwide plan of development and modernization.

This plan affected many Brazilians through high inflation, which plagued the country for years, as well as the grief many faced concerning the privatization of various industrial sectors in Brazil. The *favelas* were growing by the day as people from the rural areas tried to escape their financial hardships by moving to the large economic capitals of Brazil in search of work. Carolina gives a first-hand perspective of the consequences these political and economic movements had on the marginalized portion of society, and how inflation made their minimal purchases almost financially unbearable.

Her later diary, *Casa de alvenaria: diário de uma ex-favelada*, chronicles her struggles to be taken seriously and fit in to her newfound middle class status, as she was constantly hampered by racial prejudice in the press, as well as prejudice against her prior socio-economic standing. In

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<sup>4</sup> The diary *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada* will be referred to as *Casa de Alvenaria* within the body of the thesis.

<sup>5</sup> The versions of these books were all the original Brazilian publications with Carolina’s spelling and grammar mistakes; because of this there are misspellings and missing accents in quotes throughout the three chapters. I chose to keep these errors because it is true to Carolina’s writing abilities, and demonstrates some of the grievances critics have with her works.

this chapter I will also explore the moments Carolina expounds on life as someone who intimately knows the pangs of hunger, the misery of *favela* life, and the oft times cruel behavior of the upper classes. It is in these moments that the reader glimpses into her sadness and desperation for a better life, and in turn hears the voice of marginalized Brazilians.

In conclusion, I will show that Carolina's works have historical, cultural, and social significance for the time period in which she lived, despite her works often being dismissed and heavily criticized. Carolina may be seen as a voice of the millions of Brazilians living in poverty who had no means of sharing their story, and gave insight from first hand experiences in the *favela* into the social structure and interactions of the *favelados*.

## Chapter One: The Polarizing Effect of the Works of Carolina Maria de Jesus

The works of Carolina Maria de Jesus are a conundrum of sorts for literary circles. Some are unwilling to accept Carolina's works as literature, cast aspersions on her achievements and make insinuations concerning their authenticity. Others laud her efforts in writing, but prefer to categorize them as simple journalizing. Still others see her works as a shining example of Afro-Brazilian Literature, Female Literature and Historical Literature. It is evident that with the confusion regarding under what genre her writings fall, and if they should be regarded as relevant at all, that Carolina's writings created a polemic atmosphere. This divide first surfaced when her book *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*<sup>6</sup> was initially published, and it continues in waves even into this century.

This chapter will present the various sides to the intellectual argument, focusing on the criticism, praise, exclusion, and definition of Carolina's works, specifically those of *Quarto de despejo*, *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada*,<sup>7</sup> and the poetry of *Antologia pessoal*. In reviewing these different viewpoints it becomes evident that those who criticized Carolina oftentimes focused on trivial details of her work. The press was insistent on discrediting Carolina through reporting on anything except for her books, focusing instead on her appearance, home, mannerisms, language, and degrading stereotypes. When her works were addressed in the press or by literary critics they oftentimes alluded to, or outright accused, Audálio Dantas of liberal editing or at times being the true author of *Quarto de despejo*. This skepticism continued when Carolina's later works were published, and the press again sought to discredit Carolina by accusing her daughter of helping her write the books.

<sup>6</sup> *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada* will be referred to in this chapter as *Quarto de despejo*.

<sup>7</sup> *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada* will be referred to in this chapter as *Casa de alvenaria*

## 1. Criticism of Carolina's Writings

Those who praised *Quarto de despejo* saw achievement in Carolina's writing, and sought to give her credit for diligently writing about her experiences as a marginalized member of society. Her story is so valuable due to her ethnicity, gender, social class, and lack of formal education. Essentially, her works are pertinent to the public and intellectual circles for the same reasons she was excluded and criticized. There is merit in the writings of Carolina because they speak of instances and experiences from the viewpoint of an individual who was ostracized and uneducated, giving insight that had been unavailable until 1960. Carolina is praised for her honesty and openness concerning some of the most common and unfortunate mistreatment of women, Afro-Brazilians, the poor, and the uneducated populations of her time.

The criticisms that came soon after the first publication of *Quarto de despejo* were harsh and oft times painted a caricature of Carolina and her desires to become a writer. The articles consistently focused on her illegitimate children, her sexual encounters with white men, her lack of formal education, and her race. In constantly calling attention to these aspects of Carolina, the press sought to discredit her as an individual, as well as a writer. With articles entitled "Clichês nascidos na favela" and "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" she had no chance of creating a legitimate position in Brazil's cannon of literature. These articles failed to address the importance of Carolina's works to the Afro-Brazilian community, the marginalized, and the women of Brazil. Robert M. Levine, an American Latin American Studies professor who specializes in Carolina's writing and history, found that many times Carolina was ostracized and rejected by those in Brazil because she did not possess all the markers of a "decent" author. He writes:

Some Brazilians did not know what to make of Carolina's success. According to critic Carlos Rangel, her diary was a "kick in the stomach of the literary establishment of New York and Paris, [which were] obliged to accept *Quarto* as even a greater success than [the novels of] Jorge Amado." He added that Carolina resembled Pelé, the soccer superstar, in being the perfect kind of hero for the North Americans: she came out of nowhere to achieve glory and fortune.

("Cautionary Tale" 65)

Carolina's works are described here as a kick to the stomach of some of the world's intellectual Meccas. The comparison to Pelé is an interesting one, in that Rangel is basing his argument presumably on a shared prior social status and race between Carolina and Pelé. Besides those two commonalities there are no real correlations between the two individuals, exemplifying the fact that the press and critics were grabbing at straws in attempts to constantly remind the public that Carolina was black and poor.

Rangel's reference to North American academics appreciating Carolina's rise to success is not the only time this appeared in the press. During a heated exchange of press articles between Wilson Martins, Audálio Dantas, and Robert M. Levine in the mid 1990s, Martins uses the same argument, stating, "With the characteristic naiveté of foreign intellectuals, Robert M. Levine assigned the book as required reading" (*Unedited Diaries* 224). The underlying message from both Rangel and Martins is that North American academia, or any academic circle outside of Brazil, was incapable of ascertaining true literature because they saw Carolina's works as relevant to history, literature, and sociology in Brazil. This argument is indeed a weak one, as many scholars in Brazil as well as Brazilians teaching at American Universities see merit in her works and contributions to Brazilian literature. Levine wrote, "Martin's angry attacks were

answered only once, in a column in São Paulo's *Jornal da Tarde* by the anthropologist Roberto da Matta, who teaches at Notre Dame.” He also writes of a “favorable essay of the literary critic Marisa Lajolo” concerning the *Cinderela negra* project (13-4). In recent years, more scholars have taken greater interest in Carolina's works: in Brazil, in other Latin American countries, and Brazilian professors in United States. Rangel and Martins' denunciation of *Quarto de despejo* and the other books published do not stand when the amount of Latin American, Brazilian, and North American scholarly work put forth is taken into account.

The press was always quick to remind the public that Carolina was poor, and even after revenue began to come in from her book sales, they continued to write about her using the term “ex-favelada” always calling attention to her prior socioeconomic status. Could it not be argued, however, that many of Brazil's great authors came from humble backgrounds? There were many who were born in the interior of the country, just as Carolina. There were many who were too poor to afford schooling and had to rely on the good graces of a benefactor, just like Carolina. When Carolina is placed comparatively next to these authors it becomes evident that the press and critics were so harsh not only because she was poor, or because she was uneducated, but because she was both in addition to other factors as well. Carolina was marginalized in the press for her race, gender, socioeconomic status, and lack of education. This combination was seemingly too much for the general public and media to accept, and in turn Carolina was predominantly ostracized. This is confirmed by the findings of Renata R. Mautner Wasserman who wrote:

Carolina Maria de Jesus is routinely introduced, when she is studied, as poor, black, and semiliterate. She does not usually appear in examinations of

mainstream Brazilian authors, or woman authors, even though a fairly substantial bibliography exists in which she is adduced as an example of “marginality.” (134)

Why then, if Carolina has such a substantial bibliography, do some continue to focus more on external factors such as race, gender, and education, instead of her contributions to marginal literature? It is safe to assume that it was much easier for the majority to ignore and exclude Carolina, because of those external factors previously mentioned, allowing them to also ignore the social ills and issues that her writing attested to. Levine supports this theory by stating:

It was as if Brazilian academics, journalists, writers, and politicians closed ranks to stifle her pointed truths about the lack of racial democracy in the country and the contempt felt for the underclass, especially its black and women members. Never did reviews of her work or commentaries about her life criticize the system that had produced misery for her and her fellow favelados. Thus for nearly two decades, critics patronized Carolina for her manner but refused to recognize her importance as one of the few public voices ever to emerge from Brazil’s agitated but silent underclass (“Cautionary tale” 82).

This attitude towards the marginalized members of society is not new in the Brazilian consciousness. The desire to silence Carolina through exclusion stems predominantly from shame: shame of the *favela* and what Carolina represented. This same ambition to erase and silence contributed to the destruction of all records of slavery in Brazil after abolition in 1888 (Carneiro 96-7), as well as to the destruction of Canindé after the publication of *Quarto*. In both instances a group which had no rights, and which caused shame to Brazil's national identity, was quietly dealt with in hopes that further embarrassment would be averted. This is essentially what



happened with Carolina's writings: they were trivialized or excluded in hopes that the works along with Carolina, would disappear from national and international headlines.

Eva Paulino Bueno continues this argument stating that Carolina did not represent any one group. She writes:

The mentioning of a family affair, or a child's birthday, followed by the mentioning of the family's slavery to the cost of living in a country plagued by inflation and corruption, at once implicate Carolina de Jesus and her small family within an economy that goes beyond her and the slum. This wider world however, can only appear in de Jesus's text as a reflection of her own thoughts. De Jesus does not participate in any formal public activity engaged in the welfare either of women or of the slum dwellers in Brazil; in the most immediate sense, she represents nobody but herself and her fatherless children. (133)

Bueno points out that Carolina represents nobody but herself and her three children, though it could be argued that while she never associated herself with any political or social movement, her story is one that should be told. True, Carolina did not represent the *favela* or women living in poverty, but her diary opened the eyes of the Brazilian public concerning the social ills that were occurring in one of Brazil's most industrialized and advanced cities. Carolina did not need to be a formal representative to raise her voice and tell her story; one does not need to be affiliated with an official organization to denounce poverty, hunger, marginalization, racism, and sexual harassment.

Another reason for exclusion was the honesty and openness found in *Quarto de Despejo*. If Carolina had something on her mind, she wrote it in her diary. This included her sexual encounters, much to the disdain of the public as well as scholars at the time of publication.

Concerning this issue Bueno writes, “Carolina Maria de Jesus's race, as well as her self-depiction as a sexual female being, contributed to the fact that her work was not hailed” (118). The mention of race is an important distinction that needs to be addressed. Carolina predominantly had sexual relations with white men, whom she chose to be with. The idea of female sexual independence was an unsettling idea during the 1960's for many people, as the feminist movement was still in its beginning stages throughout the world as well as in Brazil. People were not comfortable with the image of an independent sexual female, and this was compounded by Carolina's interracial relationships. This was certainly another focal point for critics, who discredited Carolina as an immoral citizen for such behavior, when in actuality she was being open and honest about a practice that had gone on since the introduction of Africans to Brazil.

Another reason Carolina was excluded in the academic circles of Brazil is because she was not a strong representative of any position—political or social. Though she came from the *favela* she tried desperately to distance herself from the problems and issues found in Canindé. At times there were groups and individuals who desired to have her speak for their cause, but Carolina remained independent and unwilling to become heavily involved with any group or movement. She was not stepping forward in publishing her book to call anyone to action, but rather to tell of her personal struggle and provide for her family. Because she was not a voice for any one movement, many people ignored her diary, an argument confirmed by Levine:

Brazilian intellectuals on the Left rejected her because she was not, in the words of one, a “typical proletariat.” She was not a revolutionary; her quest was personal, to fend for and protect her family. Nor did conservatives deign to recognize her. (*Different Carolinas* 63)

Conservatives looked past her because of her openness concerning her sexual encounters in *Quarto de despejo*. Essentially with both sides of the spectrum unwilling to accept or laud Carolina for her efforts, she was left without a main group of supporters when the diary was first published. Ultimately this lack of support opened the door for accusations towards Carolina, misrepresentation in press releases, and the attacks on her character, education, and race without anyone to defend her.

In addition to this exclusion there were also the repeated accusations of over-editing and ghostwriters for Carolina. It was suggested numerous times that a woman lacking in a complete formal education would not have a desire to write, much less succeed in writing such an extensive and detailed diary. Audálio Dantas, the reporter who edited her works, was oft times accused of writing *Quarto* or putting words in Carolina's mouth. In the introduction to the most recent edition of *Quarto de despejo* he writes, “O que não impediu que alguns torcessem o nariz para o livro e até lançassem dúvidas sobre a autenticidade do texto de Carolina. Aquilo, diziam, só podia ser obra de um espertalhão, um golpe publicitário” (5). To suggest that *Quarto de despejo* was written by anyone other than Carolina is a weak argument, due to the publication of *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, in which the public was able to read for the first time the completely unedited version of Carolina's first diary. Because this work was published more than thirty years after the initial publication of *Quarto de despejo*, it was not available to disprove the journalists and critics who were claiming it to be a fraudulent work.

After Carolina passed away in 1977, her daughter Vera Eunice kept all of her mother's notebooks where Carolina wrote her various poems, stories, scenes from plays, and ideas for more than a decade. Levine tells about this in the introduction to *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*:

In 1996 Vera turned over to us thirty-seven handwritten notebooks totaling more than forty-two hundred pages that her mother had written in her own hand during the late 1960's...José Carlos Sebe made a startling discovery: not only had Carolina made handwritten copies of her poems, fragments of plays, essays, short stories, and novels, but among the notebooks—sometimes appearing abruptly in the middle of something else—there were about 320 pages of her original diary entries. (2-3)

Though not contained in its entirety, as Audálio Dantas kept the original copy of her diary *Quarto de Despejo*, the comparison between the published first edition of the diary and the pages which were included in the notebook proved that Dantas had in fact only edited through deletion, as shown by the ellipses, and the occasional spelling correction when the original spelling signified something other than Carolina's intended message. Though this was the case, in 1993 Wilson Martins wrote an article in the *Jornal do Brasil* denouncing the authenticity of *Quarto de Despejo* in what Levine describes as,

A savage review...in which he dismissed *Quarto de Despejo* as a “literary mystification” and a fake. Someone as ignorant as Carolina could never have written such a book, he argued. Martins attacked the book’s “precious” language. He commented on Carolina's “casual lovers” disparaging her morals. Moreover he insinuated that the real author of the book was Audálio Dantas. (*Unedited Diaries* 13)

Martins did not cite any source within his article to validate his claims, and had no evidence that proved his strong accusations against Dantas. This prompted Dantas, as he had done many times

prior, to defend his role in the publication and editing process of *Quarto de Despejo*. He wrote a response in the same newspaper, the *Jornal do Brasil*, which contained the following statement:

O crítico “apóia” suas conclusões em resenhas que, segundo ele, aqui no exterior “fornecem índicos irrecusáveis de deliberada mistificação destinada a produzir sucesso editorial”. Ele não cita porém os autores de tais resenhas. (...) Quem acompanhou a história de *Quarto de despejo* sabe que a autora procurou em várias ocasiões as redações dos jornais sonhando encontrar alguém que se dispusesse a ler e publicar seus textos. (...) E para vê-los publicados pagos de seu próprio bolso se tivesse dinheiro, e, quando teve, efetivamente pagou....O crítico não está honrando sua reputação de intelectual. Qualquer pessoa com um mínimo de capacidade e seriedade não seria tão ligeira em cometer esta mistificação literária.

(Letter 11)

Though the authenticity was proved in 1995 with the publication of *Cinderela negra* in Brazil, and *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus* in North America, there were still well-known literary critics who continued to denounce the authenticity of the work. Levine recalls the insistence of intellectual irrelevance on part of Martins concerning the diary itself, as well as the academics who were studying *Quarto de despejo* (*Unedited Diaries 3*). It is notable that thirty-five years after the original edition's publication the diary was still causing such a stir among the academic community.

These same accusations were raised with the publication of her other works, though this time the source of “help” differed. Robert M. Levine found in reviewing press releases concerning her second diary and two books that,

Critics examining her writing during the late 1960's and early 1970's showed in some cases a grudging respect for what they considered to be the improved quality of her grammar and accuracy, although they were quick to assume that her daughter Vera had helped her. ("Cautionary Tale" 70)

With these examples given it is evident that the concern and criticism of Carolina's first diary predominantly focused on superficial issues without addressing the content and material found within. The critics both in the academic world and in the press largely called attention to the grammar mistakes, the consistent misspelling of words, and even at times the use of a more expansive vocabulary, insinuating that the use of large words was comical for a woman of her educational and socioeconomic background. Indeed these criticisms are shortsighted, as they fail to address any relevant issues in the diary presented by Carolina, and they ignore both the message as well as the value of her work.

There were, however, few literary critics who indeed did focus on the merit of Carolina's work, specifically with her poetry. Her poems are at times lacking in formal structure and do not consistently rhyme. This argument was brought to light with the publication of Carolina's *Antologia pessoal*; the poems were certainly not the standard poems of the great Brazilian writers:

O elenco dos títulos de alguns poemas já indicam o recorte sócio-econômico que Carolina opera na sociedade em que vive e da qual fala: Súplica do encarcerado, O marginal, Súplica do mendigo, O prisioneiro e Rico e pobre são títulos que, na carga de estereótipos que carregam, desistorizam a questão social e empurram, para figurações secundárias pouco convincentes. (Lajolo 56)

The argument that the poems become stereotypical and unconvincing in subject matter is interesting because the author of these poems experienced much of what she wrote about during her lifetime. Each one of these poems touches on issues that Carolina had to deal with personally. Though the critic remains unconvinced concerning the subjects of the poems, obviously they were of enough importance to Carolina to write about them. Carolina mentioned on various occasions in her diary that writing was an escape for her, and her poetry was no exception. The poems were a cathartic writing experience for her as they allowed her to write out the pain, frustration, and sadness that she felt concerning the issues presented in her poetry. Though her skill as a poet was perhaps not fully matured, the fact remains that these poems should not only be analyzed in for their technical aspects. The background information should be taken into account, as it gives a more honest and holistic perspective on her writing, and helps readers and critics alike understand that while the subject might be unconvincing at first, it is an honest account of real life events.

This argument is even voiced by Dantas when initially reviewing all of Carolina's works. She allowed him to see her poetry, and in his notes he wrote "A poesia é composta de rimas pobres e quadrinhas ingênuas"(107). Dantas, like Lajolo, is concerned with the structure of the poetry and not necessarily the content itself. Dantas writes that the rhymes are weak, though that may be the case; the message and the literary devices used to convey her ideas are not. These valid criticisms came few and far between, and though neither Lajolo nor Dantas see merit in the technical aspects of the poetry, they do recognize Carolina's work as something to be studied and read. These criticisms differ from those previously mentioned as they are offering constructive criticism that would have helped Carolina become a better writer and poet. It is interesting to think about the possibilities for Carolina had she been given constructive ideas and suggestions,

and how her life experiences coupled with a more accepted writing style would have been palatable for a wider audience. Consequently we will never know what literary heights Carolina would have reached had someone assisted her in improving her writings, but perhaps the misspellings, errors, and simple themes presented in her poetry are what make the works so intriguing and honest.

## 2. Praise for Carolina's Writings

Though there were many who disagreed with the amount of attention and praise that Carolina received from her diaries and poetry, there were also individuals from around the world who saw value in Carolina's works. The praise included here is predominantly focused on *Quarto de despejo*, because that was Carolina's most well-known and substantial work. Unlike those who criticized her writings, the intellectuals and literary critics mentioned here do not attempt to focus on the external aspects of *Quarto de despejo*, such as her spelling and grammar. Instead, they look past those issues to the main points presented in her diary: hunger, poverty, exclusion, discrimination, racism, and marginality. Through discussing these themes they are calling attention to the real issues that Carolina was struggling with, creating a constructive dialogue between others in the academic communities and the public. Though Carolina did not strive to be a champion of any social cause, she would be pleased to know that the issues that she faced for so many years were finally being discussed and analyzed by people who are serious about her literary, social, and historical contributions. As Herculano Pires wrote, "*Quarto* is the response of the favela to the city. No one expected that the favela, sunk in the mud, was preparing a response" (cit. Levine "Cautionary tale" 66). It became obvious to many that



Carolina's diaries and other works ended the silent suffering of so many who lived in poverty without a means of telling their story. Carolina shared hers, and in so doing created awareness of those important issues and many people respected her works despite spelling errors and grammar mistakes.

In another review of Carolina's diaries the lack of formal education and the grammar errors are looked at from a unique and interesting perspective:

While Jesus does not explicitly state her decision to keep her grammar as is in order to make a statement about her identity and its resistance to appropriation, a close reading of her references to the act of writing can lead us to meaningful conclusions in this respect. We begin to see that she was not one to relinquish total control of her product and livelihood to Dantas. The result was a balancing act: trying to write freely and uncensored about themes that were important to her while showing the proof of her intellectual growth and capacity. (Feracho 54)

In recalling the independent nature of Carolina, it is evident that she indeed would not readily relinquish all control and decisions to anyone. Her written works were some of her most prized possessions; it is reasonable to think that Carolina would want to keep them as close to the original state as possible. Certainly Carolina strove to constantly improve her writing, but it was on her own terms because of her desire to retain her literary freedom and unique style of expression.

In reading the book reviews of Carolina's works it becomes evident that many scholars looked past the errors in the diary and focused on the determination, diligence, and self-discipline required to write such a moving and honest account of one's life. One such review was published in 1962, just after the release of the North American translation of *Quarto de despejo*

entitled *Child of the Dark*. In this review Carolina was praised for the heart and honest tone of her diary. Madeline Nichols states that it is

A truly great book, it brings vividly alive a woman of astounding courage, strength, gentleness and wisdom, in her dramatic conflict with Hunger which threatens to destroy her and her children...The formal education of the Negro author ended in the second grade, but she proves that life can also be an educator if one has the ability to observe and the energy to think. (Nichols 448)

One of the key central points of the quote is the argument that life can be a form of education through observation and thought. Carolina had certainly mastered these two concepts from an early age, and continued to use them throughout her life. This type of education afforded Carolina the opportunity to see the world around her in a different perspective than most, and to relate it to the public through her diaries and poems. Carolina is honest concerning the trials and struggles her family faced, and does show astounding courage in publishing her thoughts, dreams, and disappointments in such an open manner. Carolina willingly put herself in the public eye, where she was subjected to harassment and ridicule from almost all sides of Brazilian society. Regardless of the trials this caused in her personal life, her diaries remain a testament to the resilience and determination that the human spirit is capable of, and that is one of the greatest assets her writings have to offer.

This same idea is echoed by Francesca Miller who writes that Carolina made a large contribution to the understanding of life for the marginalized during this period of time, both in a sociological and historical sense. She writes:

Hunger and survival are the central themes of *Child of the Dark*, but what makes the book memorable is Carolina Maria de Jesus' strong sense of self...And she is

proud to be a mother. For Carolina, the diary is the story of her struggle to provide for her children, to keep them safe in a hostile environment, to protect them from disease in a slum town built on a swamp, to feed them every day, to find clothes for them, to get them to school...Carolina's descriptions of daily life of poor Brazilians, and specifically poor women, is a graphic indictment of the failure of the national development programs to address the problems of the neediest citizens. (151)

Many people remember the years 1955-1961 as years of advancement and progress in Brazil, quick to cite the many projects and initiatives that the government took on during this period. Carolina however, tells the frequently untold portion of the story, denouncing the corruption, inflation, and policies that made everyday life such a trial for so many throughout Brazil. Carolina witnessed the hunger, poverty, and desperation of the marginalized and wrote about those experiences and moments in a way that denounces the government's lack of assistance when so many were in need.

Not only was Carolina lauded by North American academics, as suggested by some critics, she was also praised by Brazilians. She was especially recognized in the Afro-Brazilian community for her work *Quarto de despejo* and *Diário de Bitita* because of the historical and literary value they held for all Afro-Brazilians. Carolina was the first and perhaps only Afro-Brazilian woman of her time to write about her life and childhood, allowing future generations of her ethnicity to understand what life was like for a descendent of slaves in the twentieth century in Brazil. One critic praised her work, writing:

Carolina Maria de Jesus aliou criação literária e experiência de vida para compor uma obra que está a merecer análises mais detalhadas: *Quarto de despejo* (1960),

alcançou repercussão internacional, revelando uma produção de caráter documental e de contestação social. (de Almeida 1039)

This recognition is crucial for the Afro-Brazilian community because it provides an important opportunity for them to read and understand what it was like for so many poor Afro-Brazilians during this time. Carolina is the second generation of post slavery descent, and as such is an example of the cycle of poverty and abandonment that began after abolition in 1888. Without her record, there would be no written account of marginalization during this time period from the perspective of an Afro-Brazilian. It proves invaluable to the national consciousness of Brazil, as well as the identity and struggles faced by the Afro-Brazilian community during the mid-twentieth century.

Carolina's contribution to the Afro-Brazilian community is essential not only for its historical and literary aspects, but also because Carolina wrote about being proud of her African heritage. The negritude movement was large throughout the world during this period of time, yet Carolina was the only one from her socioeconomic status that contributed to the movement in Brazil.

By addressing both racial inequality and her racial pride in her diary Jesus confronted head on the stereotypes and persecution and turned the diary into a weapon of subversion...She took negative stereotypes and turned them inside out, stressing instead the positive aspects and wearing her race as a badge of honor. As further subversion and manipulation of society's discrimination Jesus offered her text as a self-declaration: a diary, to be published, by an Afro-Brazilian woman. (Feracho 23)

Carolina was proud of her lineage and of her race, something that was unheard of in literature at the time in Brazil. She was, as stated in the quote, willing to take the comments people made concerning her skin, bone structure, and hair and use them to her benefit. Carolina proved in her diary that she was an independent individual, and that she refused to let the disparaging and racist comments bring her down. She is an example in this regard of the pride and happiness that individuals can achieve in their race, despite the common mistreatment they may face from the general public.

The argument concerning the value of Carolina's diaries to the Afro-Brazilian community is followed along the same lines with a well-thought-out response to the impact *Casa de alvenaria* has as a testament to many social and cultural issues that proved challenging for Carolina. *Casa de alvenaria* is honest concerning the mistreatment and exclusion that Carolina and her family faced in the middle classes after the publication of her first diary. While many saw this particular book as unimportant and less interesting than her *Quarto de despejo*, there were many who saw literary, social, and historical merit in her work. One such review stated:

É, entretanto, um livro importante. Cobre os diários desde o dia da assinatura do contrato com a editora para a publicação de *Quarto de despejo*, a saída da favela, a compra da casa num bairro de classe média, a ambivalência da autora em relação à casa, os deslumbres e as angústias na nova posição. Talvez seja o único depoimento existente do cotidiano de uma ascensão social. (Machado 107)

It is evident that not only was her first diary important for certain communities, but her second was just as relevant as the first. *Casa de alvenaria*, as stated in the quote, is perhaps the only record written of social, as well as economic, ascension in Brazil. Carolina provides an inside look into society in a manner that is valuable to sociologists, historians, and anthropologists, as

well as to the general public. It gives an opportunity for the public to take a look at their behavior from the perspective of an outsider, serving as a mirror to their actions and calling attention to the moments of exclusion and unfortunate exploitation of Carolina.

Some scholars view her second diary as valuable because of its day-to-day details which give an inside look into the lives of those marginalized as well as the suffering middle class under the inflation of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It holds value, according to Santos, who states that “as a document of the daily life of the disenfranchised Brazilians, this book is of interest to specialists both in oral history and in cultural studies, to contemporary Brazilian and Latin American historians, and to the general public” (Santos 531).

Other Brazilian intellectuals see merit in Carolina's diaries because of their focus on the changes and impact that *Quarto de despejo* had on her personal life as well as on the public after it was first released. One critic noted that “Carolina deflagrou, com seu diário da fome e seu sucesso, outro imaginário social, provocando mudanças definitivas que, entretanto, permaneceram recalçadas por anos” (Machado 107). According to this quote Carolina was not only able to pull herself out of the misery of the *favela*, but she was also able to bring important socioeconomic issues to light. This same argument is echoed by another analysis of the effect of *Quarto de despejo* on Carolina and society, in which Carlos Vogt writes:

A agitação em torno do livro foi grande. Tão grande que, ao menos no plano individual, Carolina pareceu encontrar a solução para os seus problemas. O trabalho intelectual produzia enfim, o efeito de distinção dos méritos pessoais da favelada, transformando-a, numa semana, na autora de um dos maiores best-sellers do Brasil. (212)

Though many critics prefer to ignore the fact that Carolina was so successful, it should be noted that *Quarto de despejo* remained on the all-time best sellers list in Brazil for decades after the initial publication of the book. This essentially put the problems and issues faced by Carolina and so many other marginalized individuals in the hands of millions of Brazilians. Unfortunately not much was done concerning these issues, but it certainly provided the opportunity for discussion and change regarding the marginalized populations in metropolitan areas. Carolina's witness of the hunger, suffering, and lack of social services and resources for the poor was a cry for help that was not fully answered by the public or the government. Regardless of the outcome, it should be noted that Carolina was able to publish a successful book against all odds.

These same traits of resiliency and honesty that made Carolina's diaries so compelling were found within Carolina's poetry as well. Lesley Feracho states that

Three objectives of Jesus's poetry especially stand out: 1) a means of channeling the daily suffering she experienced; 2) a means of acquiring a status that would set her apart from other favelados; and 3) a form of resistance against social and cultural forces that oppressed her. (39)

This quote directly contradicts the criticisms that Carolina received on her poetry; it recognizes the motivations that Carolina had for writing. As mentioned earlier, she used her poetry as an escape and cathartic experience, which set her apart from the other *favelados*. Many people facing the same dire circumstances as Carolina turned to drinking or other forms of abuse. Carolina, however, preferred to write. This became not only a means of escape for her, but also a way to resist against those who had oppressed her. It gave Carolina an opportunity to answer the landowners that had taken advantage of her family when she was a child. It afforded her a means of addressing those who mistreated her on the streets and made disparaging comments about her

race and socioeconomic situation. Carolina's poetry, along with her two diaries, were her messages to those who had wronged her.

Armando Freitas Filho also finds merit in Carolina's poetry because of its social as well as literary contributions. He writes:

Mais do que um documento, sua poesia é um tocante testemunho de quem viveu entre o quarto de despejo, a casa de alvenaria e a rua anônima. Mais ainda a poesia...é a prova viva de uma vida que não se deixou apagar pela solidão e venceu o esquecimento a que estava destinada. (63)

This quote calls attention to the unique perspective Carolina had in society. As previously mentioned, she was perhaps the only one who wrote from the unique perspective of ascension through the classes in Brazil, and this includes her perspective in poetry as well. Freitas Filho recognizes that had Carolina not fought to publish her works in such a diligent and persistent manner, she would have died forgotten as it seemed she was destined to do.

### 3. Defining Carolina's Works

One of the most perplexing and divisive points in analyzing the works of Carolina is defining her diaries in one specific genre. It has been a long-standing discussion among those in the academic community as to where Carolina's works belong. One argument is that her diaries are testimonial literature, as it tells the story of her life, struggles and triumphs. Another is that the diaries are not literature, but simply journals and should be treated as a historical documents. In addition is the argument to classify her diaries as Afro-Brazilian literature because of the unique perspective found within the diaries as well as the subject matter they cover. Lastly is that



her intended audience were Brazilian whites; therefore the diaries cannot be classified as Afro-Brazilian literature. In exploring the various genres in which the academic community attempted to place Carolina's writing, it becomes evident that they did not consider the possibility of regarding it as part of marginal literature.

Part of the confusion regarding *Quarto de despejo* and *Casa de alvenaria* is that the message and reading of the two works is so subjective. Because Carolina writes on a wide variety of topics and also did not invest much of her diaries in the political ideologies popular at the time, the interpretation of the text varied greatly depending on the audience.

An example of this is found in the following quote explaining the impact that *Quarto de despejo* had in two extremely different settings:

For the countries of Western Europe and especially for the United States, Carolina's Story portrayed an unjust world reinforced by centuries of colonialism. For American liberals, Carolina's diary showed the corruption of the system. The book was also read avidly in socialist bloc countries. In the Eastern bloc as well as in Cuba, Carolina's book seemed to illustrate the contradictions of capitalism and its imminent exhaustion. The historical dynamic of each of these literary contexts: Brazilian, Latin American, European, North American; capitalist or socialist, suggests that there are many ways to read Carolina Maria de Jesus's words. (Sebe 15)

It is evident from this quote that depending on the political, social, and moral background of the individual Carolina's diary had a different message, and therefore could be classified in various genres.

This issue is complicated by the paradox that some in the academic community argue exists within literature. Concerning Carolina's diaries, one individual found that “a critic who assigns the text to ‘nature’ denies the author's control over his or her production; if the critic assigns the text to ‘literature’ he or she can dismiss political intent” (Wasserman 143).

Essentially if Carolina was writing her diary without any social, moral or political pretenses it can be considered literature. This statement was made specifically in regards to testimonial literature, and it was eventually argued that Carolina's works cannot be classified as testimonial, because of her lack of community and reluctance to integrate into a group. This same argument was made again by Eva Bueno, who stated:

Carolina Maria de Jesus, who grew up without a family, did not attend social or educational institutions that could have given her a sense of community; never married, she had no other society but the one represented by her young, dependent children. Her testimony cannot picture her poverty as exemplary. (128)

Because of her lack of community or place in society, her testimony is not representative of a group, but only of herself and her three children. It could be argued, however, that while she did not write the diary with the intention of championing a cause or enacting change, she did create an impact with her own experiences. There were other writers during the twentieth century who wrote their stories as a cathartic experience, only to later have great social, historical, anthropological value and be hailed as literature. One such example is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, written by an unassuming adolescent girl during the Second World War. Her diary serves the same purpose as Carolina's; it speaks of personal experiences of the marginalized and oppressed. Though both writers had no political intent, and as such can be classified as literature, their impact around the world was political.

Part of the reluctance to classify Carolina's diaries as literature was due to the fact that she did not belong to an acceptable social class. It was unexpected and unheard of for a woman from the *favela* to write anything at all, let alone a piece of literature. Carolina, however, did not see any reason for her works to not be recognized as such. It was found that

From her own statements, we learn that she intends her work to be read as “literary” in the traditional sense. At the same time, however, its dissemination depends (and depended) on the fact that she was not part of the social and economic class that traditionally wrote, read—and defined--“literature.”

(Wasserman 134)

Wasserman concludes with the key issue: Carolina did not belong to the correct social class, and in turn many people sought to categorize her works as anything besides literature. To argue that membership in the correct socioeconomic class is one of the deciding factors of ascertaining what is and is not literature would be excluding the writings and testimonial literature of some of the world’s most moving stories. Carolina wrote her diary to calm her own fears and soothe her pain concerning a set of circumstances that were beyond the experience of most people who traditionally write literature. If Carolina's story had been left to someone from a higher socioeconomic status, the real and vivid descriptions of hunger, poverty, and desperation would be non-existent in the work. These moments that draw the reader in also cause contemplation and reflection on the human condition and are so essential to the palatability of the diaries, and without them there would be a lack of impact on the audience.

It is clear from the discussion concerning Carolina's place in Brazilian literature that many are quite unsure how to categorize her writing. Much of that stems from a lack of acceptance, as mentioned in the last quote. Regardless of which genre her diaries fall under, there

will have to be some acceptance of not completely and wholly conforming to the standards of the particular category of literature. This is confirmed by Wasserman, who writes, “Returning to the question of the place of writing by women in the ‘series’ of Brazilian literature, it seems then that Carolina Maria de Jesus represents a test of the limits not only of the system itself but also of its ability to accommodate difference” (152). In realizing that it is not only a test of the literary circles, but also one of accommodating differences, it becomes evident that many are simply unwilling to agree that Carolina's works merit the title of literature; be it Afro-Brazilian, Testimonial, Historical, or Women’s Literature. For Carolina to gain a firm and lasting place in the Brazilian literary canon there must be a general sense of understanding concerning her differences from the traditional works in Brazilian Literature. Perhaps her writings are still too recent to gain this understanding, and only through hindsight will the academic community give her the literary recognition she deserves.

Another scholar discusses this same idea, though her standpoint differs in the sense that she is speaking about her work being included in any category besides literature. She states:

Com uma posição ainda não plenamente firmada na história da literatura brasileira, a obra escrita de de Jesus tem sido lançada à margem, senão mesmo excluída desta literatura. Cognominam-na testemunho, diário pessoal, relato próximo a um relatório antropológico, até mesmo resultado de um modismo, mas poucos aferem-lhe um caráter plenamente literário. (Ferreira 103)

Ferreira concludes that the issue with Carolina's works is that not many are willing to call her writings literature, which relates back to the willingness of those analyzing her works to categorize them as many different types of writing, except literature. This is because to include Carolina as a literary figure would be seemingly unfit, because she does not fit the typical and

accepted profile of a writer. It is as if her inclusion into the genre of literature would be offensive to the other writers in Brazil, though what many fail to recognize is that Carolina's writing stands apart from the other works she is commonly compared to. Instead of condemning her work for being different and unusual, it should be studied and analyzed for its unique aspects and qualities. However, her writing coupled with her gender, race, and socioeconomic status is what leads many to disqualify her writing as literature. Despite her achievements her works will continue to be disregarded until there comes a point in time when the various social, economic, racial, and gender barriers are brought down, allowing inclusion of Carolina's works in the realm of accepted literature.

Because Carolina's works do not completely fit in any one genre already discussed, it would be best to categorize her writings as marginal literature. The content is indeed relevant to marginalization and she uses literary devices in order to forge a connection with the reader and the diary's content. Carolina shows that she is capable of writing using a wide variety of literary devices and is comfortable expressing herself both in abstract and literal language. Her audience is the white upper and middle class of Brazil, who found a great interest, or perhaps curiosity, in her first diary. This, however, does not mean that because her diary was popular she was accepted:

Carolina Maria de Jesus presents a problem, not of gender (and not even exclusively of race) but of class, the markers of which differentiate her text from the canonical not in content...but in unmediated form. She presents a problem of the acceptance, of the proper "reading" of marginality that, it can be argued, exists in relation to all forms of marginality. (Wasserman 152)

This idea is the same concept that has been presented throughout the portion of this chapter concerning how one can define Carolina's works. Even in marginal literature there is an issue of acceptance, and it largely is related to the issue of Carolina's class. The stigma of being a poor woman compounded with her race made it difficult for many to accept her as a literary figure, to the point of attempting to exclude her from the genre of marginal literature.

The problem with placing Carolina as a writer of marginal literature is that while many people may be drawn to reading her works, they usually are not reading it to better understand those who are excluded in society. In the case of Carolina's diaries, many of the people who read them were interested more in the fights, the drunken arguments, and the descriptions of loose women instead of attempting to see life from a different perspective. Carolina was more of a spectacle than a respected individual with a compelling story to tell. This same argument can be made today regarding marginal literature such as Paulo Lins' *Cidade de deus*. There are valuable social lessons that can be gleaned from reading the book, though many have preferred to read it for the violence, drugs, and sexual encounters. In the case of *Quarto de despejo*, the attention it garnered as a piece of marginal literature did not enact great social change or create a new perspective for the majority of the readers.

#### 4. Summary

It is safe to assume that when Carolina began searching for a publishing house to take on her first diary in 1948 she did not anticipate such a varied and spirited response concerning her writings. She proved that her determination and diligence were two of her greatest qualities not only in her story of survival, but also in making her dream of publication a reality. Carolina was

able to lift her family out of poverty and show the world that it is possible to make something of one's self regardless of the obstacles one may face.

Though Carolina found success in the copies sold of *Quarto de despejo* and later to a lesser extent with *Casa de alvenaria*, there were many people who sought to discredit her work and her character. The press accused the diary of being a fake and took great lengths to paint Carolina as a social misfit and self-centered woman lacking in morals, manners, and education. This can largely be attributed to the discrimination Carolina faced for being female, Afro-Brazilian, poor, and uneducated—it was easier for the press and critics to discredit her works than to acknowledge her abilities and relevance as a writer. By excluding Carolina they also were free to ignore the social and economic ills that are discussed in *Quarto de despejo* and *Casa de alvenaria*. Essentially Carolina had been marginalized before the publication of her diaries, and she continued to be marginalized by the press and certain critics after the release of *Quarto de despejo*.

Despite these numerous slanderous claims and reports concerning Carolina and her writings, many people, both Brazilian and foreign, saw value in her works and dedicated time to analyzing and critiquing her diaries and poems. This presented a new issue of how to classify Carolina's writings, as there are many aspects to her writings that need to be considered. Ultimately, though her writings partially fit into many genres, it is most fitting for her works to be classified as marginal literature because of content as well as her unique characteristics as an author.

Though marginal literature may be a sound fit for Carolina's writings, she still faces the question of acceptance, as many see reason to exclude her writings from any form of literature, due to grammatical, spelling, and syntax errors. Perhaps with more study and analysis from the

academic community people will find that Carolina was honest and open concerning her writing, and that carried over into all aspects of her work, including the sentence structure, syntax, and spelling. She presented herself through her works as best as she possibly could, and if anything the arguments for exclusion should be the very reasons that Carolina is included as literature. Her story, technical aspects, and writings are unique; they are engaging, and their subject matter is revolutionary for the time it was published.



## Chapter Two: The Background and Childhood of Carolina

Carolina Maria de Jesus lived a hard life, full of difficulties and discouragements that began at her birth and ended with her death. During her lifetime she both witnessed and experienced racial discrimination against Afro-Brazilians, disparaging treatment of Brazil's impoverished, and *machismo* which often left her distant and distrustful of men. These three main components were threads that wove themselves into every aspect of her life--her family relations, economic situations, health troubles, academic pursuits, and social interactions. Such experiences helped shape her ideas, prejudices, as well as hopes, and are extremely important in understanding her points of view shared within her diaries and poetry.

In this chapter the essential moments of Carolina's life will be discussed with an analysis of how her experiences as a child and young woman shaped her ideals, fears, and opinions found in her writings. The moments of prejudice within her family, in her town, and the mistreatment by the authority figures in her community will be studied in order to understand her plight as a *favelada* in her diary *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*.<sup>8</sup> The genesis for Carolina's love for reading and writing will be discussed to better understand why she made becoming a famous writer a life-long goal and mission. Her life in the countryside will also be analyzed as it is essential to understanding her desire for agrarian reform, a view that many saw as purely political without understanding Carolina's motives. Lastly Carolina's struggle with illness in her young adult years sheds light on the socioeconomic discrimination that she faced, which heavily influenced her views concerning interaction between social classes found in her poetry and diaries.

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<sup>8</sup> *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada* will be referred to in this chapter as *Quarto de despejo*

Many discredit her actions, views, and works without fully understanding the hardships, struggles, prejudice, and discrimination she dealt with consistently during her lifetime.

Examining these specific themes in Carolina's life enhances the ability to understand her writing, and gives the reader a fuller sense of what her life was like on a personal level.

Specific dates for important events are sometimes lacking in Carolina's biography. She simply states when she was "young" or at other times "when I was a young lady." Her lack of a formal birth certificate leaves open the question of her birth year. At times she recalls it as the year 1914, other times it is 1915. This is mentioned to explain the omission of dates and ages throughout this chapter, as this information was not provided by Carolina and there is no way to confirm her age during the significant moments spoken of in her memoirs and in this chapter.

## 1. Family Background and Upbringing

To better understand Carolina, it is essential to begin with her childhood and familial relations. She was born in 1914 into humble circumstances in the town of Sacramento, Minas Gerais, which sits close to the border of São Paulo (*Life and Death* 21). Carolina describes the home in which she was born and spent the majority of her childhood as follows:

A nossa casinha era recoberta de sapé. As paredes eram de adobe cobertas com capim. Todos os anos tinha que trocar o capim, porque apodrecia, e tinha que trocá-lo antes das chuvas. Minha mãe pagava dez mil-réis por uma carroça de capim. O chão não era solhado, era de terra dura, condensada de tanto pisar.

(*Diário de Bitita* 7)

The home itself was not something to admire, as she continues to explain the trouble the rains caused, and the lack of personal space Carolina had as a child. The small home stood on a plot of “state land, named the ‘Heritage’ which had no running water, only a small well that they had to walk to several times a day (*Diário de Bitita* 7). Her grandfather, Benedito José da Silva, owned the particular piece of land her family lived on, though it is unclear if this had been indeed a legitimate purchase. Carolina writes that he bought the land from a man in the town, though he had no jurisdiction over government-owned property (7).

Her immediate family consisted of Carolina, her mother Maria Carolina, and one brother (*Life and Death* 21). She did not know her father she knew only that his name was João Cândido Veloso and that he was an alcoholic singer who was married. Her brother, who is never referred to by name, had a different father whom she did know (21). In her memoirs she poses the question, “Conhecia o pai do meu irmão e não conhecia o meu. Será que cada criança tem que ter um pai?” (*Diário de Bitita* 7). The question posed by a young and innocent Carolina speaks of a larger issue, the familial relations in her immediate family, specifically the blended family of half-siblings and a single mother, who was separated from her husband. This is the same pattern that Carolina chooses to follow years later in her own life, as a single mother with three children each from different a father. Though Carolina witnessed the hard life that her mother lived trying to provide for her two children emotionally as well as financially, she also witnessed the *machismo* of her uncles and other town members. These instances helped Carolina form the idea that she would be better off unmarried to poor men, and more specifically poor black men.

Levine and Sebe wrote concerning Carolina:

Being illegitimate and a poor black female was an even greater obstacle...she developed traits of self-pity and self-hatred...She became ambivalent about her

blackness, as well. Although her autobiographical writings are filled with statements of pride about having been born black, all throughout her life she was attracted to white men, and she detested blacks from her social class. (*Life and Death* 23)

Here it is apparent as to why Carolina might have been inclined to seek the attention of white men, and never that of poor Afro-Brazilians. She had seen within her own family the instability and hardships her mother faced in loving poor men, and she did not want that for her own life. Unfortunately, those white men who fathered each of Carolina's three children did not openly claim them as their own. Carolina provided for them as the sole source of income and sole parent, just as her own mother had done with her. Vera, her daughter, tells us of the relationship between Carolina and her father. She states:

Meu pai? Esse eu nunca conheci, e dele não quero nada. Ele já morreu, mas durante a vida soube que era meu pai, sabia que a gente passava necessidade, e nunca fez nada por mim. Homem rico, imagine! Dono de fábrica! E nunca se importou em dar a menor ajuda para a filha...Minha mãe, pobre e favelada, lutou para que a gente sempre melhorasse de condição, saísse da favela. Meu pai, um homem que era industrial, montado em dinheiro, nunca pagou uma consulta de dentista para mim. Nada! (*Cinderela negra* 65)

This complex view of her own race helps the reader of her diaries understand the passages in which she writes disparaging remarks regarding poor Afro-Brazilians. If the negative experiences she witnessed her mother go through are taken into account, it is easier to relate to her dislike of the other black *favelados*, primarily those whom she refers to as *baianos*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Baianos* refers to migrants from Bahia, though many Brazilians use the word to describe people from that region, regardless of whether or not they are actually from the state of Bahia.

Carolina had many members of her extended family living nearby in the same neighborhood who were an integral part of her childhood for better or for worse. Her grandfather was known as *o Sócrates africano* in her neighborhood, stemming from his wise take on life's experiences as well as the respect shown him by the other Afro-Brazilians in the neighborhood. He was born into slavery, and came to Sacramento after abolition in 1888 (*Diário de Bitita* 7-8). Later on, she describes the times when he spoke about his experiences in slavery, and after abolition. She wrote:

O meu avô era um vulto que saía da senzala alquebrado e desiludido, reconhecendo que havia trabalhado para enriquecer o seu sinhô português...Chorava, dizendo “O homem que nasce escravo, nasce chorando, vive chorando e morre chorando. Quando eles nos expulsaram das fazendas, nós não tínhamos um teto decente, se encostávamos num canto, aquele local tinha dono e os meirinhos nos enxotavam...O que nós favorece é que vamos morrer um dia e do outro lado não existe a cor como divisa, lá predominarão as boas obras que praticamos aqui.” (57-8)

At this point in her memoirs it becomes clear that Carolina had a close relationship with her grandfather, as he was willing to share these painful and deep experiences with her on such an intimate level. He was someone that she admired; he was a trusted confidant and source of unconditional love and support in her life.

Though he was unable to read or write, he was well respected in his community. An example of this is when Carolina writes about the last few days of his life stating, “Quando ele ia falar, os vizinhos, os filhos, iam ouvi-lo” (*Diário de Bitita* 116). After his death Carolina heard many of the neighbors exclaiming, “Que homem inteligente. Se soubesse ler, seria o Sócrates

africano...Foi um crime não educá-lo. E este homem seria O Homem! Poderiam criar uma lei de educação geral, porque as pessoas cultas que adquirem conhecimento do seu grau intelectual têm capacidade para ver dentro de si” (119-20). It is apparent that her grandfather was a greatly revered and well-thought-of man in his community. He was instrumental in helping Carolina as a child see that it is possible to be Afro-Brazilian, poor, and still be respected. She realized at her young age the respect the neighbors paid her grandfather; she watched their actions and heard their remarks for years praising her grandfather’s intelligence and dignity. The kindness, respect, and adoration shown toward her grandfather left a deep and lasting impact on Carolina, and acted as a catalyst in heeding her grandfather’s advice concerning education.

Carolina deeply loved her grandfather, as he was the sole positive male role model in her family. She often described him as “meu defensor” (*Diário de Bitita* 25) when her mother would beat her, or when she was feeling sad, he would take care of her. It is interesting to note that her grandfather is one of the few men in all of her writings that she remembers fondly, and consistently has positive things to say about him. This illustrates how much she admired him, because predominantly at some point every man she writes about in her diaries becomes the object of her dislike and many times her distrust.

Her grandfather was also a positive influence on her love for reading and writing. There was an instance in which her grandfather was speaking to her concerning the fact that his eight children did not know how to read or write. He told her, “Não foi por relaxo de minha parte. É que na época que os seus filhos deveriam estudar não eram franqueadas as escolas para os negros. Quando vocês entrarem nas escolas, estudem com devoção e esforcem-se para aprender” (*Diário de Bitita* 57). She took his advice seriously, and this was the genesis of her love for reading and writing. She understood even at her young age the missed opportunity of education

that so many former slaves along with their children experienced, and did not want to follow in their footsteps.

Other family members, specifically her Aunt Ana Marcelina, her mother's sister, treated her unkindly due to the color of her skin. Carolina describes her aunt as a

Mulata clara. A mulata cabedal. Não gostava de preto. Dava mais atenção aos brancos. Quando olhava os pretos, era com os olhos semicerrados e desviava o olhar... Quando nós, os sobrinhos pretos, íamos visitá-la, não tínhamos o direito de entrar. Casa de mulato, o negro não entra. (*Diário de Bitita* 67)

The disparity between acceptance and kindness between family members seems odd at best, but it exemplifies the strained racial relations that existed during her childhood and were so prevalent in society at the time. In the introduction of the English translation of *Diário de Bitita*, *Bitita's Diary: The Childhood Memoirs of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, Levine explains concerning Carolina, "her...ebony skin relegated her to the low status of *preta* (black woman), and even her relatives, most of whom were mulatos, rejected her. She was raised as a pariah even though she showed keen intelligence" (xiv). She recounts throughout the memoirs many times when her relatives, even her own mother, mistreated her during family events and the embarrassment and anger it caused her. On one occasion she wrote, "Não sei se era ciúme, mas eu notava diferenças nos modos da mamãe nos tratar. O meu irmão era o predileto. Eu pensava 'Ela trata-o com todo o carinho, porque ele é mulato. E eu sou negrinha'" (*Diário de Bitita* 81).

Her relationship with her mother was volatile; there were times when her mother exclaimed, "Eu não gosto de você!" (8), and other instances when her mother showed love and compassion towards Carolina. A good example of this is when she asks her mother about how to make a wish come true. Carolina had the notion that life for men was easier, and she wanted to

become a man in order to have less demanding life as a child and later on in life as an adult. Her mother humored her curiosity about how she could become a man by patiently explaining, “Quando você ver um arco-íris, você passa por debaixo dele” (11). Her mother could have easily ignored her question, or told her not to ask about such senseless things, but instead she was creative and gave her a wonderful answer, teaching folklore and propelling Carolina’s imagination instead of reprimanding her curiosity. It is natural to question ideas and concepts as a child, and Carolina was indeed curious concerning the social world around her even at a young age. Her mother was usually patient with her many questions and remarks, though there were instances of abuse on a daily basis (25); she reports being beaten every day for something she said or did. This reflects the frustration that her mother felt at the questions that went too far, which often pertained to her father, as well as to the confusion that Carolina must have felt from the unanswered questions and daily beatings.

## 2. Growing up with Prejudice

Carolina’s experiences with racial prejudice were plentiful both inside and outside her family, and caused a great deal of strife and sadness in her life. Carolina dealt with prejudice throughout her entire life, especially in press coverage after her first diary was published, though we can see the initial instances of prejudice during her childhood in Sacramento. Carolina is called out to many times as, “Oh! Negrinha idiota! Negrinha antipática!” She explains that, “Quando alguém ia me xingar era, ‘Negrinha! Negrinha!’” (*Diário de Bitita* 74). A specific time that this occurred is when she was a young girl and decided that she wanted a mango from her neighbor’s tree. She climbed up into the tree’s branches and found a ripe mango. It was only



when she reached to grab the mango that she realized there was a snake biting the opposite side of the piece of fruit. This caused her to panic, fall out of the tree, and lose consciousness.

She regained consciousness to the voice of her neighbor, who was white, yelling, “Então é você quem rouba as minhas frutas. Negrinha vagabunda. Negro não presta.” Carolina responded with, “Os brancos também são ladrões porque roubaram os negros da África” to which her neighbor retorted looking at Carolina with disgust, “Imagina só se eu ia até a África para trazer vocês...eu não gosto de macacos” (*Diário de Bitita* 55). It is true that Carolina was doing something that would result in negative consequences if she were caught. Despite this, her neighbor’s remarks were telling of common sentiments during the time period. It is essential to notice that her remarks quickly turn from solely insulting Carolina to making sweeping statements concerning all Afro-Brazilians. There are many more instances such as this in Carolina’s memoirs, where Afro-Brazilians are blamed for an array of problems and stereotyped into a caricature of their ethnic identity. The moment her neighbor referred to Carolina as a monkey we see the woman not only has prejudice against Carolina’s race, she also felt the need to further insult a child by essentially calling her an animal. Again, the use of racial slurs points to a greater issue of a lack of dialogue, respect, and understanding between whites and Afro-Brazilians. Later on in Carolina’s diaries it is clear that the racism she experienced did not stem from growing up in a small town, but it is an aspect of Brazilian sociorelations that followed Carolina relentlessly throughout her life from the rural Brazil to the city of São Paulo.

The prejudice against Afro-Brazilians came from not just the whites living next door, but also those who were in leadership positions in the town. Carolina tells about instances in which the police in Sacramento carried out violence and injustice against the Afro-Brazilians in the

community. One specific incident that was especially tragic was when a man was shot in the town. Carolina wrote:

O fato que me horrizou foi ver um soldado matar um preto. O policial deu-lhe voz de prisão; ele era da roça, saiu correndo. O policial deu-lhe um tiro. A bala penetrou dentro do ouvido. O soldado que deu-lhe o tiro sorria dizendo “que pontaria que eu tenho!” Com o pé ele movia o corpo sem vida do infausto e dizia “ele deve ser baiano.” (*Diário de Bitita* 112)

Carolina said that this scene moved her deeply and was disturbing for her on many levels. It left her frightened as she stated, “E eu fiquei com medo dos brancos e olhei a minha pele preta. Por que será que o branco pode matar o preto? Será que Deus deu o mundo para eles?” (113). To a young girl it seemed that the whites in her community had indeed been given the world, and that the police were a power that she should fearfully avoid. It is possible that she kept this question in mind throughout her life as she went to work in the homes of white families who sometimes did not pay her for her services. Again she experienced mistreatment when she was living in the favela from the whites who looked at her in disgust, refused to help her, or threw rotten food at her as she rummaged through garbage. These instances from different points in her life all return to her second question “Could it be that God gave them the world?” Indeed, with a life of discrimination, it perhaps seemed that way to Carolina.

When writing about her later childhood she shares that in her community, “Os pretos tinham pavor dos policias, que os perseguiam. Para mim aquelas cenas eram semelhantes aos gatos correndo dos cães.” Carolina also explained that there was no recourse for justice, as “Os brancos, que eram os donos do Brasil, não defendiam os negros. Apenas sorriam achando graça de ver os negros correndo de um lado para outro. Procurando um refúgio, para não serem

atingidos por uma bala” (*Diário de Bitita* 56). This treatment of the Afro-Brazilians in Sacramento was only a fraction of the injustices that used to occur during the times of slavery. After an instance involving gunfire that left Carolina particularly shaken up, her great-grandmother told her, “Os brancos de agora já estão ficando melhor para os pretos. Agora eles atiram para amedrontá-lo, antigamente atiravam para matá-los” (56).

Not only did the police mistreat the men, they also harassed the women but through lewd behavior instead of physical violence. Carolina writes that, “Não faziam elas correrem. Mas falavam palavrões para elas e mostravam o pênis, e eu fui dizer a minha mãe” (56). This specific instance was when she was walking with a teenage girl who was stopped and harassed by a group of officers. Carolina was also subjected to their dirty words, gestures, and lewd conduct. Moments like these throughout Carolina’s childhood created a deep fear of the police and their motives, which carried on to a lesser extent throughout the rest of her life. She was afraid when her children were summoned to the police station, and feared that they would unjustly be sent to live in juvenile detention, like so many of the other poor Afro-Brazilian children at the time. She believed to an extent that she was safe from the mistreatment, but knew that her own children were not immune to the discrimination she saw so many individuals face as a child.

Despite Carolina mentioning that the police did not come after the women regularly, there was a time when her mother was wrongly accused of a crime and taken to jail. Carolina recalls:

Um dia a minha mãe estava lavando roupa. Pretendia lavá-la depressa para arranjar dinheiro e comprar comida para nós. Os policiais prenderam-na. Fiquei nervosa. Mas não podia dizer nada. Se reclamasse o soldado me batia com um chicote de borracha...Quando o meu irmão soube que a mamãe estava presa

começou a chorar. Rodávamos ao redor da cadeia chorando. A meia-noite resolveram soltá-la. Ficamos alegres. Ela nos agradeceu, depois chorou. (*Diário de Bitita 27*)

It is unsettling to think about people being arrested for crimes they did not commit, and without due process being followed. Had they not released Carolina's mother there would have been no immediate family member to help her care for her brother, and to provide for their needs. This example shows that not only were the women subject to the harassment discussed previously, but also to occasional unjust imprisonment.

There were also instances where it was not the police in the town who were mistreating the Afro-Brazilians, but instead the officials. There was an incident in which Carolina went to buy some limes for her mother, and on the way home a boy stole them from her. The boy happened to be the son of the judge, who was one of the most powerful figures in town and who had people arrested on a regular basis. Only a few days later, the boy threw limes at Carolina's legs and face. She went to the judge and told him that his son, "vive pegando no seio das meninas pobres, aperta e deixa elas chorando mas em mim você não vai encostar suas mãos." The judge told Carolina to have some manners, to which she replied, "Eu tenho. O teu filho é que não tem." The judge in anger told her, "Cala a boca. Eu posso te internar" (28). Carolina knew the threat was real, and that she could have grave consequences for talking to a white man in his position in such a forward manner, but she told him:

Para o seu filho fazer porcaria em mim, como faz com as meninas que o senhor recolhe? É melhor ir para o inferno do que ir para a sua casa. Doutor Brand, aqui todos falam do senhor, mas ninguém tem coragem de falar para o senhor...O seu

filho entra nos quintais dos pobres e rouba as frutas...Olha Doutor Brand, o seu filho me roubou uma lima. Todos têm medo dele, eu não tenho! (28)

When the Doutor went to strike Carolina for speaking to him in such a manner, she fearlessly continued:

O Rui Barbosa falou que os brancos não devem roubar, não devem matar. Não devem prevalecer porque é o branco quem predomina. A chave do mundo está nas mãos dos brancos, o branco tem que ser superior para dar o exemplo. O branco tem que ser semelhante ao maestro na orquestra. O branco tem que andar na linha.  
(*Diário de Bitita* 28-9)

This incident is important on many levels. Primarily, it attests to the fact that Carolina despite her age and her lack of education, was able to stand up for herself to a college educated white man. She did what so many others in the community undoubtedly wanted to do, but lacked the courage to follow through. She, though only a child at the time, was able to articulate her thoughts in a well-stated manner, and was even able to paraphrase the ideas of Rui Barbosa--one of the most memorable Brazilian politicians of the nineteenth century. It is also important to note that Carolina was speaking out against the injustices committed by the Judge's son. In doing so, she was seeking justice for the young women who had been violated, and for those robbed by his son. This drive to restore justice and order in society is a characteristic that Carolina carried through her adolescence and into her adult life. There are many instances which she writes about in her diaries where she is the only one in the *favela* willing to call the police when a fight broke out, or when she witnessed something illegal. As a result, many of the *favelados* looked to Carolina to help resolve problems within the *favela* and saw her as a voice of reason among the chaos.

### 3. Carolina's Education

One of Carolina's most noted attributes is her desire to constantly learn and continue her studies. Her initial opportunity to go to school came about due to the generosity of a local philanthropist. A woman by the name of Dona Maria Leite would come to Sacramento twice a year and give out clothes and necessities to the needy. When she learned of Carolina needing an education she told Carolina:

Eu sou francesa. Não tenho culpa da odisséia de vocês; mas eu sou muito rica, auxilio vocês porque tenho dó. Vamos alfabetizá-los para ver o que é que vocês nos revelam: se vão ser tipos sociáveis e tendo conhecimento poderão desviar-se da delinqüência e acatar a retidão. (*Diário de Bitita* 123)

It is indeed interesting that Carolina includes this information concerning her benefactor, as it gives the reader some insight into how a few underprivileged children of her town were able to go to school. The kindness of this one white woman does not overshadow the many instances of prejudice and discrimination that Carolina had already faced in life, but it does illustrate the fact that there were kind whites who were interested in helping the Afro-Brazilians become a more self-sufficient and educated race.

Though Carolina writes many times in her diaries about the joy reading and literature brings her, and how much she enjoyed school, this was not always the case. On recalling her first day of school<sup>10</sup> she writes, “Quando entramos na escola fiquei com medo. Nas paredes havia uns quadros do esqueleto humano...Quando eu olhava os quadros dos esqueletos, o meu coração acelerava-se. Amanhã eu não volto aqui. Eu não preciso aprender a ler” (*Diário de Bitita* 122).

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<sup>10</sup> Carolina does not reveal the year that she began school, nor her age when she was enrolled, leaving the reader only with the information that she was a child, but nothing more specific.

She relates to the reader how sad it made her that the white children and mulattoes would make fun of how dark she was and her facial features. She wrote, “É que eu estava revoltada com os colegas por terem dito ‘que negrinha feia!’...’Que olhos grandes, parece sapo’...Ninguém quer ser feio” (122).

School continued to be a difficult experience for her, as she was discouraged and not catching on to things quickly. Carolina writes that, “Continuei indo à escola. Porque o comparecimento era obrigatório. Mas não me interessava pelos estudos. A minha professora insistia para eu aprender a ler...Eu achava tão difícil aprender a ler” (*Diário de Bitita* 124-5). She remembers writing also being difficult, and only being able to write the letter “o” in her notebooks for a long time. Finally, after persistence on her teacher’s part,<sup>11</sup> Carolina found the drive and determination to excel in her studies. Slowly Carolina began to recognize words, and finally was able to read whole sentences. She could read the signs on the shop fronts, and she recalls running home to tell her mother the exciting news. Carolina writes of the experience:

Vasculhei as gavetas procurando qualquer coisa para eu ler. A nossa casa não tinha livros. Era uma casa pobre. Uma vizinha emprestou-me um livro, o romance *Escrava Isaura*...Eu lia o livro e retirava a síntese. E assim foi duplicando o meu interesse pelos livros. Não mais deixei de ler. (*Diário de Bitita* 126-7)

Carolina could have easily given up on her studies, but she saw importance in learning despite her difficulties at the beginning of her education. She became one of the best students in her class, and found an outlet for the hard life she had at home. Her daughter, Vera Eunice, recalls that her mother used literature and writing as a means of escape from the outside world. She says:

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<sup>11</sup> The teacher is never mentioned by name, as Carolina refers to her only as “Minha Professora” throughout her chapter regarding education.

Foi o gosto pela leitura, a facilidade que ela tinha de ler livros e jornais que a motivaram a continuar se desenvolvendo. E acabava tendo de ser assim: sozinha com os livros. Acho que os livros foram os únicos companheiros constantes dela, porque eles não escolhem seu leitor...Por isso é que ela aprendeu tanto e acabou sendo escritora: se afogava em livros para fugir da solidão. (*Cinderela negra* 67)

It is clear from the words of Carolina's daughter that books and writing were her only outlets of expression and sources of comfort. During the course of her life she had no one to turn to, no one to help ease her burdens and concerns, only her books and diaries. Sad as it may be, Vera Eunice attributes the loneliness and social exclusion Carolina faced to her success as a writer and her life-long devotion to education. This love for learning, reading, and writing was an attribute that she instilled in her children, and education became something she strongly believed in and preached to others for the rest of her life.

#### **4. Life in the Countryside**

Carolina was able to experience life in many different settings as a child and young adult. Though she was born and lived in Sacramento for the majority of her childhood, there was a time when her mother moved to the countryside. Her mother had decided to move to a farm with a man, and Carolina was to go along. This news was sad for Carolina, as she had found acceptance from her teacher and a gift for reading and writing. She wrote, "Foi com pesar que deixei a escola. Chorei porque faltavam dois anos para eu receber o meu diploma. Único meio foi resignar-me" (*Diário de Bitita* 128). She and her mother moved to the Lajeado farm, on the outskirts of Uberaba, Minas Gerais (*Life and Death* 26).



The transition from living in her small town to living in the country was difficult at first. Carolina was not accustomed to living in such isolated circumstances, and writes that when she looked around all she could see were the various shades of green from the trees. There were no other homes with children, just fields and trees (*Diário de Bitita* 129). Carolina's mother saw the difficulty her daughter was having with the adjustment, but after some words of encouragement Carolina decided to try and enjoy her time in the country. Her mornings were more relaxed, with baths in the nearby spring, listening to the birds outside her window, and helping her mother and step-father plant in the fields that they were allowed to plant on.

Carolina remembers the times in the country with fondness, and learned the importance of having land to work. She recalls that the land they farmed was fertile, so much so that:

Quando surgiu a colheita, fiquei admirada da prodigalidade da terra. Uma amiga que todos os meses nos oferece algo para colher. Plantamos dois sacos de arroz, colhemos trinta. Dois sacos de milho. Colhemos três carros...Que vida gostosa! Eu ficava deslumbrada com a fartura. Verduras e frutas, para mim aquilo tudo era a terra prometida ao Moisés que eu tive a ventura de encontrar. (*Diário de Bitita* 130-1)

Carolina found solace in working the fields; it was something simple for her to do each day that yielded great results. Her family had plenty, so much so that her stepfather built a storehouse to keep all of their food. The life that she knew in Sacramento was financially unstable, and her mother had to work odd jobs to keep them fed. The life in the country contrasted sharply with that of Sacramento, and Carolina saw the benefits of planting and harvesting their own food. She writes:

Eu estava enamoradíssima da nova vida. Estava desligando-me da compra de quilos de arroz e familiarizando-me com os sacos de cem quilos e com o paiol. Todos tinham possibilidades de fazer doces. Mamãe fazia arroz-doce com leite puro. Eu comia. Ela perguntava, “Quer mais?” Aquele quer mais, ficava eclodindo no meu cérebro. Ganhávamos o leite, o açúcar. O arroz nós plantávamos. Que tranqüilidade, não tinha a polícia nos nossos calcanhares. Que silêncio para dormir! (*Diário de Bitita* 131)

With these glimpses into Carolina’s childhood in the countryside it becomes clear that she saw the country as a safe haven. Her mother was not as impatient with her, and their relationship changed into a friendship instead of a rivalry. She was able to eat enough food, and never went hungry because of the plenty they had at each harvest. Though she was not in school she continued to read and educate herself on the subjects of history and literature (*Diário de Bitita* 130). This refuge for Carolina explains the draw she felt to having her own land and small farm when the fame and constant spotlight became too much for her to bear. Carolina in her later years moved to a piece of land with a small house and planted food, much to the bewilderment and laughter of the public, especially those in the press. In understanding her love for the country and the serene times she had on the farm, it is reasonable to assume that when she was too stressed about the constant coverage and scrutiny of her life she retreated to the only place she had truly been content.

Her passion for the land is a poignant insight into her views on agrarian reform, which continues to be a divisive topic in Latin America. She repeatedly stressed her support for agrarian reform later on in her diaries, and this view stemmed predominantly from her positive experiences in the country. From living a life of hunger and poverty in cities as a child and as an

adult she sees owning land and growing food as a viable solution to the poverty she witnessed throughout her life. It was one of the few times in her life that she did not have to worry about food, and this led to her strong belief that in order to be successful one needed land to cultivate and farm.

Though Carolina spoke of the rural life in such glowing terms, it is apparent that her experiences in the country were not all idyllic. Carolina experienced first-hand the cruelty of the landowners, and the helplessness that many poor and immigrants faced on the farms of Brazil. The eventual reason for Carolina, her mother, and stepfather leaving the farming life was because the landowner insisted that they owed an exorbitant amount of money, which they were incapable of paying. The original agreement had been for Carolina's family to give a certain percentage of their harvest to the landowner, with which they complied. The dishonesty of the farmer explains the hesitation Carolina has in working on other's land in the future, and her resistance to receiving help from those around her. The milk, sugar, and other goods that were given to her family became detriments quickly when the landowner demanded payment for their "debt." At this point in her memoirs, Carolina no longer mentions her stepfather, which could mean that her mother's relationship with him ended. She and her mother left the farm with no money, and had to pay a truck driver with a pig and chickens to secure a ride back to Sacramento. They left their life of plenty with no choice other than to return to their small home and humble life of poverty. Instances such as these created a more cynical and thick-skinned Carolina that is ever present in her diaries.

## 5. Socioeconomic Discrimination

There were many times that Carolina faced discrimination in her early years, much of which was already discussed in the portions of this chapter that dealt with race and machismo within her family. None of these were as consistent and traumatizing as the period of her life when she was infected with an illness that left her legs covered in open sores.<sup>12</sup> While this illness was most certainly treatable at the time, she did not have the money to pay for treatment, and in turn her illness was prolonged for over a year. It was during this period of her life that Carolina experienced the hardships of being ill, discriminated against, and no recourse to quickly treat her illness.

She first traveled alone to Uberaba, the town she had lived nearby so many years before during the years of plenty on the farm. She had heard that the doctors were well trained in Uberaba, and left Sacramento with hopes of curing her illness. She was without money and traveled the distance on foot, sleeping on the side of the road. She recalls, “Dormia nas estradas. Andava pelas estradas de rodagem. Que luta!” (*Diário de Bitita* 148). One can imagine the pain she must have experienced during the forty-five mile walk from Sacramento to Uberaba. Since her legs were infected with sores, she complained that they were usually hot and swollen, which made walking uncomfortable and at times almost unbearable.

Her first encounter with discrimination was with a woman she recalled meeting many years before as a child. Carolina was hoping that Dona Maria Leonaldo, an acquaintance of the family, would let her stay in her home while she was treated. Unfortunately for Carolina, she was not given the warm welcome she was anticipating. She writes:

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<sup>12</sup> Carolina does not state how old she was when she contracted the illness, though we know that she was an adolescent. At this point in the memoirs she was living in Sacramento with her mother, and perhaps her brother, though he was not mentioned.

Ela recebeu-me friamente. Era a dona Maria Leonaldo. Um recebimento sem sorriso, sem o tão comum: “Como vai?”...Eu disse-lhe que havia ido a Uberaba apenas para ver se conseguia curar as minhas pernas...À noite, as suas filhas foram chegando. Não me cumprimentaram, apenas passaram os olhos e franziram o nariz. (*Diário de Bitita* 148)

The reception Carolina receives is telling of how ostracized she was. Seeing as how this is an acquaintance of her family, it is safe to assume that Dona Maria stems from the same socioeconomic standing as Carolina’s own relatives. However, Carolina had already been pushed aside repeatedly because of her skin color and her illegitimate origins. Her exclusion was complicated further by the sores that were apparent to anyone with whom she came in contact. As if the cold greetings from all the family members were not cruel enough, they further humiliated her at nightfall when:

A Dona Maria disse-me que o único lugar disponível para eu dormir era no galinheiro. Para quem já havia dormido nas estradas, qualquer coisa servia...Passei a noite no quintal, não era possível dormir com as aves. Que noite longa! Cheguei até a sentir saudades do calor do sol...Às oito horas ela abriu a porta e disse que não me queria na sua casa. (*Diário de Bitita* 149)

She was told that she had to go to the St. Vincent House to find shelter, because they cannot refuse the poor who ask for help.

Though she found refuge at the St. Vincent House, the poor treatment and discrimination she faced upon arrival in Uberaba at the home of Dona Maria remained with her. It is clear that Dona Maria upon seeing Carolina, and greeting her “coldly,” was focusing on the facts that Carolina was both poor and ill; she did not want to associate with her, let alone welcome her into

her house. This instance was not the only time that Carolina arrived at an acquaintance's home only to be treated poorly. The second instance is even more disheartening because it was her aunt that treated her unkindly.

She traveled to Ribeirão Preto later in that year, this time with money given to her by her mother. The money allowed her to buy a ticket to Ribeirão Preto in order to be treated for the same infection. She was seen at the Santa Casa (almshouse) and was told to return in three days for more treatment. Once again, she found herself in a city where she knew only one family, that of her Aunt Ana. She tracked down her address and of her initial encounter with her Aunt Carolina writes:

Quando cheguei eram seis horas da tarde. Eles estavam jantando. Parei na porta e cumprimentei-a “A bênção tia Ana!” Ela não me respondeu. Mesmo sem este convite: “Vamos entrar”, eu entrei e sentei. Os meus pés estavam inchados dentro dos sapatos que os comprimiam...A tia Ana disse-me: “Você com certeza já jantou.” (*Diário de Bitita* 161-2)

Carolina experienced a lack of hospitality in the home of Dona Maria and her Aunt Ana. Both women were cold and passive when Carolina arrived, despite it being obvious that she was in need of food, shelter, and kindness. These two occasions show that the women were not only inconvenienced by Carolina's presence but also embarrassed. It is safe to assume that Carolina did not look wealthy by any means, and that she most likely was dirty and unkempt from traveling such long distances in miserable conditions. Though the first woman was a family friend and the second a relative, both women were angry that Carolina had chosen to seek them out for charity. A prime example of this is when Carolina told her aunt that she had not eaten, and the aunt responded with “Um olhar furioso. Pôs um pouquinho de feijão e arroz e foi

dizendo, ‘visitas de boca não me interessam, visitas de braços sim. Como foi que você descobriu a minha casa?’” When Carolina told her that she had asked a neighbor who pointed her in the right direction the aunt became angry: “Minha tia Ana ficou furiosa xingando ‘Ah, mulher infame, desgraçada! Ela que vá para o inferno!’” (*Diário de Bitita* 162). Obviously neither woman welcomed Carolina, mainly because she was poor, and had nothing to offer them in return for their hospitality. There was no thought in extending charity to Carolina, but rather ways to get her out of their homes and excuses to tell inquiring neighbors who she was. While visiting her aunt, Carolina attended a dance and while she was there:

She noticed that her aunt was sitting next to an “old” woman, more than fifty years old. The woman asked Ana who the girl with her was. Ana looked her niece over minutely and responded: “She’s a beggar who comes from time to time to my house to ask for handouts.” “How charitable you are,” the woman replied...when they arrived home her aunt gave her a rug on which to lie down on the cement floor. (*Life and Death* 35)

The sad irony found in this account is astounding for a few reasons. Primarily, it is interesting that Ana is comfortable lying to her neighbor to escape having to admit any relation to Carolina by stating that she is a beggar. This deception gives the perception that Ana is a kind woman who is charitable, when in actuality she is the opposite as evidenced by her treatment of Carolina before and after the dance. This passage also is an example of the discrimination Carolina faced during this period of her life, the stigma that being ill and poor, and the dire social exclusion that was. The cruel treatment at the hands of her aunt did not stop there. After she was left to sleep on a concrete floor with only a rug to keep her warm and comfortable, Ana again mistreated her niece. Levine and Sebe write of the experience:

At daybreak Carolina went outside to warm in the sun. No one offered to feed her any breakfast...she was told to stay in the yard of the house. At mid-day her aunt gave her two spoons of rice and two of beans while complaining that she was a burden. “Why don’t you beg?,” she said. “Go to the city. I’m sick of you being here in my house.” (*Life and Death* 34)

Carolina understood that she was not going to be able to stay at her Aunt’s home, and so she sought refuge at the home of another relative who also lived in Ribeirão Preto. She had forgotten about Barbara also residing in the city and had hopes that she would be able to stay with Barbara for the remainder of her treatment. These hopes were dashed when Barbara, upon seeing Carolina, slammed the door in her face and refused to let her in (*Life and Death* 34). Her only option was to return to the yard of her aunt, where she stayed, unwelcome, for the next two days. As she left once again to the Santa Casa, Carolina was running low on hope and had been deeply hurt by the lack of hospitality she had received from her relatives. She writes:

Toquei a campainha pensando: ‘Como será que vou ser recebida?’ E o meu coração começou acelerar-se como se estivesse dançando um samba. Eu tinha a impressão que havia levado um empurrão e sendo atirada fora do mundo. Se eu não recuperar a minha saúde, terei que mendigar mesmo. (*Diário de Bitita* 168)

Though Carolina was able to find refuge and treatment in the Santa Casa she was not cured and decided to leave despite the nuns imploring her to stay. As she walked back to Sacramento from Ribeirão Preto, she once again slept on the side of the road and as people passed by her, she heard them say, “Ela deve ser louca!” (*Diário de Bitita* 171). Carolina indeed felt trapped by her illness, poverty, and social status that prevented her from being happy during this period of her



young adult years. She felt out of place and estranged from those around her, feeling comfortable only depending on herself for survival.

It was during this dark period of her life that Carolina experienced the harsh realities of living in the basest conditions of human existence. Without a home, a regular source of food, water, and safety, she saw how hard it was for someone of her color, social standing, and condition, to succeed in life. She was unable to attain employment, unable to cure her illness completely, and unable to forge lasting relationships and friendships that prove so important and essential to the human experience. Carolina thought to herself in this dark moment of her life, “Será que a minha vida vai ser atribulada assim? Eu não quero pedir esmola. Não quero roubar. Quero ser honesta” (*Diário de Bitita* 171). Unfortunately for Carolina this question she posed to herself as a young woman would be answered with a life of day-to-day survival. A relentless struggle to earn enough money to take care of herself and her three small children; indeed her life for the most part was strikingly similar to the hardships she experienced in seeking treatment for her illness.

## 6. The Road to Canindé

Though Carolina does not provide this information in her memoirs, the story of how she ended up in Canindé collecting scraps of paper has been pieced together through interviews and clarified by the research of Robert M. Levine in his article “The Cautionary Tale of Carolina Maria de Jesus”. He found that at age twenty-three she migrated to São Paulo in hopes of finding work, and it proved to be a hard life of sleeping under bridges while working odd jobs to pay for her food. She eventually was able to find work as a maid, though she was fired for being “too

independent” (56). She went on to hold five more positions as a maid, and was fired from each job. While she was working in her last job in 1948, she became pregnant by a Portuguese sailor who abandoned her. She was fired and banned from the employer’s home, leaving her with no choice but to set out on her own to find housing and work. Since she was pregnant, no one was willing to hire her and she thus could not afford to pay room and board anywhere. She moved to a *favela*. Levine writes that during this period of her life Carolina “selected the favela of Canindé because it was close to a junkyard. She carried boards on her head that she had removed from a church construction site five blocks away and built a shack with her own hands, covering it with scrap tin” 57). All this was done while Carolina was six months pregnant, and after her son João was born she “strapped her infant to her back and walked the streets collecting paper and odds and ends in a burlap bag. She foraged in garbage cans for food and clothing...on good days she earned twenty-five to thirty cents, on bad days, nothing” 57).

When João was two she had her second son, José Carlos, and now was picking up scraps in the streets with two children strapped to her. Shortly after this she had Vera Eunice, fathered by a wealthy businessman (“Cautionary Tale” 58). With the birth of each subsequent child, she had a greater financial burden to shoulder that equated to harder work and added stress of feeding more mouths. Her neighbors also shunned Carolina because she enjoyed spending her time listening to music and reading. This exclusion coupled with the stress of providing for her family led to the birth of Carolina’s diaries in 1955. She wrote almost every day for three years until Audálio Dantas discovered her while he was covering a separate story in the *favela* 59). Her diary, *Quarto de despejo*, was first published in pieces in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, and because of its success it was later published as a book in 1960.

After the publication of her works, she moved out of her house in the Santana neighborhood in an attempt to flee the disruption that the press and money seekers had caused in her life. She moved to a small plot of land in Paralheiros<sup>13</sup> where she lived out the remainder of her life struggling to make ends meet yet again. Concerning her death, Levine writes:

Carolina died of respiratory failure on 13 February 1977. On having difficulty breathing, she had taken a bus to her son José Carlos's house and told her daughter-in-law Joana that she had come to their house to die. Carolina and José Carlos argued, and when she said she was getting worse, he refused to believe her. Carolina died en route to the local first-aid station. Her children had no money to bury her. Although they appealed to the press for financial help, saying they were penniless, none materialized. ("Cautionary Tale" 78)

Carolina came full circle during her lifetime; she was born into poverty and died in poverty. Though it must be recognized that for a portion of her life she attained her lifelong goal of becoming a published writer with her name on the cover of her books. She died under unfortunate circumstances, and was not remembered too kindly by the press in the obituaries that were written following her passing.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, this review of key moments of Carolina's childhood, adolescence, and young adult years, provides evidence that her worldview were formed by these events. Many people criticized her for her demeanor in public after the publication of her diaries, without understanding that she came from humble circumstances in a rural town, where she was

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<sup>13</sup> According to Levine, Paralheiros was two hours south west of the city of São Paulo by bus. It was an emerging industrial area filled with warehouses and factories, and one of the lowest income areas in the city ("Cautionary Tale" 72).

<sup>14</sup> Levine includes a translated obituary from the *Estado de São Paulo* in his article "The Cautionary Tale of Carolina Maria de Jesus" which paints Carolina as a reckless individual that squandered her money, and died living in a shack (79).

routinely discriminated against for one reason or another. Her diary affirms that an upbringing fraught with rejection imprints one's characteristics and habits.

By reviewing the impact her family had on her we see that Carolina was not welcome at family events and had few people in her life from a young age that she could turn to for comfort and safety. The one stable individual in her life, her grandfather, passed away when she was only five or six years old, leaving Carolina without any relative who was consistently loving and kind. Although family is often a refuge from the everyday worries and disappointments of life, we see Carolina's experience was far from that. The diaries suggest that as result of a childhood and young adult life full of exclusion, Carolina begins to withdraw. By extension she becomes fiercely protective of her children both in and out of the *favela*. She is so afraid that they would experience the same things she went through in her family that she keeps other individuals far from their family circle.

Carolina was also criticized for her "loose morals"<sup>15</sup> by the media and the way that she openly spoke of her sexual independence in her diaries. Her open relationships with men were found to be especially distasteful in the public eye because these men were predominantly wealthy and white. Carolina possessed, partly due to watching her mother, a type of female sexual independence that was not discussed openly at the time her diaries were published, let alone by a *favelada* who sleeps with wealthier white men. Carolina grew to detest poor Afro-Brazilian men, believing that they were irresponsible and could not be good providers. This was true of her father, as well as her brother's father, so she sought to resolve the issue by seeking out rich white lovers. However, her family life was not bettered by this choice; white men fathered all three of her children and abandoned them. Perhaps Carolina found compensation in the color

<sup>15</sup> Mentioned by David St. Clair in his afterword of the English translation of Carolina's first diary, *Child of the Dark* (182).

of children's skin in every case lighter than her own. Perhaps they would be less ostracized in society with a fairer complexion. Through looking at Carolina's family relations and interactions during her childhood and into her young adult years it is evident why she wrote about taboo topics, and why she acted so "inappropriately" in public even after the publication of her diaries.

The prejudice she experienced while growing up had a lasting impact on the way she perceived the actions of those around her, as well as her wariness of people offering to help her. Men, classmates, neighbors, the police, the town judge, relatives, and strangers alike discriminated against Carolina, each instance confirming to Carolina that she could rely on no one but herself. Discrimination continued throughout her childhood and even when she arrived in the bustling city of São Paulo.

Carolina took these reflections on her discrimination and came to the conclusion that few people were willing to help her in any way. She developed a resiliency that stemmed from not being able to count on those around her, and arguably this attribute could be what eventually helped her get out of the *favela*. Carolina never hesitates to write of instances of wealthy *paulistanos* mistreating her or looking down on her situation as a *favelada*. She was keenly aware of sideways glances of disgust, muttered comments, and whispers as she picked up paper in the streets. Had she not experienced this type of treatment consistently in her youth, it might have gone unnoticed. Instead she was able to not only perceive what was happening, she was able to write occasions of discrimination down and tell of these social injustices to the world.

One of the most noted attributes of Carolina is her love for reading and writing. From reading her diaries one might not know that she is an avid fan of classic Luzo-Brazilian literature, but she reports that her two years of formal schooling was all it took for her passion for literature to come alive. Her books were her lifelong companions, and she knew that reading

and writing could be an escape from her daily troubles and hardships either in her youth, or later on in the *favela*. In writing about learning to read and write at school, Carolina shares with the happy moments of success that she felt as a star student, and the joy she found in reading. This also helps one understand the primary catalyst for her diaries, as well as the genesis for her desire to be a famous writer. Without acknowledging these moments in her life and her short period of education it is easy to simply write Carolina off with the label of “semi-literate,” not understanding the constant effort and lifetime devotion she had to her writing and learning and improving herself in a literary sense.

When Carolina moves to a Paralleiros, a remote part of São Paulo, and plants a garden and raises chickens after her fame and success from her diaries, she is mocked by some of the Brazilian press. Carolina’s decision to sell the Santana home that brought her out of the *favela*— for a perceived “downgrade” by Brazilian critics— seems illogical and a poor financial decision. However, if one brings into account her pre-*favela* memories of idyllic country life it that she would seek refuge in a situation comparable to that of her childhood years on the *fazenda*. Those were the times of plentiful crops and abundant food, and solace found in nature. Carolina was retreating from the hectic world that encompassed her after the release of her first diary, and trying to build a home far from the unrelenting and unsavory press coverage that came along with fame. It could be argued that she was simply trying to regain control of her life, and to find the solace she once knew as a child in the country.

The adolescent illness that Carolina suffered for more than a year brought many harsh lessons and taught her that for the remainder of her life she would have to define and defend her own independence. She realized that adequate health care was not available to all Brazilian citizens. An infection that would have been cured in a reasonable amount of time for an

individual with adequate financial resources lingered for months on end—bringing Carolina much embarrassment and despair concerning her condition and future. She was unable to work, homeless, hungry, and sick, relying only on the good graces of the Santa Casa for temporary refuge. These moments were unfortunately a window into her future, as she continued to fight for services and help when she needed it well into her adult years. Carolina gives a first-hand account of what it is like for someone of her socio-economic standing to be in need of help, both in her young adult years, as well as later during her diary years. She shows the reader that the poor are often forgotten, or mistreated in their times of extreme need and distress. She is a testament to the lack of resources and social ostracism that accompany being poor; and she shows what it means to be marginalized.

Carolina's discussion of her younger years, the reader of her diaries may fail to see the consequences of a life of prejudice, exclusion, as well as a life of hard work and diligence. It is easier to not only understand Carolina's diaries and poems with these insights, but it also facilitates comprehending her public actions and opinions that brought her heavy criticism.

### Chapter Three: The Autobiographical Works and Poetry of Carolina Maria de Jesus

Carolina Maria de Jesus is best known in Brazil and throughout the world for her diary, *Quarto de despejo: o diário de uma favelada* (1960).<sup>16</sup> This work is comprised of Carolina's daily musings spanning the years 1955-1960, where she wrote her experiences and trials that stemmed from living in the São Paulo favela Canindé. Carolina's contribution to Brazil's collective experience and voice is an important one; her diary serves a unique historical and literary purpose. It is the only published account of someone marginalized in São Paulo during the years of Juscelino Kubitschek, and it serves as a representation of the plight so many went through with inflation, poverty, and hunger during these years. Certainly these issues carried on despite the publishing of Carolina's work, but the mere act of Carolina lending her voice and letting her hardships be known through her writing is something to be valued.

Her second diary, *Casa de alvenaria: diário de uma ex-favelada*,<sup>17</sup> is also valuable because it portrays the after effects of her success, and the struggles she continued to face even after escaping her previous life of poverty and hunger in the *favela*. She recounts the new challenges and difficulties that faced her as the media, greedy individuals, and at times close confidants and friends became her worst critics. It is the story of a woman who arrives unwelcomed to the middle class lifestyle, and is snubbed for her behavior, comments, and at times even her personal purchases. This lesser-known work provides the reader with a chance to witness what happened after Carolina and her family left the *favela*, and to see that the Brazilian

<sup>16</sup> The first English translation, by David St. Clair is published in the United States under the title *Child of the Dark* in 1962. Also, the Portuguese title *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*, will be referred to as *Quarto de despejo* in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> This diary is also published in the United States under the title *I'm Going to Have a Little House: The Second Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, translated by Melvin S. Arrington Jr. and Robert M. Levine. In addition, the Portuguese title, *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada*, will be referred to as *Casa de alvenaria* in this chapter.



public generally was reluctant to welcome into her newfound light as a nationally renowned writer.

Carolina's dream in life was to be a writer and have her name published on the front of a book<sup>18</sup>. She realized her dream with the publication of *Quarto de despejo*, and again with her other three books *Casa de alvenaria*, *Pedaços da fome*,<sup>19</sup> and *Proverbios*.<sup>20</sup> Carolina's childhood memoirs were recognized for their historical and social merit, and were published posthumously in the 1980's with the title *Diário de Bitita*. Aside from these works, Carolina was an avid writer of prose and poetry. Though her prose is interesting, her voice shines through in her poetry where she writes on themes concerning moments and experiences from her own life. Poems such as "O colono e o fazendeiro" help the reader understand Carolina's point of view concerning the disparaging treatment of farm laborers and the exploitation they face, stemming from her own experiences as a child and again as a teenager. Other poems, such as "O rico e o pobre" and "Súplica do mendigo," give the reader a glimpse into the hardships of poverty in an industrialized city. Lastly, her poem "Súplica do encarcerado" shows Carolina's literary merit in her ability to capture the feelings of a prisoner and portray them in a universal theme. This poetry is a representation of her ability as a writer, and a testament of her lifelong devotion to her own literary evolution and progression. Carolina indicates that though she might not have obtained the education she desired, she did a remarkable job of expressing herself through both her autobiographical works and her poetry.

This chapter will focus on the historical, social, and literary significance of the mentioned works during Carolina's lifetime, specifically her two diaries and the selected poetry from her

<sup>18</sup> Stated by Carolina's daughter, Vera Eunice, in an interview with Robert M. Levine (*Cinderela Negra* 64).

<sup>19</sup> Published originally in 1963, this work does not have an English translation.

<sup>20</sup> This work was also published for the first time in 1963, and does not have an English translation.

*Antologia pessoal*.<sup>21</sup> Carolina's publications serve as a voice and witness to the hardships of the marginalized populations of Brazil faced during the mid twentieth century. By analyzing her first and second diaries concerning inflation and cost of living increases during this time, the historical and social value of these works becomes evident because it recounts the day-to-day struggle many Brazilians faced during this period. Also, her insider's look into the harsh realities of being a marginalized citizen in a large and ever-expanding metropolis is essential to understanding the realities many Brazilians faced, but did not write about.

### 1. *Quarto de despejo: Diário de uma favelada*

By far, *Quarto de despejo* is the best-known work of Carolina Maria de Jesus, as it is one of the best-selling books in Brazilian history according to Robert M. Levine ("Cautionary Tale" 55). One of the greater values of this particular work is the exposure of the social cruelties that Carolina and other *favelados* faced from other *paulistanos*. There are many instances where Carolina writes about the mistreatment and embarrassment that she and others faced when people went out of their way to humiliate or degrade her. One of the most repetitive instances of this is people preventing Carolina from picking up discarded food off the street or out of the trash. Many times in *Quarto de despejo* Carolina mentions a factory that she would visit on occasion to look for tomatoes that had fallen to the ground during the loading process. Carolina makes it clear that when the tomatoes fall they are not used by the company any more:

Quando passei perto da fabrica vi varios tomates. Ia pegar quando vi o gerente Não aproximei porque ele não gosta que pega. Quando descarregam os caminhões os tomates caem no solo e quando os caminhões saem [o gerente] esmaga-os. Mas

<sup>21</sup> A collection of her works, published posthumously in 1996. There is no English translation of this book.

a humanidade é assim. Prefere vê estragar do que deixar seus semelhantes aproveitar. Quando ele afastou-se eu fui pegar uns tomates. (69)

This is not an isolated incident, as Carolina returns to this same area another day and is confronted by an employee while she is desperately trying to pick up tomatoes to use in a salad for her children. She writes that, “Passei na fabrica para ver se tinha tomates. Havia muitas lenhas. Eu ia pegar uns pedaços quando ouvi um preto dizer para eu não mecher nas lenhas que ele ia bater-me. Eu disse para bater que eu não tenho medo...Olhou-me com desprezo e disse ‘maloqueira.’” (73) Although Carolina relates many times in her diary instances where people are rude to her and she peacefully takes their comments and disgusted looks, this time she reacted to his comment because she realized that if she said nothing he would continue to provoke her, threatening her ability to scavenge food for her family. She told the man:

Por eu ser de maloca [maloqueira] é que você não deve mecher comigo. Eu estou habituada a tudo. A roubar, brigar e beber. Eu passo 15 dias em casa e quinze na prisão. Já fui sentenciada em Santos. Eu sou da favela do Canindé. Sei cortar de gilete e navalha e estou aprendendo manejar a peixeira...Se vai me bater pode vir...Hoje o senhor fica só com uma orelha. (73)

Carolina was able to leave without the man hitting her. She writes concerning the incident that she felt compelled to tell the man those lies and exaggerations in order to not only save face, but also to make sure that he wouldn't try and harm her. This interaction has social significance because it demonstrates an interesting relationship between the working class of Brazil and the poor and marginalized members of society. Though the tomatoes were not going to be used by the business, the employees went out of their way to ensure that no one else ate them. Both instances, the manager who deliberately squishes the produce, and the employee who threatens

to hit her if she takes the discarded food, are prime examples of the working class preventing the poor from successfully scavenging for food. This relationship may speak of a desire for a portion of the population to dominate the marginalized members of society by restricting their ability to feed themselves. Carolina speaks openly about the cruelty the *favelados* faced, and recognizes that this was not isolated only to her experience on the streets, it is something that was, unfortunately, a common practice.

On another day, Carolina was standing in a line of people waiting to receive food from people who were handing out stale crackers and cookies. She recounts:

Enquanto eu esperava na fila para ganhar bolachas ia ouvindo as mulheres lamentar-se. Outra mulher reclamava que passou numa casa e pediu uma esmola. A dona da casa mandou esperar (...) A mulher continuou dizendo que a dona da casa surgiu com um embrulho e deu-lhe. Ela não quis abrir o embrulho perto das colegas, com receio que elas pedissem. Começou pensar. Será um pedaço de queijo? Será carne? Quando ela chegou em casa, a primeira coisa que fez, foi desfazer o embrulho porque a curiosidade é amiga das mulheres. Quando desfez o embrulho viu que eram ratos mortos. Tem pessoas que zombam dos que pedem.  
(55)

This incident is further proof that the poor and needy who asked for handouts often became the brunt of people's jokes and abuses. At times Carolina wrote about the difficulty of having to provide for her children on such meager means, and how actions such as these complicated the process. There were days when she stood in line to get old food to eat and it ran out, so she had to try to find other methods of obtaining food for her family because the social assistance given was insufficient to help everyone in need. Then, when she had to resort to asking for food or

scavenging for it in the garbage, those who were in a place to give refused to do so. The reader is able to see a complex social issue from the perspective of those it affects the most, the hungry and poor.

The inhumanity expressed in the account of the woman overheard (*supra*) was also experienced by Carolina's children. Sometimes when it was rainy and Carolina was not able to scavenge for paper in the streets she would send her two boys out to ask for food in hopes that they would be able to find discarded food for them to eat. On one such occasion they arrived at home and she writes that, "Os meninos ganharam uns pães duro, mas estava recheiado com pernas de barata" (90). It can be inferred from this small sentence that whoever gave the bread to the boys was discarding it because they knew the bread was no good, specifically because it had legs of cockroaches inside the loaves. Though they knew the bread would most likely cause harm or illness to the children, they handed them the loaves anyway. This disregard for the wellbeing of a child is an unfortunate example of the social discrimination even children faced during their moments of hunger and distress.

Carolina again speaks out against the practice of purposely contaminating food to prevent the marginalized population from eating it when she relates an account that occurred two years prior to her writing the diary. She writes:

Em 1953 eu vendia ferro lá no Zinho. Havia um pretinho bonitinho. Ele ia vender ferro lá no Zinho...Um dia eu ia vender ferro quando parei na Avenida Bom Jardim. No lixão, como é denominado o local. Os lixeiros haviam jogado carne no lixo. E ele escolha uns pedaços...deu me uns pedaços...Procurei convencê-lo a não comer aquela carne...Ele disse-me que não. Que há dois dias não comia. Acendeu o fogo e assou a carne. A fome era tanta que ele não pode deixar assar

a carne. Esquentou-a e comeu. No outro dia encontraram o pretinho morto...Foi sepultado como um Zé qualquer. Ninguém procurou saber seu nome. Marginal não tem nome. (35-6)

The young man in this account is not the only one that suffered death from eating food from the garbage; it was something that Carolina feared every time she rummaged for something to eat in the waste bins of the city. There are multiple occasions in which she is preparing food for her family, or sees the children eating from the garbage and poses the question, “E se tiver veneno?” (42). Her diary entry articulates a common fear that stemmed from a despicable and odd social practice Carolina touches on when writing about the lack of social outreach towards the poor from those who are in a position to give. She writes:

Ao escrever isto vão pensar que no Brasil não há o que comer. Nós temos. Só que os preços nos impossibilita de adquirir. Temos bacalhau nas vendas que ficam anos e anos a espera de compradores. As moscas sujam o bacalhau. Então o bacalhau apodrece e os atacadistas jogam no lixo, e jogam creolina para o pobre não catar e comer. (133)

It is from moments and observations like this that Carolina understood why people died regularly from eating food from the garbage, much like the young man she found dead from eating the meat. She also reported the intentional fouling of discarded meat at the meat packing plant, where she would oft times go to beg for bones to make a soup, or to scavenge for old *linguiças*. She became more cautious after one day writing that, “Percebi que no Frigorifico jogam creolina no lixo, para o favelado não catar a carne para comer” (39). This is why Carolina prepared food fearing poisoning herself and her children on many occasions—because those who were throwing out the food would rather no one eat it, or eat it and die, than eat it at all. Carolina

chose to write about these practices because they were a part of her daily existence, and also because it provides the reader a chance to see the damage a practice such as poisoning food in the garbage can have on the marginalized population. This is socially significant because it speaks not only of the day-to-day dangers Carolina and others faced, but also a unique and unfortunate social interaction between the upper classes and the marginalized populations.

The marginalized were looked down upon by the wealthiest as well as those who lived in the neighborhoods adjacent to the *favelas*. Carolina recounts the times that people were kind and gave her money, though more often than not the bad experiences outweighed the good. One of the most memorable accounts happened while Carolina was in an upscale apartment building and was confronted by a resident who disliked her presence. She writes that:

Uma senhora que regressava da feira disse-me para eu buscar papeis na rua Porto Seguro, no predio da esquina, 4 andar, 44...O elevador em vez de descer, subiu mais dois andares. Mas eu estava acompanhada, não tive receio...No sexto andar o senhor que penetrou no elevador olhou-me com repugnancia. Já estou familiarisada com estes olhares. Não entristeço. Quiz saber o que eu estava fazendo no elevador. Expliquei-lhe que a mãe dos meninos havia dado-me uns jornaes. Era este o motivo da minha presença no elevador. Perguntei-lhe se era medico ou deputado. Disse-me que era senador. O homem estava bem vestido. Eu estava descalça. (98).

This treatment was symptomatic for Carolina, who again had encountered someone who disliked being in her presence. She specifically states that she had grown accustomed to the rude glares and glances that people often sent her way, and that these looks did not cause her any discomfort or sadness. It is interesting to note the frequency with which Carolina must have encountered

situations such as these to become immune to their disheartening effects. It is also evident that the man who shared the short elevator ride to the ground floor did not approve of Carolina being in his building, let alone using the elevator instead of the stairs. Perhaps it could be argued that the social disparity caused a desire among the wealthy of São Paulo for the poor to be “out of sight, out of mind.” Carolina was disrupting that social distance with her presence, thus provoking the man’s disgust and confrontational question.

Though the rich presumably wanted to be kept far from the problems and struggles of the poor, they were not the only ones who desired to be kept ignorant of the poverty around them. The middle class and lower class also held the same “out of sight out of mind” attitude when it came to the *favelados*. Carolina writes that, “Os vizinhos de alvenaria olha os favelados com repugnancia. Percebo seus olhares de odio porque eles não quer a favela aqui. Que a favela deturpou o bairro. Que tem nojo da pobreza. Esquecem eles que na morte todos ficam pobres” (49). This articulates the idea that many *paulistanos* wanted to keep the unfortunate scenes of the poor and the *favela* from their daily lives; Carolina reminds us that poverty makes them uncomfortable. This social construct might have been overlooked had Carolina not brought it to the attention of the public, making the upper classes aware of the fact that she saw their dirty looks, and heard their snide remarks. She is also quick to remind all that after this life everyone is equal, there will no longer be wealth, classes, and privilege. This thought might have been comforting to Carolina, but most likely was an unsettling one for many Brazilians; they obviously preferred the distance and socioeconomic segregation.

*Quarto de despejo* also has historical significance because it was written during the *Cinquenta anos em cinco* movement carried out by the Juscelino Kubitschek administration. During this time of a national push to advance Brazil in a technological and industrial sense,



there was also the onset of inflation that refused to be curbed or reduced. Year after year prices increased, and some of the hardest-hit citizens were the poor of the *favelas* who could not keep up with the increase in cost of living. Carolina earned a meager living and the survival of her family was a day-to-day struggle. She writes many times about how everyday items such as sugar, bread, and public transportation have all increased in price, and her income cannot keep up with the inflation. With this firsthand insight of the daily struggles many faced during this time period in Brazil to make ends meet, the reader becomes aware of what life was like for the marginalized portion of São Paulo during the mid-twentieth century. She writes of this time, “Os preços aumentam igual as ondas do mar. Cada qual mais forte. Quem luta com as ondas?” (54). It is evident from this quote that Carolina felt as though the prices continued to drive up while no one was stepping forward to stop them.

She also wrote about the effect that inflation had on those who were moving from the interior of Brazil to the city to escape the mistreatment of landowners. One gentleman in particular caught her eye during her daily routine of picking up paper in the streets. She described him as follows:

Estava rasgado e sujo que dava pena. Nos seus trajes rotos ele podia representar-se como diretor do sindicato dos miseráveis. O seu olhar era um olhar angustiado como se olhasse o mundo com desprezo. Indigno para um ser humano. Estava comendo uns doces que a fabrica havia jogado na lama. Ele limpava o barro e comia os doces...Estava tonto de fome. (48)

The description of this man is a sad one; it paints a mental picture of a downtrodden and weak man. It represents all those who during this time of industrialization and forward thinking were forgotten amongst the garbage of the city, left to find their own way. Carolina took pity on the

man, and although she had to provide for herself and her three small children she approached the man and told him to wait for her while she sold her paper and bought him something to eat. The man refused to let her buy him anything, and told her:

Eu já sei o que vou fazer da minha vida. Daqui uns dias eu não vou precisar de mais nada deste mundo. Eu não pude viver nas fazendas, Os fazendeiros me explorava muito. Eu não posso trabalhar na cidade porque aqui tudo é a dinheiro e eu não encontro emprego porque já sou idoso. Eu sei que eu vou morrer porque a fome é a pior das enfermidades. (49)

This man's words were the story of so many who left rural Brazil in search of a better life during this time period, only to encounter harsh living conditions and ever-increasing inflation which rendered them unable to pay for their daily food and living expenses. Many marginalized people had these same difficulties, and Carolina was able to write about them, thus leaving us with a historical account of the financial hardships the poor faced during the 1950's.

At times the inflation and the lack of outreach to the poor infuriated Carolina, because she was seeing the effects of the government on those around her, on her children, and on herself. She writes:

O que o senhor Juscelino tem de aproveitavel é a voz. Parece um sabiá e a sua voz é agradável aos ouvidos. E agora, o sabiá está residindo na gaiola de ouro que é o Catete. Cuidado sabiá, para não perder esta gaiola, porque os gatos quando estão com fome contempla as aves nas gaiolas. E os favelados são os gatos. Tem fome. (30)

From this quote the reader sees a different side to Carolina's personality. She is speaking out of a place of rage and frustration, and also one of helplessness, and takes it a step further with a threat

veiled in her metaphor. She is speaking of the marginalization of the poor from the rest of society, specifically from the politicians who are running the country. She alludes to the fact that the president is living a safe life of luxury in Rio de Janeiro while so many in the *favelas* are suffering and dying of illness and starvation, and that sooner or later the poor will no longer tolerate the abandonment and mistreatment of the *favelados*.

On another occasion Carolina also writes with frustration in the following manner: “Eu quando estou com fome quero matar o Janio, quero enforcar o Adhemar e queimar o Juscelino. As dificuldades corta o afeto do povo pelos politicos” (29). It could be argued that Carolina became so angry towards the politicians because she had been in the *favela* long enough to see that they used the marginalized population to win the electoral vote, yet fulfilled none of the promises made to the *favelados* once in office. She explains:

Os politicos só aparecem aqui nas eleitoraes. O senhor Cantidio Sampaio quando era vereador em 1953 passava os domingos aqui na favela. Ele era tão agradável. Tomava nosso café, bebia nas nossas xicaras. Ele nos dirigia as suas frases de viludo. Brincava com nossas crianças. Deixou boas impressões por aqui e quando candidatou-se a deputado venceu. Mas na Camara dos Deputados não criou um protego para beneficiar o favelados. Não nos visitou mais. (28).

This is another example of a time when Carolina was looking to the politicians to help those in need, and their promises were empty and hollow once they were elected into office. It is understandable in taking this into consideration that Carolina, and other marginalized members of society, were frustrated when the cost of living was going up, inflation was high, and the politicians who promised to help had forgotten. This response to the hard economic times many were facing is historically relevant because it allows the reader to see what a day-to-day struggle

it was for those living in poverty during the Kubitschek administration. Surely historical textbooks may provide an anecdote or two concerning the effects inflation and emigration had during the 1950's, but Carolina's diary provides a first-hand street account of the negative impact of inflation.

Carolina also writes about when she would go to visit social services open to the poor or the local police station, and the things that they would tell her about those living in the *favela*. These moments are when we are able to see the disparity between what outsiders were seeing in the *favela*, and the hopelessness the *favelados* felt in relation to the economic hardships and the government. She recalls:

Disse-me que a favela é um ambiente propenso, que as pessoas tem mais possibilidades de delinquir do que tornar-se util a patria e ao país. Pensei: Se ele sabe disto, porque não faz um relatorio e envia para os politicos? O senhor Janio Quadros, o Kubitschek, e o Dr. Adhemar de Barros? Agora falar para mim, que sou uma pobre lixeira...O Brasil precisa ser dirigido por uma pessoa que já passou fome. A fome tambem é professora. Quem passa fome aprende a pensar no proximo, e nas crianças. (26)

In these moments Carolina demonstrates that she not only was aware of the stigma of being a *favelada* and the negative treatment that usually accompanies it, but also aware of local and national politics. Carolina gives a good example here of not simply accepting the fact that *favelados* are more prone to delinquency and crime, but instead thinking that this man could write a report and send it to the local and national governments. In this instance she is noting that simply telling a member of the marginalized population statistics and opinions will not change the reality, it requires action as well. Lastly, her astute observation concerning those in politics

being out of touch with the poor of the country is especially striking. She notes that those who have not walked in her shoes and experienced the struggles of being poor cannot understand the hardships that the *favelados* face.

Finally, *Quarto de despejo* has literary significance as it creates a new genre of literature in Brazil; never before had an Afro-Brazilian woman written her experiences as a marginalized member of society and shared them with the world. Carolina was the first to do so, and provides the reader with a monotonous day-to-day account of her struggles to survive and provide for her family. It is within these diary entries that the essence of Carolina's writing style and wit emerge with the use of metaphors, similes, and imaginative descriptions of people and places she encountered. Her voice is simple and straightforward throughout the work, and her bluntness serves the subject matter of the diary—she is direct and open about poverty and the hardships she encounters every day.

One of the most used literary devices in Carolina's writing is the metaphor. She employs metaphors often to magnify the significance of the specific topic she is touching on. An example of such a metaphor is when she writes about Kubitschek being distant from the poor and underprivileged. She compares Kubitschek to a bird kept in a golden cage, and the *favelados* to cats residing in the same home. An analysis of this astute comparison reveals to the reader the truth and accuracy in her metaphor. A bird is kept in a cage to provide the owner with company, entertainment, and an object of admiration. It does not give any practical contribution to the household, like a dog who might be kept to guard the home. The specific mention of the cage being gold is significant as well, because the reader infers that the household is indeed one of wealth and that the bird lives a good life in comfort. The cats in the home represent the poor, who are locked out of the golden cage, thus signifying that they are excluded from the same life

of luxury afforded to the bird. Also, the cat and the bird are dependent on being fed by their owner, and when that does not happen the cat returns to its primal instincts of hunting for food. This comparison can be interpreted in the literal sense that the *favelados*, having lost their sources of stable income, have reverted to scavenging for food. It can also be interpreted figuratively, as the cat begins to hunt the bird to satisfy its hunger, the *favelados* also will come to a breaking point where they will rebel against the political abandonment through refusal to participate in promoting the candidates during their publicity visits to the *favela*. This metaphor works on various levels, and it leaves the reader with many possible readings and interpretations.

Perhaps one of her best-known uses of metaphor is the genesis of the title of the diary, *Quarto de despejo*. Carolina writes, “classifico São Paulo assim: O Palácio, é a sala de visita. A Prefeitura é a sala de jantar e a cidade é o jardim. E a favela é o quintal onde jogam os lixos” (28). Her analysis of the city is a striking one, as it paints a clear picture of how Carolina sees the city. The ostentatious buildings, such as the governor’s mansion, are the parlor of the home, where guests are received. In this room the best items are put on display; it is always clean and orderly. The city offices are where people come together in the dining room, also a place that is well kept with a sole purpose of fulfilling their duty and nothing more. A dining room can never be a bedroom, it cannot be a kitchen, it is what it is. The well-groomed garden is the city. Downtown São Paulo is manicured and landscaped, and everything has its place. There is order and an expectation of efficiency and aesthetic satisfaction. The analogy of the *favela* being the garbage room works on both a figurative and literal level. Firstly, into this room people enter only if they have to. No one would choose to spend time in this room, it is only for throwing away things that are no longer needed or wanted. The idea of a “garbage room” can be used in a figurative sense concerning the people residing in the *favela*. Those who are residing there do not

do so willingly; it is because they had no place else in the “house” to stay, it is out of necessity. Carolina accurately describes the relationship of freestanding elements in São Paulo to the collective identity of the city, and in doing so gives the reader a clearer picture of her point of view.

Lastly, Carolina describes São Paulo as follows: “Rainha que ostenta vaidosa a tua coroa de ouro que são os arranha-céus. Que veste viludo e seda e calça meias de algodão que é a favela” (37).<sup>22</sup> This is a description of the city, as there are so many sides to São Paulo that are not always readily apparent. A businessman visiting the city he might notice only the golden crown of São Paulo, the skyscrapers which symbolize the wealth and industry of the city. Others who are upper class and frequent only the upscale parts of the city would take notice of only the finery and fashion of São Paulo. Lastly Carolina touches on the *favela*, which is represented by the cotton stockings of the queen. These stockings, made of an ordinary and utilitarian material, are hidden away, an embarrassment to the otherwise luxurious and stately outfit of the queen. This is an accurate comparison to the *favela*; many people decided to ignore and look past its presence in the city. The moneyed population had hidden away the plain, common, and unstylish people of the São Paulo.

Carolina also uses this literary device on a regular basis to describe people and situations that she encounters. Carolina sometimes departs from simply writing the events as they occurred and adds a literary device. She provides something beyond simply writing in her diary, her reading of daily events often waxes poetic.

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<sup>22</sup> The use of cotton in this metaphor is significant on many levels. It was the only type of material that slaves were allowed to use in Brazil. Carolina, as a descendent of slaves, was perhaps making a racial as well as social reference in her metaphor. This could also allude to her familiarity with well-known Brazilian writers and their mentioning of cotton, specifically Gregório de Matos in “Triste Bahia, oh quão dessemelhante”, and also Machado de Assis’ “A Igreja do Diabo” and his reference to the “franjas de algodão.”

One example is when Carolina spoke of the inflation occurring in Brazil during the mid 1950's. She wrote, "Os preços aumentam igual as ondas do mar. Cada qual mais forte" (54). This is a strong use of simile, because it gives a vivid image of inflation and its nature during this time period. When one thinks of the sea and its waves, the immediate descriptive words that may come to mind are strong, forceful, constant, as well as always changing. Waves have the ability to knock down just things in their path; they are responsible for calamities throughout the world each year. Waves are constant in the sense that they are repetitive; they never cease to pummel to the shore day after day, hour after hour. Though they are constant, they are also ever evolving and changing. Each wave is different than the last in height, effect, and strength. All of these qualities are also true of inflation; it has the ability to cause financial calamity, to erode the fiscal security of a nation, its presence becomes constant, yet each day it is always changing, also leaving the individual with a certain amount of insecurity and uncertainty. Carolina was able to convey all of these ideas in one simple yet accurate simile.

Carolina also used a simile to describe the poor downtrodden man she encountered who was on his path to starvation. She described in the following manner, "Nos seus trajos rotos ele podia representar-se como diretor do sindicato dos miseráveis" (48). This simile is striking in its simplicity, certainly conjuring up an image for the reader of a sad man, who has led a life of misery and is broken. From the description of his torn suit we become familiar with the man's plight, and can imagine that he was perhaps better off at an earlier time, but had fallen on hard luck. Carolina also mentions that he could be the union leader of the miserable people. This creative explanation tells us indirectly and succinctly that he not only looked poor and impoverished but also downtrodden and miserable about his condition. Those two descriptions



do not always go hand in hand, as not all poor are miserable and not all miserable people are poor, yet Carolina lets the reader know that he indeed was both through her clever use of simile.

Not only does Carolina employ classic literary devices frequently in her writing, she also has vivid and capturing descriptions of people and places she encounters daily. These descriptions are colorful and paint a rich picture in the mind's eye of the reader. Readers find themselves involved in her imagery of her diary. Carolina offers the reader a chance to see the world and city of São Paulo through her eyes, a unique perspective never before given to the public. At times the description is something abstract, such as a dream or a reoccurring imaginative place where she can travel, and other times it is of a situation or a person. These descriptions are always simple in their form, but leave a lasting impression on the reader and testify of Carolina's literary ability despite her lack of formal education.

An example of the abstract descriptions comes from Carolina explaining where she goes when she writes, her imaginary place that helps her forget the woes of the *favela*. She writes:

Enquanto escrevo vou pensando que resido num castelo cor de ouro que reluz na luz do sol. Que as janelas são de prata e as luzes de brilhantes. Que a minha vista circula no jardim e eu contemplo as flores de todas as qualidades (...) É preciso criar este ambiente de fantasia, para esquecer que estou na favela...Olhei o céu, a estrela Dalva já estava no céu. Como é horrível pisar na lama. As horas que sou feliz é quando estou residindo nos castelos imaginarios. (52)

This paragraph is simple yet also saddening. Carolina has created an alternate place of being where she can go to write in order to escape the travails of the *favela* and describes this place with vivid imagery. Readers can see in their mind's eye the golden castle shimmering in the sun, with windows made of silver and chandeliers made with diamonds. This is a place of luxury and

solace, represented by the beautiful flowers and the well-kept garden she describes. Carolina's castle is a place of refuge and escape from the filth and disruptive environment she lives in. The castle imagery is effectively juxtaposed at the end of the quote when she mentions how horrible it is to step in mud, as it pulls the reader back to Carolina's reality and reminds them of the humble circumstances she really lives in. Her last statement sums up her whole reason for writing this paragraph, as it explains that she needs an escape from her reality and writing provides that. Carolina could have simply stated that writing allows her to disconnect from the *favela*, but instead she takes the reader a step further by explaining what that experience is like for her and the peace it brings.

Aside from her description of abstract places and events, Carolina also lends her talents to creating vivid descriptions of people and events. A good example of this is when Carolina had been given a mattress along with a small armoire to put in her home. She was with her son, João, who began to complain when he realized that the two furniture pieces were not going to fit in the small cart she used to collect scrap metal. She writes that

O dono da loja de sapatos auxiliou-me a por o guarda-roupa no carrinho. Caiu porque o carrinho deslisou-se. Tinha uns homens da Light trabalhando. Surgiu um e deu-me uma corda. Comecei a amarrar. Mas não conseguia. Começou afluir pessoas para ver-me. O João ficou nervoso com os olhares. Eu olhava os empregados da Light e pensava: no Brasil não tem homens! Se tivesse ageitava isto aqui para mim. Eu devia ter nascido no Inferno! (118)

Here she paints a clear picture for the reader of what happened that day. It is easy to imagine from her description her presence in front of the shoe store attempting to singlehandedly put the two items in her small cart. It is as if the reader has joined the ranks of the onlookers, watching

as the cart topples over and she relentlessly tries to place the mattress and armoire again in her only mode of transportation all while João nervously avoids the stares of the crowd. Her last sentence about how she must have been born in Hell implies to the reader that a situation such as this is close to a personal hell for Carolina. She had so many men watching her trying in vain to get these two pieces to stay in her cart, and yet no one wanted to help her. This ordinary event could also be seen as a broader statement concerning her life; so many people have watched her struggle to accomplish things, her education, her publications, and even her day-to-day presence on the streets, yet few if any offered to help her. Indeed this a well told and descriptive moment in her diary that gives an amplified look into her daily life as well as her larger struggle to survive.

It is evident that Carolina is quite capable of employing literary devices in her writing, and that they add literary significance to the work as a whole. She creates scenes for her readers, the majority of whom are completely unfamiliar with a life like that of Carolina's. The use of metaphors, similes, and vivid descriptions allows the reader to become accustomed to her plight, her daily struggles, and her desires. Without these elements, there would still be merit in reading the diary for its social and historical content, but the literary contribution Carolina makes with *Quarto de despejo* would be lost.

## **2. *Casa de alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada***

Carolina's second diary came about in the midst of her life leaving the *favela* and entering in the middle class of São Paulo. This work gives more social insight though it dramatically differs from that of the first diary. Carolina is in an essentially a new world in the

second diary, one in which she has money to purchase enough food for her children, and one where she lives in a brick home on a safe street. Neighbors and others at times overshadow this apparent “good life” by not welcoming her presence into these new social circles and the new neighborhood.

Though this diary also contains material of social and historical significance, it is pertaining to different topics than those of *Quarto de despejo*. Her writings in this diary have almost an F. Scott Fitzgerald quality to them, as the main voice takes a strong observatory approach of the happenings around her. This provides the reader with an inside look into the social circles Carolina frequented in this time period, as well as the many book signings and press appearances she made in promotion of her diary. These moments are important in understanding the reception Carolina was given, both as a writer, and as an Afro-Brazilian female in the middle class. The reader is given the chance to witness her moments of happiness, as well as the many instances of Carolina having to deal with those who desired to take advantage of her fame and fortune for their own personal gain. These glimpses into the social life of Carolina, as well as the relationships, both negative and positive, that stemmed from her newfound fame are socially significant.

The second diary also proves to be informative concerning historical events during this time period. It spans the year 1960-1961, a year in which inflation increased by 65 percent<sup>23</sup> (Levine and Sebe xiii), and politics began to crumble as Kubitschek left office, and Jânio Quadros left office only seven months after his inauguration. Carolina writes from the perspective of a normal citizen during these moments, all of which eventually led to the coup

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<sup>23</sup> According to the study *Estatísticas do século XX* (Statistics of the decades) by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), the years 1956-1967 were one of the largest periods of inflation during the twentieth century. Inflation increased from 19 percent in the 1950's to 41.2 percent by 1967.

only three short years after the end of this diary. Though Carolina now has money, she still tells the reader about the continued increase in cost of living, and also the poor she encounters who continue to be unable to cope with the incessant inflation. Without these moments in *Casa de alvenaria* we would lose a valuable voice of what the years were like leading up to one of the darkest moments in Brazilian history.

Carolina continues to write in her unique and honest voice throughout this diary. There is, however, less reflection on the injustices of life, which is understandable considering her sudden and abrupt arrival into the middle class. These moments are replaced by relief, accompanied with a strong sense of hope for her future as a writer and provider for her three children. Carolina again employs literary devices such as metaphors, similes, as well as irony to convey her message and point of view. With these elements Carolina lifts the diary from that of a simple retelling of events to a literary plane, one that provides the reader with opportunities to consider and contemplate her work and the meaning behind it.

There certainly are moments where Carolina gained recognition for the work she had done in exposing the ills of living in the *favela* and the hardships it brings upon the residents. A good example of this is when she was asked to appear on an evening television talk show and speak about the *favela*, she wrote:

Falamos da favela. E porque a favela é o quarto de despejo de São Paulo. É porque em 1948, quando começaram a demolir as casas terreas para construir os edificios, nós os pobres que residiamos nas habitações coletivas fomos despejados e ficamos debaixo das pontes. É por isso que eu denomino que a favela é o quarto de despejo de uma cidade. (17)

This quote sheds new light on Carolina's perspective concerning the *favela*. In her previous diary we heard the stories of those who were moving into the *favela* during 1955-1960, but never the genesis of how Carolina and the other *favelados* came to live in Canindé. This helps close a gap of misunderstanding between the reader and Carolina's experience because it explains that many of these people became homeless so quickly that they were not able to find affordable and decent housing to replace the tenements they had lived in. It was an uncontrolled circumstance, and it demonstrates that the majority of the people who move to the *favela* do so out of need, and not choice.

After the publication of *Quarto de despejo* Carolina was brought into many new experiences and social circles. At times she felt out of place, as judgments about Carolina and the *favela* were cast, and indirect insults were made towards her. One example of such a moment was when Carolina was invited to participate in a debate concerning the origins and answers to the evolution of the *favela* in São Paulo. The speaker who went before Carolina stated that "Em São Paulo o povo trabalha nas fabricas, nas oficinas e não saem pelas ruas catando papel. Saem para um serviço digno que lhe proporciona uma condição de vida decente" (180). These two men expressed the sentiments of undoubtedly many members of Brazilian society during this time period. They saw negative aspects of the *favela* and the *favelados* and felt that the people living in these circumstances were simply lazy and ambitionless. Carolina wrote however, that if there were no problems with the legitimate means of employment, no one would ever see reason to strike. This discussion gave Carolina the chance to explain why the *favelas* exist, and why people live in poverty. Regardless, her words were not as convicting as those of the other two speakers because Carolina did not have the academic and social credibility that they possessed. This means that many times when Carolina attempted to educate people concerning the *favela* they

did not listen, because she was not seen as a credible and reliable source. The two speakers in this moment only compounded the situation by indirectly insulting where Carolina had once lived and her former profession just minutes before she was to speak on those very topics.

Though Carolina always dreamed of moving into a cinder block home in a real neighborhood, her experience was not everything that she was expecting. She found that the other children were not open to playing with her three children. Her family also became the scapegoat for any mishaps or accidents in the neighborhood. An example of this is after they had been living in the home for a few months and one day she wrote that, “A Dona Ivete foi queixar-se de que os meus filhos escreveram palavrões no seu muro...Estou descontente porque tudo que é mal feito nesta rua eles acusam os meus filhos” (139). Though Carolina was trying to help her children fit in with the new children, schools, and all the pressures of their new life, it was difficult due to the stigma they carried as former *favelados*. In the eyes of the neighbors Carolina’s children were uneducated and behaved poorly, despite anything Carolina said or did to convince them otherwise. Her neighbors had made up their minds the day that the family moved into the house, as Carolina wrote of the experience that many people gave her judgmental looks and whispered to each other as she moved in her belongings (114). Carolina had been judged harshly when she lived in the *favela* and she quickly recognized that this judgment would continue regardless of where she was living.

This is again confirmed when Carolina writes in her diary a few months later, “Ouvi um xingatorio. Fui ver. As crianças haviam soltado um balão e o balão entrou no quarto de uma senhora. contei 11 meninos, mas ela xingava só os meus filhos, ‘Favelados desgraçados, ordinarios. A tua mãe não te dá educação’” (175). This quote shows that her children were singled out in the neighborhood because of their prior socio-economic status. An innocent

mistake of a group of children suddenly shifted from the complete group to Carolina's three children, demonstrating that they served as the neighborhood scapegoats. This treatment of Carolina's family highlights the neighbor's disdain and dislike of their presence in the neighborhood. It seems as though Carolina and her children could leave the *favela* and buy a home, but they could not escape the stigma of where they used to live.

During this period in her life Carolina had countless press appearances; it seems as though each day in her diary she was interviewed for a television or radio program, a newspaper or magazine, or invited to speak at a forum. At times she was not well received, not because of the remarks that she made per se but more for her origins. An example of this is after she received a gold pen as a gift of recognition for her writing and publication of *Quarto de despejo* during a television program she was insulted. She recalled:

Nas ruas o povo dizia:

“Olha a escritora que estava na televisão.”

“Ela ganhou uma caneta de ouro.”

“De ouro!” Exclamavam os que ouvia, “Que sorte!”

“Por que é que ela ganhou a caneta?”

“Ela é a escritora da favela.”

Ouvi uma gargalhada ironica, “Favela não dá escritor. Dá ladrão, tarado e vaiado.

Homem que mora na favela é porque não presta.” (25)

Carolina was intrigued by this comment, and wanted to stay and listen to the man's point of view, but her daughter begged her to take her home. This shows the perception of the middle and upper class concerning the marginalized people. The man proves that people were ignorant of the plight of those living in poverty, and that he also resented Carolina and her achievements. His



response began with refuting Carolina's chosen profession, and showed that people saw what she had accomplished as nothing more than fluke. They argued that someone from the *favela* without a complete education is unqualified to be called a writer.

This disdain and disregard for Carolina's achievements was held not only by those in the upper and middle classes, but also by the majority of the press. Many times when she was interviewed in newspapers, the reporters chose to focus on certain aspects of Carolina; playing up her lack of education, her race, and her social standing. This was done perhaps partly to sensationalize Carolina and draw in more readers for the paper, and also to consistently remind the people of São Paulo of Carolina's less-desirable qualities. In one diary entry she writes that she was in a story on the first page of *Última Hora* and the reporter wrote:

Carolina vai deixar a favela. Publicará mais três livros. Humilde mulher de côr da favela Canindé, vivendo na miseria com seus três filhos pequenos, semi-analfabeta, começou a garatujar em papéis recolhidos no lixo a história de seus anos de sofrimento. Um jornalista descobriu-a e ainda este ano sairá o diário de Maria de Jesus. (26)

The only thing that Carolina gleaned from that article was, "O reporter José Roberto Penna disse que eu sou semi-alfabeta. Quer dizer que tenho a metade da cultura" (14). This same perception proved to be true for many other readers of her book when it was published, as Carolina was not taken seriously for her writing. Most people, both the common reader as well as the literary critic, decided to focus on her literary missteps and spelling mistakes, instead of the content of her diary.

Carolina had a difficult time adjusting to her new place in the middle class of Brazil and the luxuries that suddenly came into her life. During a publicity trip to Rio de Janeiro she was

invited to dine out with reporters and people from literary and social circles of Rio de Janeiro and the United States. She wrote about the night with a tone of confusion and frustration, with lines such as, “[Estavam] olhando a lista do cardapio, escolhendo com indiferença o que iam comer. Dá impressão que elas não estão com fome...Eu não conhecia os cardapios. O reporter ia explicando-me. Pedi uma sopa de aspargos e crème suzette. Comi aquela confusão e fiquei com fome” (96-7). Carolina displays confusion and uncertainty in this passage, acknowledging that she feels unable to fully integrate herself into this new lifestyle. She quickly realizes that many of the women were dining as more of a social outing than out of necessity. This is frustrating and confusing to Carolina, because she is aware of how many people are hungry. The women might not think anything of this practice, but Carolina brings a fresh perspective to this situation as one who has never eaten for purely social reasons, and had spent almost her whole life struggling to eat enough. This is socially significant as it shows the disparity between the upbringing of someone who is from the upper and middle class, and one who is born into poverty concerning a common factor—food.

In another instance Carolina shows that she fears her new place in society, along with the complexities of trying to fit in without knowing exactly how to do so. She writes, “Hoje é feriado. Não vou sair de casa. Não estou escrevendo o diário com receio de citar as confusões do povo da sala de visitas. Eles são ambiciosos e comentam com uma dose de despeito: ‘Carolina está rica’” (101). This is the entire entry for that day. It would be interesting to know the background of what brought her to the point where she no longer felt comfortable writing about those in the new social circles she visited. The sole clue that she writes is the remarks of resentment that are going around these groups concerning Carolina. This is a good example of the resentment and ostracism she faced after she became a part of the middle class. People

undoubtedly expected her to act and behave in a specific manner, and she could not live up to their expectations. She was essentially in a situation that had no good answer, if she wrote about the people she mingled with they would cry foul, but if she did not write her observations her diary would be void of her astute social commentary and her perspective as essentially an outsider being invited in.

These assimilation difficulties are confirmed later on in *Casa de alvenaria* when Carolina writes at the end of a diary entry, “Estou lutando para ageitar-me dentro da casa de alvenaria. E não consigo. Minhas impressões na casa de alvenaria variam. Tem dia que estou no céu, tem dia que estou no inferno, tem dia que penso ser a Gata Borracheira” (151). Carolina shows that she is confused about the expectations placed on her, the many people asking her for favors and assistance, and the loud and ever-present critics in the press and in society. She was raised as a child who was poor and much of the time excluded, and later on in the *favela* she chose exclusion. For the first time in her life she is being forced to integrate into a social class she was not raised in, which most of the time resulted in Carolina feeling uneasy and nervous. She could not find a way to cope with her new social pressures and the new environment that she was quickly ushered into and left without a mentor. This speaks volumes concerning the social circles she was being brought into, as it demonstrates that they were exclusionary and not exactly fond of Carolina’s newfound wealth, fame, and her presence.

Her fame was hard on Carolina and many of the middle and upper classes were rude, unwilling to accept her sudden wealth and success. She recalls on the way home from Recife during a stop in Rio de Janeiro, “Ouvi umas vozes pronunciando, ‘Olha a Carolina! Ficou importante está imitando o Juscelino. É nova rica. Há de querer construir uma casa no espaço e escrever um livro: Da favela para a Lua’” (84). During this time period the people traveling by

air would be well off, presumably from the middle and upper classes. For Carolina to hear these comments in the airport we can assume that they are coming from the people who are now sharing social space with her and do not welcome her presence. This is interesting socially because it shows the double standard they have for Carolina. As she is seen in the airport traveling people jump to the most extreme comparison—comparing her to the president in an effort to make light of Carolina’s accomplishments and press coverage. Also, the mention of writing a book about moving to the moon is making a mockery of her writings and their contributions to society. This example again illustrates the contempt and unwelcoming attitude of much of Brazilian society towards Carolina and her family. Carolina felt at odds with her new fame, fortune, and social recognition; people were continually seeking to pull her down, discredit her works, and remind her of her humble origins. Simply put, Carolina was not accepted for who she had become, and was constantly reminded of who she used to be.

Not only does Carolina serve as a voice of the marginalized, and now wealthy writer, but she also is a resource in understanding what it was like for a female Afro-Brazilian during the early 1960’s. During this time period there were many groundbreaking Brazilian female writers writing about feminism, femininity, and their life experiences, but Carolina is one of the few writing from the perspective of an Afro-Brazilian. She has a unique viewpoint that she shares through her conversations with others, as well as the experiences she had at events she attended.

One of the first times Carolina spoke about her race in *Casa de alvenaria* is when she wrote about attending a celebration of the emancipation of slavery. She wrote that she was a special guest, and was invited to speak to an Afro-Brazilian poet after the festivities. She wrote, “Conversei com um preto que é artista e ele disse-me que gosta de ser preto. E eu também...É bonito estar satisfeito com o que somos” (20). This is a telling statement; it demonstrates that

Carolina possesses a sort of self-awareness concerning her race and its role in Brazilian culture and society. She is proud of her heritage, as well as her ethnicity. In a time when women were just beginning to gain recognition for their literary contributions and their roles in society, Carolina takes one step beyond that, and contemplates her role as both a woman and an Afro-Brazilian. This same sentiment is echoed in her earlier work, *Quarto de despejo*, as well. Despite the prejudice and mistreatment Carolina encountered throughout her life, she remained resilient and happy as a member of the Afro-Brazilian population.

Though Carolina held no malice towards the white population for the mistreatment that she had received since childhood, she did encounter Afro-Brazilian women who had bitter feelings towards the white Brazilians. An example of this is a woman who stopped by to invite her to an Afro-Brazilian festival that would be held a few months later. Carolina wrote:

O que achei interessante foi ouvir uma pretinha. Ela dizia, "Carolina, você pode pagar uma empregada branca, faze-la andar de toquinha, avental e esfregar o chão. Obriga ela a passar palha de aço com as mãos, levar o café na cama e te chamar de Dona Carolina. Faz com ela o que elas fazem conosco. (147)

Carolina provides a glimpse into a conversation that would have never transpired had a white Brazilian been present. Carolina shows that there are members of Brazilian society who detested the treatment that the whites gave to the Afro-Brazilian population. Many times Brazilians will tout their lack of racism, but the use of "us" versus "them" in this quote reflects a different story. There was certainly a racial distance between the Afro-Brazilians and the whites, and that is evident in the relationship discussed in this quote. It is reminiscent of the woman of the house and slave relationship from the previous century. It is also interesting to note that obviously to these women the idea of having a white woman working for an Afro-Brazilian is absurd and

unheard of. This shows that even when Afro-Brazilians are financially capable of hiring people, the white population would feel shamed working for them. This idea of racial segregation and having a white employee becomes even more solidified and evident when Carolina hires a white maid to work for her. This particular woman came to Carolina in desperation; she was from a poor family and was in debt. Carolina agreed to pay the woman's debts in exchange for her services as a housekeeper, cook, and occasional babysitter. The irony of the Afro-Brazilian woman joking about having a white maid, and then Carolina actually hiring one is interesting. It once again gives the reader an opportunity to see the social relations between the races. This woman was so ashamed to work for Carolina that she refused to let Carolina publish her full name. We only know her in the diary as "Dona Maria."

In a statement that sums up this entire concept Dona Maria says one day at Carolina's home, "Meu Deus do céu, isto é o fim do mundo! Deus está me castigando. O mundo está virando. Eu, branca, ter uma patroa preta..." Carolina responded to this in her typical fashion. She wrote, "Eu dava risada e pensava: nós os pretos não revoltamos de ter patrões brancos. (...) Não sou exigente com as minhas empregadas. Não faço questão de côr. Gosto de D. Maria porque ela lava roupa muito bem" (103). It is interesting to note that Dona Maria is burdened by having to work for Carolina, and the amount of shame she feels. Her exclamations about the world being turned upside down and God punishing her are telling of just how uncommon a practice this was. Without this perspective the reader would lose some of Carolina's valuable insight into race relations and her standpoint on the matter. Carolina demonstrates that she looks past skin color to focus on the qualities of the person. If only everyone could have this perspective much of the racial strife that existed would have diminished.

Though Carolina was at peace with her race as well as her relationships with whites there were many members of Brazilian society who were ashamed of their skin color. Carolina included one such woman in her diary. She wrote that, “Eu conheci uma preta. A Nair. Tinha desgosto de ser preta. Não ia aos bailes dos pretos” (137). Nair is a good representation of the Afro-Brazilians that felt shame concerning their skin color because of the mistreatment and discrimination they had faced throughout their life. Carolina, however, shows that there is always something to be unhappy about in life. She writes:

Juro, eu nunca compreendo o ente humano. É o pior enigma para mim. Se uma pessoa é pobre, quer ser rico. Se está doente quer ter saude, se é gordo quer emagrecer. Se é magro quer engordar, se é solteiro quer casar-se. Há os que depois que casam...arrepende-se. Os que são altos demais ou baixo demais, tem complexos...Que confusão! (137)

Carolina realizes that there are so many different aspects of the human experience that make people unhappy with their lives, and sees no reason to lament over something so permanent, as race. She is a good example of a woman who has come to terms with her race and ethnicity, though this should not be taken to mean that she approved or accepted the hateful comments and treatment that she had faced throughout her life. It does show that she is secure enough to be at peace with herself as well as see her race as a source of pride and not shame as Nair did.

This pride in being Afro-Brazilian at times created an intriguing point of view for Carolina. She mentioned various times throughout her diary that she enjoys living in Brazil, where the Afro-Brazilian population does not have to deal with racial prejudice. This is contradictory to many of the accounts she had written in *Quarto de despejo* as well as works published later, such as *Diário de Bitita*. There are many instances in these diaries when Carolina

tells of unfortunate events of people calling her the equivalent of “nigger,” or the mistreatment of the Afro-Brazilians at the hands of the whites, the social segregation that existed in events such as dances, and the unlawful treatment of the Afro-Brazilians by the police. Despite these moments Carolina writes after listening to a church sermon, “Gostei do sermão, agradecendo Deus por ser brasileira. Viver neste país sem temor. Devemos amar este país onde não há preconceito de côr (174). This statement seems quite contradictory to *Quarto*, as well as her future writings, and perhaps it could be attributed to the effect the sermon had on her during that moment. While it is good that Carolina is grateful for living in a country of freedom, it is a disservice to herself and to the other Afro-Brazilians to ignore the racism and prejudice of the time.

*Casa de alvenaria* is interesting and especially pertinent to Brazilian society at the time because it tells of the many people who came to Carolina to solve their financial problems. Some were earnest in their approach to Carolina, and were truly in need of help, but the majority were seeking to ride the on the coat tails of her newfound wealth. The attention and almost daily visits from people wanting money coupled with the pressure of the press and her new socio-economic status often was too much for Carolina to handle. Many times she would tell her children to turn away the strangers who wanted a portion of Carolina’s earnings. Eventually they resorted to having to lie, saying Carolina was not home because of the persistence of those wanting money. Essentially she had become a nuisance and joke to the middle and upper class, and a sought-after source of money to the poor. Even more surprising was that occasionally people who were financially stable, but were simply looking to take advantage of Carolina, approached her.

One of the people who did not need money was a factory owner looking for a loan to expand his factory. He told Carolina that he would pay the money back in installments, and



became quite angry when she replied that she did not want to help finance his business. She wrote concerning previous situations such as these, “Há pessoas que não precisam de dinheiro e me pedem. Nunca pedi nada por causa de ambição. Quando pedi ajuda, pedi só o essencial” (79). This man continued to pester her, and even showed up of his own volition to speak with an associate of Audálio Dantas about the loan without Carolina’s permission. His story of pestering Carolina for money was not the only one included in her diary; she was bothered on an almost daily basis, sometimes more than once, to lend people money. People asking for money became so commonplace in her life that one of her diary entries is only two sentences: “Hoje ninguém veio pedir dinheiro. Graças a Deus!” (137). This constant begging at her doorstep left her agitated. One of her entries begins, “E eu que pensava e sonhava com uma casa de alvenaria, supondo que ia encontrar tranquilidade...Há os que me aborrecem e os que admiram-me. Os que querem auxilio e os que querem dinheiro para comprar casa” (115). Though people perhaps perceived Carolina as dense or easily manipulated on matters of money, she proves that she was aware of people’s attempts to take advantage of her wealth and fame.

These passages concerning people asking for handouts are socially significant because they demonstrate a common characteristic of society at the time. The people who sought Carolina out saw her as a quick source for income, and did not take into account the hard work and effort that it took for Carolina to earn that money. They sought to take advantage of her, and when she refused to help the individuals became angry and resentful. This indicates that many people during this time period went after Carolina’s money because they believed that she was a quick source of money. It also indicates that regardless of her new position in the middle-class, people still felt comfortable exploiting her, just as so many did when she was a poor young woman and *favelada*. Without Carolina’s daily entries recounting these events the reader would

have not been aware of the added pressure Carolina was under, even in her own home as people sought her out in an attempt to take advantage of her success.

*Casa de alvenaria* also holds historical significance, as this diary is a daily account of a tumultuous year in the economy, and Carolina relates the difficulties many were having during this time period with inflation and the increase of cost of living in São Paulo. Her account gives the perspective of a member of the middle class, though she proves that she is still aware of the hardships faced by those in the *favela*. Carolina's writings also show that despite her being in the middle class and financially stable, this did not mean that she was afforded everything she wanted; many times the prices were too steep to merit purchasing items such as meat. One such example is written during the month of March; the diary entry is short but speaks volumes. She writes, "Hoje é sexta-feira Santa. Não comprei peixe. Está caríssimo" (159). Her inability to buy fish for the celebration of a religious holiday is telling with respect to the inflation at that time. A common good that Carolina had consistently bought in the past, such as meat, suddenly spikes in price with the holiday, leaving her unable to properly celebrate Good Friday. Though this is her individual experience, undoubtedly there were other homes in São Paulo who went without fish on Good Friday as well due to the high prices.

One of the most telling and historically significant moments of the diary concerning inflation is when Carolina writes about the strikes that were happening in the city. Many people were upset about the increase in prices and the stagnant salaries they were receiving at their jobs. Their wages could not keep up with inflation and the only option they saw was to strike for better pay. Carolina writes concerning one of these strikes:

Desciamos a Rua Libero Badaró. Vi varias pessoas conduzindo cartazes. Os cartazes iam com inscrições pedindo aumento. (...)Parei para ver...Fiquei com dó

deles, porque já passei fome. Assustei-me quando ouvi vozes e a multidão com cartazes...O povo bradava: “O Plano de Ação acabou com o nosso pão!” (127-28)

This scene had special significance for Carolina, as she states in the quote. She understood their plight of not being able to provide adequately for their families, and she knew the pangs of hunger well. The protestors are a good example of the cost of living increase and the uncontrolled inflation that was plaguing the country during this time period. Without Carolina’s first-hand accounts of events such as these, the reader would lose valuable insight into the daily lives and struggles of everyday people. Carolina captures moments in her diary that might have otherwise gone unnoticed and unrecorded by historians or the press. Carolina’s historical contributions of the day-to-day struggles and perspectives concerning relevant and current issues during that time period are extremely valuable and useful in reviewing the difficulties of the 1960’s in Brazil.

Carolina’s second diary is historically significant in a political context as well. Though many perceived Carolina as someone out of touch with politics, and not sufficiently informed to write or speak about politics, she did recognize the false sense of concern by the upper class concerning the *favela*. In contemplating the words of some upper-class women at a dinner event she quotes them as having told her:

Não é justo deixarmos os favelados relegados no quarto de despejo. Você fez bem em nos alertar para esse problema. Temos que amparar os infaustos. Você demonstrou coragem lutando para sair daquele antro. (96-7)

While Carolina listened the kind words of the women and heard their concern for the welfare of the country’s poor, she understood that few people who demonstrate concern rarely contribute to a solution concerning the *favelas*. Carolina writes, “Elas são filantropicas nas palavras. São

falastronas. Papagaios noturnos. Quando avistam-me é que recordam que há favelas no Brasil” (96). Carolina shows that despite the public’s perception of her as a semi-literate aspiring writer from the *favela*, she is not naïve when it comes to the political intentions of those around her. She understands that few people who make sweeping statements about change and improvement in the *favelas* actually fulfill those promises.

In addition to dealing with high society and politicians’ grand promises, Carolina also had a difficult time when others attempted to use her diary as a platform for their own political agenda. An example of this is in the Northeast when she is visiting the state of Pernambuco and participates in a press conference for *Quarto de despejo*. She writes concerning the experience, “Perguntaram o que acho de comunismo: Não li e não vi países comunistas. Não posso dar opinião. Disseram que sou comunista porque tenho dó dos pobres e dos operários que ganham o insuficiente para viver” (104-5). It is interesting to see how quickly the reporters in the Northeast wanted to paint Carolina as a communist to serve their own political purposes. Carolina expressed aggravation many times in *Casa de alvenaria* when people would put words in her mouth, and at the end of this particular incident she gets back to the issue by simply stating, “Conclusão: o operário não tem o direito de dizer que passa fome” (105). Though Carolina might not have been well versed in all the intricacies of Brazilian politics during this time, she did understand the problems plaguing the country. Her clear and direct answer demonstrates Carolina’s ability to rise above the political speculations and focus on the deeper issues, such as hunger, poverty, and marginalization.

Carolina was also astute in noticing the disdain that the general public held for the newly elected president, Jânio Quadros and other government officials that were in office. She gives an

example of this, writing about a rainy day when she is trying to hail a cab to take home. Carolina writes:

Eu estava ao lado de um senhor bem vestido. Estava de terno branco. Estava falando sosinho. Passava o carro de propaganda do senhor Cantidio Sampaio, ele dizia, “Morre desgraçado! Você não vai melhorar a vida dos pobres de São Paulo. Você tem carro, desgraçado. Vem ver o povo sofrendo! (143)

As Carolina continues to wait for a way to get home out of the rain the man again curses the politicians. She writes: “passou o carro de propaganda do Senhor Prestes Maia. Ele xingou, ‘Você também é outro desgraçado. Fala só em urbanizar, urbanizar. E derruba as casas. O povo precisa é de condução’” (143). The man who is speaking obviously is unhappy with the current political situation and also sees a bleak future ahead for the state and municipal government. Carolina sees his outbursts as “nonsense,” but also identifies with the need for more affordable and accessible transportation. These quotes are essential to understanding the public’s point of view concerning politics and important issues during a crucial time for Brazilian government. Carolina manages to capture the public sentiment regarding the Kubitschek and Quadros administrations in *Casa de alvenaria*. With these excerpts the reader can better understand the unhappy state of the general public during this time, how the people’s dissatisfaction led to the resignation of Quadros, and how the resignation of Quadros led to the coup only three short years later. Carolina captures all of this in her diary and shares it with her audience, helping them realize what a crucial moment this was in Brazilian politics.

In addition to noting the political climate around her, Carolina formed her own political opinions concerning the government at the time, and shared them openly when people questioned her about her standing. At one point she was being interviewed about her diary at her

home, and the reporter asked her about the picture she had of Jânio Quadros and if she supported him. Carolina responded with a direct and honest answer. She said, “ Não sou Janista. Conservo o retrato do senhor Janio Quadros para ver se êle sorrir até o fim do mandato” (122). This quote was given in the beginning of January 1961, before Quadros had even been inaugurated; yet Carolina was wise enough to know that his presidency would not be a glorious one. Carolina must be given credit for being familiar with politics enough to foresee the difficulty Quadros was facing even before he took office, and for sharing it with the reader.

Lastly, Carolina’s second diary is rich in literary devices that reflect her ability as a writer. The literary significance of *Casa de alvenaria* is found in its many metaphors, similes, as well as the occasional use of irony. These devices are used throughout the diary, giving the reader a richer experience and a window into Carolina’s abilities as a writer. Her voice continues to be honest, straightforward, and simple as in *Quarto de despejo*; yet her use of literary devices demonstrate her expansive imagination as well as her sharp understanding of the people and events around her.

One of the most used devices in *Casa de alvenaria* is the metaphor. Carolina writes rich metaphors that function on a variety of levels. This leaves the reader to ponder not only her unique use of language, but also her intended message. Carolina incorporates metaphors in her daily speech with others, as well as in her reflective writing. A good example of her integrating metaphors into her conversations comes when an old friend visits her new home. He marvels at the comforts she enjoys and remarks to her, “Que salto você deu na vida! Você saiu do inferno e está no céu!” To which Carolina cleverly replies, “Engana-te. Eu estou no Purgatorio” (132). This is a sound explanation of where Carolina was socially and financially at this point in her life. She was constantly caught in between her old life and her new one. She was not fully

accepted by the upper and middle classes, and her old neighbors in the *favela* resented her. She had money to take care of her family, but was never at peace due to the many people who sought to take advantage of her finances. Carolina was not in Hell anymore, but she knew that she had not yet reached Heaven.

Another moment in which Carolina displays her literary abilities is when she writes about the sunrise of a new day and the clouds in the sky. She writes, “O céu está belissimo. As nuvens estão vagueando-se. Umas negras, outras côm de cinza e outras claras. Em todos os recantos existe a fusão das cores. Será que as nuvens brancas pensam que são superior as nuvens negras?” (148). This metaphor is a representation of what she was seeing in the world around her concerning race relations. Each main group in Brazil is represented in this metaphor, the Afro-Brazilians, whites, and mulattos. It should be noted that she writes concerning the fusion of colors, perhaps hoping for a more integrated social circle than what existed at the time. Her question at the end of the metaphor is so simple, yet speaks volumes concerning the place of whites in society at the time. It is an open-ended question that gives the reader an opportunity to contemplate the societal relations between Afro-Brazilians, mulattoes, and whites of the time. Carolina could have written that she awoke at dawn and seen the sunrise, and that would have been a sufficient description of her morning. Instead, she chose to take the opportunity to use a metaphor that included a glimpse into her social and racial questions.

Carolina also uses the occasional simile to make a point, or more specifically to describe how she is feeling. The images she produces with her similes are so exact and representational in a universal way. A good example of this is when a particular woman came to see Carolina concerning a mortgage. This woman wanted Carolina to pay it off for her, and when Carolina refused to do so, the woman became persistent. She showed up for days at least once a day to

beg Carolina, and one of the days Carolina wrote, “Tenho impressão que sou uma carniça e os corvos estão rondando meu corpo” (130). This description gives insight concerning into how picked apart and sought after Carolina felt. Carrion is the meat which so many animals fight over--all of them vying for a piece of the dead animal. There is no consideration given to the other scavengers, because the animals that feed off carrion are predominantly solitary species. This same scenario could be applied to Carolina’s life at the time, as all of the people coming to see her for money had personal motives. They were only looking out for their own personal interests, and with few exceptions, they wanted to take as much of Carolina’s assets as possible. These people indeed were circling Carolina and waiting for the time to come get their share of her wealth. This accurate and universal simile shows Carolina’s ability to incorporate solid uses of literary devices into her writing, which makes for a stronger piece of literature and a more intriguing work as a whole.

Carolina also uses similes to describe the new and different places she visited while touring the country for her first diary. On one such occasion she was leaving the state of Paraná, known for its unique pine trees. Carolina described the landscape as follows, “Antes de penetrar circulei o olhar os redor contemplando as paisagens magestosas do Paraná. O Pinheiro sobressaindo entre as outras arvores, garboso igual um ator principal” (162). This description of the pine trees is of the *Pinheiro do Paraná*. These particular trees are so tall and distinguishable amongst the surrounding trees that one cannot help but notice them. This is comparable to the main character in a play; the character is the center of the plot and the person to focus on. Carolina shows in uses of simile such as this that she took time in her day to notice her surroundings and used her imagination to cement those moments into her consciousness. In



writing down moments such as these in such a poetic manner, Carolina demonstrates her ability to relate to her surroundings and connect to the reader through literary devices.

Lastly, Carolina uses irony in her diary many times to point out the idiosyncrasies of society or individuals she comes in contact with. These moments in the diary cause the reader to stop and reflect on the ridiculousness of comments or actions of others. At one point in the diary Carolina comes in contact with another writer and strikes up a conversation with him concerning her recent publication of *Quarto de despejo*. He tells her, quite aware of the fame and income she received from the diary, “Carolina, emprega bem o teu dinheiro, porque a literatura não é meio de vida” (122). Her reply to this incident clearly showed the irony of his words, she wrote:

Eu consegui enriquecer com o meu livro. O meu livro foi uma fada que transformou-me de gata borralheira a princesa. Os meus sonhos estão concretizando. Eu desejava uma casa de alvenaria. Consegui. O que emociona-me é introduzir a chave na fechadura e abrir a porta e saber que a casa é minha. Tem hora que tenho vontade de dar um grito para ser ouvido no Universo, Viva o meu livro! Viva os meus dois anos de grupo escolar! (122-3)

Carolina shows that while perhaps this man was not making an adequate living off of his works, Carolina was. For a fellow writer to tell her that she would not be able to get by on revenues from her book was absurd, because she had already achieved her primary goal and was continuing to receive money from *Quarto de despejo*. This use of irony brings the inaccuracy of the man’s words to the forefront of the scene, causing the reader to focus on Carolina’s achievements. This is further impacted by her mentioning that she had published her work and become a national bestseller with only two years of school, which is ironic in its own right.

Carolina also uses irony to show the foibles of human nature, mainly those who were coming after her money. These people who bothered her every day brought her such irritation, nervousness, and cynicism toward human nature. After dealing with a particularly bothersome man who wanted money to expand his business, she wrote the following:

Egoista. O egoista pensa que êle deveria morar no mundo sozinho. Se o seu invento dá dinheiro êle podia organizar uma sociedade. Se a natureza é coletiva, por que é que o homem há de ser egoista? Querer tudo só para si. Uma laranjeira dá laranjas para milhares de pessoas. O sol é um astro unico e aquece o mundo.  
(103)

This use of irony is used to point out the selfish nature of the individual. Here Carolina alludes to the fact that humans are inherently selfish individuals, and yet they are as natural as trees or the sun. It is highly ironic that trees and the sun, simple and individual entities, contribute more to those around them than humans. Carolina uses this to her advantage by showing that humans are functioning on a plane lower than a tree or the sun, which brings the absurdity of the situation to the attention of the reader. Through the use of irony in moments such as these Carolina demonstrates that she has a keen understanding and perspective on the world around her, as well as a strong ability to use literary devices to relay her view to the reader.

*Casa de alvenaria* is also significant because it shows Carolina's literary improvement. Though there are still mistakes within her writing and grammar, Carolina demonstrates her ability to adapt her writing and improvements in spelling and sentence structure. An example of this is one of the moments in her diary where she is reflecting on how she is feeling on that particular day. She writes "Estou ficando nervosa com os aborrecimentos diarios. Tem dias que não escrevo por falta de tempo. O que sei dizer é que a minha vida está muito desorganizada"

(151). This example demonstrates that Carolina has refined her writing in the sense that it is more concise and clear in comparison to *Quarto de despejo*. She is able to convey her thoughts in sentences that are correctly structured and without spelling errors.

Though Carolina shows an improvement in her grammar and writing, she still has errors within *Casa de alvenaria*. For example, many times she omits accents on words, such as in the above quote with the word “diários”. Other times she might not have gender or verb agreement in her sentences, such as “Os filhos vai a escola” (139). The sentence structure itself remains fairly short and simple, leaving a sense of abruptness in the way she writes, only breaking from this pattern occasionally. Along with this there is a certain lack of continuity of thought in her writing. An example of both the short sentence structure and the lack of continuity in thought is found in one of her less-eventful journal entries in which she writes “Levantei as 5 horas da manhã. Os filhos vai a escola. Preparei a refeição matinal e fui fazer as compras. O João e José Carlos vão de manhã. A Vera, a tarde. A casa está horrosa” (139). In these short sentences comprising a small paragraph the subject changes frequently, and there is a lack of a streamlined thought process. This exemplifies the fact that though her grammar and sentence structure had improved, there were still errors that detracted from the validity of the work as literature according to many critics.

In reviewing the social, historical, and literary significance of *Casa de alvenaria* it is evident that Carolina again succeeds in relating these important aspects of Brazilian life during the year of 1960-1961. She gives those reading her work an opportunity to see what life is like for an Afro-Brazilian, a woman, an outsider in her own social class, a subject of the media, and a mother. Her insights and experiences are socially and historically relevant because they captured what life was like on a day-to-day basis during the 1960’s. She opened the eyes of her reader to

the greedy nature of so many people she came in contact with after the publication of her book. She also helped people become more aware of the pretentious nature of the middle and upper classes, and how for the most part they completely misunderstood the plight of their country's poor. Without Carolina's second diary these social intricacies and notes would be lost. The historical aspect of the diary is helpful in understanding the issues that drove many people to become dissatisfied with the government officials. Carolina wrote about the inflation, the strikes, the politicians who turned a blind eye, and the social unrest that was beginning in São Paulo and throughout the country. These moments paint a clearer picture of why the government fell, and how a military dictatorship came to be only a few short years after the diary. Without these instances recorded the reader would lose the first-hand accounts of an essential part of Brazilian history. The literary value is shown in the metaphors, similes, and irony throughout the diary. In using these aspects of writing the reader forms a stronger connection with Carolina and the work itself. These elements enable the reader to stop and ponder Carolina's thoughts and ideas, in turn leading to a better understanding of where she is coming from. These metaphors, similes, and uses of irony prove that Carolina is indeed capable of writing not only for testimonial purposes, but also for the art of writing and literature.

### ***3. Antologia pessoal***

The last pieces of writing that will be analyzed in this chapter are selected poems from Carolina's *Antologia pessoal*. These poems were chosen because they are a strong representation of Carolina's literary abilities, and they also demonstrate her continued social and historical awareness. These poems lend a unique insight into the life of someone who has known hunger

and poverty as well as fame and fortune. This allows the reader to gain a sense of perspective that is unattainable for most writers. Though Carolina is less known for her poetry, it is still a valuable contribution to the literature being published at the time because of its social, historical, and literary focus.

Though not all of her poetry can be analyzed for its social contributions, many poems do indeed touch on the topic in one way or another. These poems predominantly speak of the injustices of the upper classes toward the poor. An example of this is found in the poem “O colono e o fazendeiro” which laments the exploitation of slave descendants on modern-day farms. This poem portrays the plight of this small group, and it is certainly a situation that Carolina was intimately familiar with. She had lived on a farm in similar situations to the poem on two separate occasions, both of which left her family exploited and poor as an end result. Carolina draws on her personal experience to create a poem that offers the reader an opportunity to understand the plight of the overworked and underpaid slave descendants on farms. These three stanzas demonstrate the feelings that Carolina held towards this dishonest and deplorable practice:

Colono não tem futuro

E trabalha todo o dia

O pobre não tem seguro

E nem aposentadoria.

Ele perde a mocidade

A vida inteira no mato

E não tem sociedade

Onde está seu sindicato?

Ele passa o ano inteiro

Trabalhando, que grandeza!

Enriquece o fazendeiro

E termina na pobreza. (147)

These stanzas accurately portray the mistreatment that the farmhands received and speak out concerning a social issue that not many people were willing to write about. Carolina used her own experiences to create a unique voice for some of the most underprivileged members of Brazilian society at the time. With poems like “O colono e o fazendeiro” the reader becomes acquainted with the hardships and difficulties many people faced, and in turn realizes the suffering and new slavery that was occurring on the farms, even during the 1960's.

The same social awareness is found in the poem “Súplica do mendigo” which is a work also drawn from Carolina’s personal experiences. In this poem the subject is imploring God for divine assistance to continue to live and survive. A few stanzas that are especially touching are when Carolina writes concerning the hunger of the poor. She writes:

Não me preocupo com a grandeza,

Pobre não tem ilusão.

Que não falte na minha mesa

Um pedacinho de pão.

Trabalho com assiduidade,

Olham os calos nas minhas mãos.

Tenho filho em tenra idade  
 Que implora: “quero pão”.

Como é sacrificada  
 A vida do trabalhador:  
 O salário sobe de escada,  
 Os preços do elevador. (137-8)

These stanzas incorporate the sentiments so many felt who were caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. There was no escape from poverty, despite the amount of work done and the children are constantly hungry. This was Carolina’s life in the *favela*, and she used those moments of desperate supplication to God as material for a touching and telling poem. With poems such as these the reader is able to better understand the plight of the poor in Brazil’s cities and realize the hardships they deal with on a daily basis. Carolina’s contribution to the social consciousness concerning the poor and marginalized in her poetry is important, as she is one of the few who experienced the subject of the poem for most of her life and chose to write about it.

Carolina also gives a historical contribution through her poetry in pieces such as the aforementioned poem “O colono e o fazendeiro”. In this poem Carolina is writing down not only a social commentary concerning the hardships of the poor, but is also giving a historically significant perspective of farm life during the mid-twentieth century. An example of this is found in the first stanza that deals with this type of new slavery in Brazil:

Diz o brasileiro  
 Que acabou a escravidão  
 Mas o colono sua o ano inteiro

E nunca tem um tostão. (147)

This account is historical because it is preserving the acts of mistreatment and discrimination that the workers faced during this time period. It allows the reader to make connections to present-day issues, such as the similar cycle of poverty and new slavery found in the Brazilian charcoal industry, as well as past moments such as the exploitation of slaves in Brazil, which spanned more than three centuries. By recording the current issues of her time, Carolina was preserving history in her poems and making that history accessible to future generations.

Other details included in “O colono e o fazendeiro” have historical merit, as they help the reader understand the plight of the farm worker during this time period. An example of this are lines such as, “Trabalha o ano inteiro/E no natal não tem abono” (149) and “Carne não pode comprar/Pra não dever ao patrão” (148). These lines give further insight into how difficult the day-to-day life was of the farm hands, and how utterly inescapable their situation was. Carolina also touches on the inability for the farm workers to gain an education (149) as well as the unfair pricing of goods at the hand of the landowner (148). These details are historically relevant because not only are they first-hand accounts from Carolina's experiences, but also because they paint a universal picture of the injustices that were occurring on the farms during this time period. They speak out against the injustices that were happening, and are a wake-up call to act on the mistreatment that continues to happen on farms in Brazil today.

As previously mentioned, Carolina's poems are oft times overlooked because they are not always completely consistent in their form. Though this is the case, Carolina creates imagery through a wide variety of literary devices. One of her best uses is personification, evident in the poem “O rico e o pobre”. Carolina paints a picture in the first stanza when she writes:

Bateu na porta: era a pobreza



Recebi altiva: era a riqueza

-O que vens aqui fazer

A pobre soluçando diz:

-Riqueza eu sou infeliz! (179)

By personifying poverty and wealth, the reader is immediately drawn in to the conversation between the two characters, as it is a universal theme throughout the world. Everyone can relate to at least one of the two characters presented in the poem. *Pobreza* is representative of anyone who is poor; this could mean someone who is lacking in a financial as well as an emotional sense, or perhaps both. *Riqueza* automatically conjures up an image in the reader's mind of wealth, stability, and perhaps a bit of disdain for the poor. It is a personification of those who are comfortable and content, yet not necessarily willing to help others achieve this same station in life. The use of a universal theme, as well as personification of two socioeconomic statuses, gives the poem literary merit, because through this Carolina demonstrates her ability to include an audience from any walk of life while continuing to write about situations that are familiar to her, such as poverty, without alienating the reader.

Carolina also writes a comparison of the suffering of a prisoner to the suffering of Christ in “Súplica do encarcerado”. This poem considered as a whole is an example of Carolina's literary abilities, because it is almost a parable. Though she is writing about being in a prison, this could be taken literally or figuratively. Figuratively speaking, this cell could represent the inability to break free from the mistreatment, racial and social discrimination, and poverty that Carolina had faced throughout her life. She includes the following stanza that has a strong use of imagery:

Disse outro dia o vigário

Temos todos um calvário

Quem sofre tem uma cruz.

Esta cela é tenebrosa

A liberdade é ditosa

Heróico, só foi Jesus! (83)

To describe the jail cell as *tenebrosa* the reader is given a visual of a cold, dark, dingy cell which is inhospitable to the prisoner. Liberty clearly is the opposite; it represents the absence of all the misfortune and sadness that comes from living in the cell. If one were to read the prisoner as being someone who is marginalized, then the cell could be the *favela*, where the *favelados* are constantly surrounded by misery and poverty. The freedom from this would be financial freedom, which would enable the prisoner to escape his life of hunger and sadness. It is interesting to note, however, that the prisoner acknowledges the fact that all individuals in life have their own Calvary, and that the only true triumphant one is Christ. This stanza is not necessarily one of hope, but instead one that recognizes the human condition. It does not promise an escape from their personal prison, but instead recognizes that only Christ has won that victory. It is in moments such as these that we see true literary competence from Carolina. She is aware of how to incorporate a universal theme into her poem in a way that allows a personal connection from the reader regardless of their life experiences.

From analyzing these four specific poems it is evident that Carolina's diaries were not her only works of social, historical, and literary significance. Her anthology of poetry is also socially relevant as it discusses social themes and issues that were relevant not only to Carolina, but to the general public as well. The social awareness that Carolina evokes through her poetry is telling of how conscious she was of the plight of so many people in Brazil during her lifetime.

She was a woman intimately familiar with poverty, racial prejudice, and hunger, themes she wrote openly about in these poems. The historical significance is found not only in the overarching themes of the poems, but also in the details, exemplified by “O colono e o fazendeiro.” The poems give small details that help the reader, regardless of their socioeconomic position in life, connect with the subject of the poem and understand the issues that existed during that time period, as well as their significance in our modern society. Lastly, the poems prove that Carolina's diaries are not the only works that contain literary merit. She proves through her use of personification, metaphors, and use of universal themes that she is able to write compelling pieces that speak to readers from all walks of life. Carolina writes pieces that capture her thoughts, concerns, feelings, and disappointments in a way that is accessible to everyone. Though the structure and form of her poetry is sometimes not in accordance with what is academically acceptable, the message behind it is what is important. Carolina portrays this message through a wide variety of literary devices, proving that she is a capable and compelling writer in prose as well as in poetry.

In summary this chapter, though long, provides an in-depth analysis of Carolina's two primary journals, *Quarto de despejo* and *Casa de alvenaria*, as well as selected poems from her *Antologia pessoal*. In reviewing and analyzing these works it is evident that each contains material that is relevant in a social, historical, and literary sense. Carolina provides the world an opportunity to see things as she does, first as a *favelada* in *Quarto de despejo*, then as a tentative not fully accepted member of the middle class in *Casa de alvenaria*. She also relates her experiences through her poetry in *Antologia pessoal*, which provides a unique perspective of her social and historical views.

In terms of social relevance, Carolina covers topics such as marginalization, discrimination, racism, and mistreatment of the poor. She also continues her social commentary in writing about the throngs of selfish people who wanted her money after the publication of her first diary. Carolina shows the dark side of the middle and upper classes in their reluctance to accept her and her children, especially within in her new neighborhood. These social intricacies speak volumes concerning the common practices, points of view, and unfortunate treatment of fellow citizens during the mid-twentieth century. Her selected poetry when analyzed proved to be a significant resource in understanding lesser-spoken-of topics such as the plight of the farm hand during the 1960's. Her coverage of issues such as these is crucial to understanding the reasons why people were emigrating to the cities, as well as the relationship between the landowners and the farm workers. By providing these experiences and moments from her life Carolina gives anyone who wishes to read her works an opportunity to learn about the social structure of the 1960's from a first-hand account. There is no other marginalized Afro-Brazilian woman who spoke up concerning these issues; therefore it is evident that her writings contain social value for their unique perspective and honest evaluation of society.

In terms of historical value, Carolina's works are not valued for their ability to create a time-line of celebrated events and days; they are valuable for the historical details that they provide. Both her first and second diaries contain valuable information concerning the inflation that occurred during the years of 1955-1961. Carolina provides insight and details regarding the difficulties faced by Brazilians with the cost-of-living increase, specifically the effect it had on the marginalized portion of the population. *Casa de alvenaria* also includes moments where it is clear that people are having a difficult time purchasing food for their families, evidenced by the strikes and disdain for the lack of government assistance. Carolina continues this in her poetry,

by providing details concerning the poor and the hardships of those working as sharecroppers on farms. These details help the reader fill in the broader history of Brazil during these six years, and to see the actual effects of movements such as the *Cinquenta anos em cinco* (Fifty Years in Five) movement of Juscelino Kubitschek, as well as the crumbling government of Jânio Quadros. It is through these simple accounts and details that the reader sees the reaction of the people, as well as the reason that Brazil's government was overthrown just three years later. Carolina gives the background for some of Brazil's memorable historic moments in her works, and the value of these details and accounts is indisputable.

Finally, Carolina's works have literary merit, despite the criticisms of the press, public, and other Brazilian authors. Carolina proves her ability as a writer through the sound use of literary devices such as irony, metaphors, similes, and an honest and blunt tone. Carolina's diaries do have grammar and syntax errors, but this is not the only factor that should be weighed when deciding the literary value of a work. Carolina demonstrates that despite her lack of opportunity for a full education, she is able to include striking literary elements into her works that leave a lasting impression on her audience. These literary elements are just as present in her diaries as they are in her poetry, proving that Carolina is a capable writer in either literary realm. Her ability to write on such solemn subject matter as marginalization and hunger while still leaving room for hope and joy in the simple aspects of life should not be overlooked.

## Conclusion

In reviewing the works of Carolina Maria de Jesus it is evident her writings have literary as well as historical merit. Taking into consideration the hardships she faced as a young girl and adult, as discussed in chapters one and two, we see that she had numerous obstacles to overcome in order to achieve her dream of being a published writer. We come to understand the struggles she faced as a descendant of slaves born into poverty. Her short time in school explains her rudimentary grammar and spelling in her works, and the poverty coupled with the lack of formal education was one of the biggest reasons she could not provide for herself after losing her job in São Paulo. We come to understand the odds were stacked against her from the beginning and also realize how she ended up living in Canindé. The story of her life is important on a historical level because it is regarded as one of the only records of an Afro-Brazilian woman in post slavery Brazil. Though her biography is full of hardships, it is representative of a portion of Brazil's population that previously did not have their story told.

Her determination toward accomplishing her goal of being published should be taken into account, being that she performed menial labor each day, writing on scraps of paper as an emotional release. She was a dedicated writer, as she wrote her first diary almost daily for three years before her discovery. *Quarto de despejo* leaves a lasting impression on those who read its honest accounts of hunger and her daily struggle to earn a living. Not only does her perspective offer a previously untold story of life in the *favela*, it also is a testament of human survival. Her diary contains moments of Carolina's introspection, often relying on literary devices to convey her thoughts, which resonate with the reader and create an understanding despite Carolina's unique vantage point. Her first diary proved to also have political significance as it tells of the

candidates who used the *favela* as a public appearance opportunity only to later deny the inhabitants access to government services and assistance. *Quarto de despejo* also holds historical significance as it gives glimpses of everyday life for a member of the marginalized population during the *Cinquenta anos em cinco* movement. She writes about how she was affected financially from inflation. She also mentions the lack of impact Kubitschek's plan had on her daily life and that though it was striving for progress and modernization, people like her were being left farther behind.

The publication of *Quarto de despejo* led to her exit of the *favela* but introduced new difficulties into her life in the form of heavy criticism, lack of social acceptance, as well as people attempting to take advantage of her. This is evidenced in *Casa de alvenaria*, which is discussed in chapter two. She was constantly hounded for money by complete strangers who wanted to take advantage of her lack of financial know how and new source of income. She was in despair over the lack of acceptance by her neighbors, which she displays in writing about the disparaging comments she heard from fellow residents, and the singling out of her children by women in the neighborhood. Yet Carolina continued to provide her unique perspective and outlook on race issues, poverty, hunger, politics, inflation, and other matters from an entirely different vantage point than that of *Quarto de despejo*. Carolina provided insight into the middle and upper classes from a perspective of someone who was not raised in that environment, as well as a black woman, thus noticing differences and idiosyncrasies, which she in turn relayed to the reader through her diary. This information is valuable because it is a look into many different aspects of life in São Paulo during the 1960's from a very unique perspective.

The poetry that was reviewed in chapter two showcases another side of Carolina's writings. It tells her story through a medium other than non-fiction journal based writing, and as

a result the reader is able to see that Carolina is capable of writing informative and socially minded poetry. These poems spoke of personal experiences that she had as a child and as a woman, and they do not stray far from the subject matter of her diaries. They focus on the injustices toward the poor, predominantly farm workers and poor city dwellers. Her use of metaphors, similes, and personification throughout these works displays a working knowledge of literary elements and an ability to couple them with issues that Carolina felt were important. Her poetry, though at times rough and elementary in rhyme and structure, is not lacking in content.

Carolina's works continue to be disputed in academic and media circles both in the United States and Brazil and have been since the first publication of *Quarto de despejo* in 1960. There are some who criticize her lack of formal education and the simple writing style that she uses both in the diaries and her poetry, claiming that it should not be given the title of literature because it is too basic in style and literary elements, as well as the rudimentary spelling and grammar usage. Others questioned the legitimacy of the diary, suggesting and at times outright accusing Audálio Dantas of being the true writer of her works. Despite these accusations and criticisms, there are also those who deem her works as important testimonies of what life was like for a marginalized member of society from 1914 into the second half of the century. Her contributions are praised because though she claimed to not be a spokesperson of any one group, her experiences of poverty, hunger, racial and gender discrimination, and social rejection told a story that until the publication of *Quarto de despejo* had gone untold. Carolina made it possible for the masses to gain a better understanding of what it is like to go hungry, and the physical strain that her work caused. She helped people recognize that there are large populations of society who struggle to survive, and that they live in a never-ending cycle of poverty. Carolina's writings have been categorized as many things, though it is most fitting to place them in the



genre of marginal literature. It follows the criteria of the genre in content, style, and language. Carolina wrote about a topic, the *favela*, before it was popularized by the writings of later authors such as Paulo Lins. It could be said that perhaps she was ahead of her time in writing such an honest account, and in a way that was seen as scandalous in her era. In categorizing her work as marginal literature, it becomes clear that Carolina not only penned valuable pieces of historical and political writing, but also literature despite the arguments of her critics.

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