

## Magic Realism at the Service of Ethnicity: Darrell Kastin's Azorean Honeymoon in *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*

O Realismo Mágico ao serviço da etnicidade: A lua de mel açoriana de Darrell Kastin em *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*

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This essay attempts to contribute to the ongoing critical discussion on the short story-cycle and its tradition within the framework of emergent contemporary American literatures, more specifically American writings with a Portuguese ethnic resonance. The collection of stories which will be the basis for discussion in the ensuing pages is Darrell Kastin's *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*, published in 2012. So as to fully appreciate most of its stories, it is, nonetheless, imperative to touch upon the presence of magic realism in this cycle of stories even if the author resists such a literary classification.

This genre was conveniently appropriated by Latin-American writers and, more recently, has thrived with the emergence of postcolonialism, diasporic studies, multiethnic literatures, and hybridity. In the case of Darrell Kastin, an American writer of Portuguese and Russian descent, he finds in ethnicity, strangeness, folklore, tales, exoticism, and upholding his Azorean ethnic roots as rhetorical, fictional outlets to write mostly about the Azores and, sporadically, its diaspora in California. In this volume, he draws from his Azorean/Portuguese heritage when visiting his mother's and grandmother's country of birth and, in the process, crafts stories replete with mysteries, strangeness, myths, and folk tales he has heard about there and blends these with traits akin to magic realist writings.

This essay also provides an understanding of the author's own views on this short-story cycle as well as how a few personal and family biographical elements crop up in some of these stories and the role his grandmother has played in con-

necting him to his ancestral Azorean culture. The crust of the second half of this essay offers a piecemeal tour and analysis of the entire short-story cycle in the volume while attempting to connect these introductory scholarly materials to the stories themselves.

## The Short Story-Cycle and its Tradition

Contemporary scholars who analyzed the development of this genre noted that in the Western tradition its earliest manifestations date back to medieval times. One scholar in particular, James Nagel, in his *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre*, has shown that Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* are perhaps the earliest texts where the concept of a cycle is evident. While Gower employed "a personal confession as the framework for the stories" Chaucer, instead, used a pilgrimage to St. Thomas à Beckett with each pilgrim telling his own story (Nagel, 2001, p. 2). In both texts, he notes that "each contributing unit of the work" is "an independent narrative episode" and that "there be some principle of unification that gives structure, movement, and thematic development to the whole" (Nagel, 2001, p. 2). But the general scholarly consensus is that Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is a cornerstone in this genre of writing. In the summer of 1938, Anderson began writing a new novel, but was having problems selecting the best form. He wrote to his friend Roger Sergel, telling him why he went back to the *Winesburg* form. "It is a form in which I feel at ease. I invented it. It was mine" (Anderson, 1984, p. 220). It was a form, he tells us in *Memoirs*, that had brought him a feeling of a "new looseness" and that in *Winesburg* he had made his "own form" (Anderson, 1942, p. 289). This collection of interconnected stories, Nagel, tells us, is

unified by a consistent narrative voice, by setting, and by coalescent motifs... featur[ing] a primary protagonist, George Willard, whose struggle for self-realization and growth creates a paramount line of development for the volume, a strategy used successfully in such volumes as Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1937), and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). (Nagel, 2001, p. 6)

Possibly one of the most intriguing metaphors I have encountered to describe the structure of the short-story cycle was the one presented by Jennifer J. Smith, who compares it to a helix. In *One Story, Many Voices: Problems of Unity in the Short-Story Cycle* Smith argues that in this genre, "the stories circle without exact repetition. The linking structures serve as axes around which the stories curve. As a form that draws attention to the imperfect cyclicity of the stories, the genre abjures linearity in favor of episodic, non-chronological narratives" (Smith, 2011, p. 3). These short-story cycles, she notes, "do not lead to a single grand conclusion but instead often turn back into themselves" (Smith, 2011, p. 3.) These are traits which will be examined ahead in the collection under review.

Delving into some older work by Forrest Ingram, Susan Garland Mann, Maggie Dunn, Ann Morris, and J. Gerald Kennedy, to name a few, it is quite evident that this genre has received much critical attention. In more recent times, however, the focus has been mostly on short story cycles with an ethnic

appeal, due, in part, to the phenomenon of emergent ethnic American literatures. Rocío G. Davis has shown in some of her recent publications that there is a correlation between ethnicity and the cycle. Nagel, in turn, has argued that “one of the most fascinating aspects of the contemporary fictional cycle is that writers from a wide variety of ethnic groups have used the form for the depiction of the central conflicts of characters from their own race or nationality” (Nagel, 2001, p. 15). As American narratives, he further notes that “these stories often involve the process of immigration, acculturation, language acquisition, assimilation, identity formation, and the complexities of formulating a sense of self that incorporates the old world and the new, the central traditions of the country of origin integrated into, or in conflict with, the values of the country of choice” (Nagel, 2001, p. 15). This scholarly insight applies quite well to such works as, for example, Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* (1984), Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (1985), and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), collections which are regarded as examples of some of the earliest manifestations of this new multiethnic short-story cycle. Since then, these scholars have noted, the field has become richer and richer, encompassing a wide range of ethnicities – ranging from Native American to African American to Asian American, etc.

In this essay, however, my focus will be on American writings with a Portuguese American background, more specifically, Darrel Kestin’s short-story cycle titled, *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*, published in 2012. This emergent American literature only came of age in the last one or two decades of the twentieth-century for reasons I have outlined in *Representations of the Portuguese in American Literature* and *Portuguese American Literature*. Compared to other multiethnic literatures, its scope is clearly smaller and the number of writers as well. Narrowing down this focus even further to include examples of Portuguese American writers who have produced short-story cycles might leave us with just three or four names. Would names like José Rodrigues Miguéis (1901-1980), who wrote in Portuguese about Portuguese immigrants in the United States in some of his short stories in *Gente da Terceira Classe* (*Steerage and Ten Other Stories*) qualify? Or *Barnacle Love* (2008), by Anthony De Sa, a Canadian writer of Portuguese descent? This collection, as Albert Braz has noted, is composed of “ten linked short stories about the immigrant experience” (Braz, 2011, p. 64). As a North American writer, Anthony De Sa – like Julian Silva and Katherine Vaz – is revisiting his Portuguese roots in the English language and doing so using this loose genre of short story writing even if *Barnacle Love*, like *Winesburg, Ohio*, also has an underlying structural pattern. The other short-story cycles in Portuguese American literature are *Fado & Other Stories* (1997) and *Our Lady of the Artichokes and Other Portuguese – American Stories* (2008), by Katherine Vaz and *Move Over Scopes and Other Writings* (2011), by Julian Silva.

### The presence of magic realism in *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*

Before moving on to a detailed analysis of this short story-cycle and Kestin’s use of this genre as a means to revisit and write about his ancestral Azorean roots,

in most of the stories composing this volume he does so by way of juxtaposing realistic fictional occurrences with sudden shifts into situations characterized by the presence of strangeness, superstitions, and, often, local Azorean folk tales. As we shall see ahead, this mode of writing shares much in common with the tenets of magical realism even if the author declines, or perhaps hesitates, to view it as such. In my view, however, one cannot fully appreciate the stories in *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales* without a brief discussion of what is magical realism, when and where it emerged, why it was so readily appropriated by Latin-American writers and, more recently, flourished so well with the emergence of postcolonialism, diasporic studies, multiethnic literatures, and hybridity. In the case of Darrell Kastin, an American writer of Portuguese and Russian descent, he finds in ethnicity, strangeness, folklore, tales, exoticism, and upholding his Azorean ethnic roots as rhetorical, fictional outlets to write mostly about the Azores and, sporadically, its diaspora in California in this collection of short stories as well as in his first novel, *The Undiscovered Island*, published in 2009.

Searching for a basic, working definition of this genre, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* provides the following explanation:

Magic realism, chiefly a Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction. Although this strategy is known in the literature of many cultures in many ages, the term *magic realism* is a relatively recent designation, first applied in the 1940s by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, who recognized this characteristic in much Latin-American literature. Some scholars have posited that magic realism is a natural outcome of postcolonial writing, which must make sense of at least two separate realities – the reality of the conquerors as well as that of the conquered. Prominent among the Latin-American magic realists are the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, the Brazilian Jorge Amado, the Argentines Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortazar, and the Chilean Isabel Allende. (“Magic Realism”, n.d., n.p.)

Magic realism originated in Germany almost immediately after World War I. Franz Roh was one of the first – if not the first – scholar who attempted to examine the relationship between expressionism and magic realism. In its reaction against impressionism, one can easily recognize a pronounced preference for fantastic objects, supernatural or remote objects in expressionist art (Roh, 1927, p. 35). The paintings of this period, notes Roh, intended to reflect this new reality (Roh, 1927, p. 41). Its starting-point was to analyze the interior with much greater purity than what realism in the nineteenth-century had ever attempted. This new art aimed at bringing before our own eyes, in an intuitive manner, the inner figure of the extant external world (Roh, 1927, pp. 48-49). In other words, the artist aimed at reconstructing the object, beginning exclusively from our own interiority (Roh, 1927, p. 50). In essence, the painter or artist was captivated by a strange world (Roh, 1927, p. 81). “Ill-defined and misused as it may be,” argues Seymour Menton, “*magic realism* is the most appropriate term to describe the artistic and literary tendency that has manifested itself in Europe, the United States, and Latin America from 1918 to the present as a response to one of the Western World’s basic dilemmas of the twentieth century” (Menton,

1983, p. 13). This “oxymoronic combination of *realism* and *magic*,” Menton further notes, “captures the artists’ and the author’s efforts to portray the strange, the uncanny, the eerie, and then dreamlike – but not the fantastic – aspects of everyday reality” (Menton, 1983, p. 13).

In his analysis of magic realism and the *real maravilloso*, Juan Barroso has shown that with this new aesthetics, the artist is now engaged in pursuing a subjectivism that alters the intrinsic twentieth-century’s photographic realistic vision, making it become more lyrical, interior, and intuitive. In his view, this alteration results from the magic in the world of dreams and of the imagination, from myths, symbols and intuition, which are, thus, the door to the mystery inherent in man (Barroso, 1977, p. 22). Words such as surprise, mystery, unexpectedness, and strangeness are catch words which define this new artistic tendency (Barroso, 1977, pp. 46-51). Alicia Llerena (1997) in turn, has stressed the importance artists attribute to narratives with settings that arouse particular sensations in the reader, namely sounds and tactile impressions – echoes, murmurings, shadows, sights, and listening – so as to achieve these emotions. To produce such an eerie ambiance and effect, was clearly an issue that certain writers from the Romantic period had endorsed, in particular, Edgar Allan Poe, which he has propounded in his theories of composition. Without a doubt, on this particular issue his theories have been recycled with magic realism.

Julia Barella has further added that when writing about historical locales known by all, the magic realist writer populates his fiction with familiar places populated by fantastic beings, voices from the tomb, absurd and unexplainable occurrences. Daily life coexists with a strange reality. In other words, unreality disguises itself up as reality and walks comfortably through the streets (Barella, 1990, p. 72). In what is now regarded as a classical essay on magic realism written by Angel Flores, he foregrounded the year of 1935 “as the point of departure of this new phase of Latin American literature, of magic realism” (Flores, 1971, p. 189). For him, this new type of art should be “predominantly an art of surprises. From the very first line the reader is thrown into a timeless flux and/or the unconceivable, freighted with dramatic suspense” (Flores, 1971, p. 190). Moreover, the ideal piece of writing is the one where “time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality” (Flores, 1971, p. 191).

For the sake of better understanding this genre of writing and how a number of Latin American writers made great use of it, and how, of late, post-colonialism, diasporic studies, ethnicity, and hybridity encountered in such writings a fertile ground, it is worth taking a brief look at the more recent rhetorical and scholarly discussions. The writer in review, Darrel Kastin, and his collection of stories were, in essence, shaped by these new trends. In Kastin’s view, magic realism had its start in America with Mário Andrade and Miguel Angel Asturias since they were writing in that style in the 1930s. Anita Arroyo, for example, has noted how, in Latin America, the native, indigenous art has blended in with Spanish art (Arroyo, 1980, p. 339). Moreover, in her study of the works of Carpentier, she has traced his search for Latin-American identity through cultural hybridity, which, in his view, is the key to fully understand such a marvelous continent (p. 340).

In his analysis of magic realism, Sandro Abate has also identified hybridity and myths as additional elements in this genre (Abate, 1997, pp. 149-50).

Once regarded as an essentially European and South American medium of expression, Stephen Slemon, however, has come to the conclusion that magic realism has eventually spilled over into other latitudes, languages, and literary canons. "Recently", he argues,

the locus for critical studies on magic realism has been broadened from Latin America and the Caribbean to include speculations on its place in the literatures of India, Nigeria, and English Canada, this last being perhaps the most startling development for magic realism in recent years, since Canada, unlike these other regions, is not part of the Third World, a condition long thought necessary to the currency of the term in regard to literature, though not to art. (Slemon, 1995, pp. 407-8)

With emergent ethnic literatures in the United States, the former "imperial center" of the more "established" Anglo writings has been further dethroned with the impact of magic realism and its writings. For Slemon, it has thrived in those cultures "situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions" (Slemon, 1995, p. 408). Portuguese American writings are also a case in point. Darrel Kastin as we shall now see, views himself as an American artist who was shaped by ethnicity and who yearns to revisit and uphold his Azorean/Portuguese heritage by visiting his mother's and grandmother's country of birth, crafting stories about the Azores while tapping from the mysteries, strangeness, myths, and folk tales he has heard about there and blending these with traits akin with magic realist writings. As a mainstream American, he writes about American cultural and literary realities much in the same way as other writers before him such as, to name just two or three, Toni Morrison (*Beloved*), Louise Erdrich (*Tracks*) or Junot Díaz (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*).

### Kastin's views on his short-story cycle in *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*

Before delving into this short story-cycle, it might prove far more rewarding to ascertain what the author really thinks about it and how it came about than trying to speculate. In an email dated 19 March 2016, Kastin wrote back to me with insightful information regarding the history of how the individual stories were published. As far as the magazine publications occurred, he notes that

it was pretty much hit or miss. I sent them out in large batches, and waited for an acceptance. "The Wounds" was the first to be published, in a magazine called *Magic Realism*. "Eduardo's Promise," the first Azorean story I wrote, written when I lived on Faial 1987-88, was the second story published, in *The Crescent Review*. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

As for the manner in which he organized this sequence, he has shared the following information:

Regarding the order of the stories in the collection I wanted the book to be titled *Night Magic & Other Azorean Tales*, which likely would have placed the story of that name first, but the press wanted *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales*, so we made that story the first in the book. A number of people who have reviewed the book have subsequently told me they feel “Night Magic” is the strongest story in the collection. Beyond that it was pretty much intuitive, wanting a humorous story followed by a more poignant story, etc., going for a series that flowed, that sort of thing. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

Writing some of the stories, however, was not always easy or immediate. One, in particular, was put aside for a lengthy period of time:

Most of the stories were written quickly. I didn’t have to think about them. They more or less wrote themselves. Sometimes, like in the case with “Maria Almeida’s Miraculous Fate” I had  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the story, but the ending eluded me. I tried to come up with one, but was unsuccessful, so I put it away for several months. When I went back to it the ending appeared immediately. I thought, “But, of course!” It seemed so obvious after the fact. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

Although one of his stories in this collection was published in the magazine *Magic Realism* and so many unexpected, strange occurrences take place in most of the stories composing this short-story cycle, Kastin does not regard them as such. In his view, this is because of the mysterious ambiance he always feels whenever he is living in the Azores:

My time on the islands made magic realism the obvious choice in writing the stories, not that I thought about it. Sometimes I tried to ride the fence between reality and the fantastic. One of the stories in my new novel, “The Savior of the Little Birds” was written during the same time as “Eduardo’s Promise” and while some might see it as Magic Realism, it isn’t really. The events of the story do not lie beyond the realm of possibility. I grew up believing that anything could happen on the Azores, and conversations I had with people there, old whalers who swam with the whales, or people who claimed their pregnant daughter was a virgin, finding a line in a book from 1877, which the author states that “It’s rumored no one ever dies here,” made Magic Realism unavoidable. I see the stories as not fantasy or necessarily fantastic, but simply the way things go on the islands. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

Kastin’s affinity with mysterious, unexpected, and strange occurrences in literary writings is a feature he may have picked up from an assortment of writers who, in one way or another, clearly shaped him as a writer:

I was a fan of Dostoyevsky and Gogol, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Mario Andrade, from Brazil, before I was a reader of Garcia Márquez, and I see Magic Realism as an extension of their writing. The same can be said for *The Tales of the Arabian Nights* stories, which are not dissimilar. In fact the sequel to my novel, *The Undiscovered Island*, is titled, *A Tale of the Azorean Nights*, and features a number of tales told over a number of nights by a couple living on

Pico, much in the vein of *The Arabian Nights*. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

In addition to these writers, Kastin has made an effort to get as close as possible to the essence of Portuguese history and culture through extensive reading, namely on the following issues:

I read and collected all the magazines articles I could find on the Azores and Portugal. Reading about the slave trade, the raids of corsairs on the Azores, and the sands from Northern African Saharan storms that seed the islands, all help to inform my identity of being Portuguese descent. (Kastin, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2016)

### Biographical elements on the author and the role of his grandmother

Compared to other acclaimed writers of Portuguese descent, like, say, Katherine Vaz or Frank Gaspar, who are either second- or third-generation Portuguese-Americans, Darrell Kastin tells us in a piece in his website page, “The Other Realm, Writing about the Azores” that he cannot answer this question in such a straight-forward manner. “I’ve often been asked whether I am a first, second, or third-generation Portuguese-American. I’ve always found this a difficult question to answer.” His earliest relative to reach the United States was Domingos, his great-grandfather, from the island of Corvo, who left on an American whaling vessel that had passed close to the island, “always on the lookout for new crew members.” He ended up settling in Santa Rosa, California. For the next two generations, his family lived either in the United States or in the Azores. His grandmother Josefina, we learn, “read voraciously, and studied music and languages. She went to Terceira to further her studies, and there met my grandfather, Francisco do Canto e Castro, a poet, journalist, and musician. They married and moved to Pico and then to Faial, where my mother was born.” It is possible that the author of *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales* may have been influenced by his grandparents’ artistic tastes considering his interests in literature and music. “After having a number of children and trying unsuccessfully to run a newspaper,” we learn, “Josefina moved to the U. S. in 1945. Eventually, the rest of the family joined her there. Because of the articles she and Francisco wrote in the Portuguese newspapers criticizing the government, she wasn’t allowed to return to Portugal until 1968. She settled on Pico”.

Darrell Kastin goes into these family details so as to substantiate why he finds it rather difficult to ascertain the generation he belongs to. “This slice of family history,” he notes, “illustrates the difficulty in determining whether I am a first generation, second generation, or third generation American. Even though Josefina was born in Providence, her parents took her to live in the Azores when she was a year old, and since my mother was born on the islands, I usually consider myself a first generation American. My mother’s first language was Portuguese, as was my grandmother’s, and in fact every generation that preceded her. Also, my grandfather’s side of the family had lived on the Azores since at least



1500". Kastin ends by telling us in this piece that he belongs to both American and Portuguese cultures, better, to a realm in between:

I have never felt that I was completely an American, like the friends I made at school, but born and raised in the United States, I certainly don't feel I am Portuguese or Azorean. I can't account for this other than to say that since my first stay on the Azores, I have felt their draw and their influence. I'm a writer whose stories are set on the islands, and I'm a musician who sets Portuguese poetry to music. Like the protagonist of my novel I feel like I am from both, that I have one foot in the U. S. and one foot on the Azores. Or better yet from somewhere in between, that there is another realm, a separate place: a place of *saudade*.

He first visited the Azores when he was fifteen and was fascinated by its natural beauty, the volcanic eruptions, the whale factories and all of this sight-seeing spurred his imagination to the point that he returned about eighteen years later, when he was around thirty-three years of age, and kept on coming back. He even ended up marrying an Azorean woman from the island of Santa Maria.

As he was growing up, he "heard [his] grandmother's stories about the islands, and about the family history. She was different from the grandmothers of [his] friends." Whether it was his grandmothers' stories, his visits to the Azores, the stories people told him there, along with his readings, all of these served a common purpose: feeding the writer's imagination with themes for his craft of fiction. The ambiance of strangeness that often crops up in some of the stories composing this short-story cycle, in part, may be attributed to the myths, legends, and superstitions he picked up from the locals:

I had written stories set on the islands where people didn't die, or lived beyond death; and then read books like *AMONG THE AZORES*, by Lyman Weeks, where it is stated, "It is rumored no one ever dies here." I wrote a story, "The Child of the Sea" about a mermaid found on the islands, long before I heard the legend of Santa Maria, about a mermaid a fisherman caught. People asked me repeatedly if these were authentic myths or legends of the Azores, which I used in my own stories. I answered that I was writing my own myths and legends of the islands.

He learned to trust his instincts and pay close attention to the stories he heard, with the result being, precisely, his gift to the world – his writing:

I trusted my instincts, in my senses, and imagination, to create what I had envisioned. They may not be your reality of the islands, but then they may be another's. Some will dismiss them as fantasies conjured from an over active imagination...But I heard grown men and women talk about virgins having babies, of folk disappearing, of storms that carried animals, trees and people away, of darkness for twenty-four hours, of witches stealing boats and casting spells.

Initially spurred by the stories his grandmother told him, a central figure in ethnic writing, Fred Gardaphé tells us in *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, along with these revelations and superstitions narrated to him by local Azorean people he bumped into during his wanderings through the islands, what readers are, in essence, offered in *The*

*Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales* are golden fictional nuggets where strangeness encroaches on mundane reality. In the particular case of Italian American writing, Gardaphé has noted,

The key to reading the literature produced by third-generation Italian American writers is observing the role that the grandparent plays in connecting the writer to his or her ancestral past. A significant difference between second- and third-generation writers, then, is this presence of a grandparent figure who serves to reconnect the protagonist to a past out of which the protagonist fashions an ethnic identity. (Gardaphé, 1996, p. 120)

It is, therefore, nigh time that we delve into these stories so as to appreciate an unusual means of revisiting one's ancestral roots through the lenses of magical realism and love for tracing one's ethnicity. This writer's attempt at mapping out and crossing over the borders of identity – American into Portuguese – through the fictional hybridity on display in his short story-cycle may somehow help most Portuguese Americans ponder the duality present in their everyday life: the humdrum of mundane daily life interspersed with the remnants of miracles, superstitions, witchcraft, superstition, magic charms and the evil eye brought to the diaspora by the older generations of immigrants or often met *in loco* upon revisiting the old country.

### An overview of the short-story cycle in the volume

Composed of eighteen stories, the first story, from which the entire collection derives its name, “The Conjurer” is a story about homesickness and finding magic ways to either return or feel closer to the Azores. Moreover, it taps from the ethnic zest for retrieving one's roots or, in this particular case, a grandfather initiating Jorge, his grandson, into doing so by way of telling him stories from the old world. Valdemar Coutinho, a widower and a retired school teacher has been living in Gloucester, Massachusetts, for the past three years. Jorge's parents, who own a grocery store, had brought him from the Azores since he could no longer look after himself and they felt it was their moral obligation to care for him in his senior years. He spends his time in his makeshift observatory in the attic looking at the stars through his telescope or creating the conditions for his grandson to “hear the roar of the surf, and smell the sea breeze” from the Azores or even a view of the “island of Pico in all its immensity: its towering volcano” arising “majestically inside the room” (Kastin, 2012, p. 3). As a magician, he often mixes “items in a beaker – a drop of sunlight, a moon-soaked bit of a dragonfly's wing, a baby's tear – heating things up, rarefying, distilling” (Kastin, 2012, p. 3).

This story is undeniably about plugging into one's ancestral culture and the process of evoking it through a few historical references. In this sense, Kastin is exploring a few “ethnic signs” (to use a phrase coined by William Boelhower) when referring to navigators and explorers, such as Pedro de Barcelos and João Fernandes de Lavrador (both reached the coast of Labrador in North America, in 1492); Portugal Day, on June 10<sup>th</sup>; the legend of the Atlantis and the Azores as the volcanic tips of this submerged continent, etc. These allusions and the excitement Valdemar arouses in his grandson, leads the latter to say: “I wish

we could go to the Azores together, Grandpa,' Jorge said. His parents, he knew, had no desire to return. They never spoke of the islands, as if they'd forgotten their past. Jorge had never been there. All he knew of the Azores was from what Valdemar told him" (Kastin, 2012, p. 7).

In this story, the humdrum of daily life downstairs, represented by Jorge's parents, coexists with Valdemar's world of magic upstairs: "Life went its usual course downstairs: minor crises concerning the grocery store arose and were resolved; visitors came and went amid the constant bustle of family life. Through it all Valdemar spent most of his time upstairs, conceiving ever more complex designs, in a maze of glass, screens, and tubes" (Kastin, 2012, p. 5). This story ends with Valdemar speaking to the ghost of his deceased wife and even his former girlfriend. What is quite evident is that in this story, Valdemar brings to the Portuguese diaspora in the United States a world of superstition typical of closed, parochial, and superstitious people, some of whom often seeking the services of a sorceress to connect with their departed ones in case some unresolved matter had to be dealt with and put to rest for good. Moreover, these are perhaps some of the stories that the author was told during his roaming around the islands and which he is here fleshing out. And, magic realism, to a certain extent, is the best means to deal with such materials.

With this inaugural story, Kastin has set the tone for the remainder of this short story collection. By delving more and more into the ancestral culture transmitted to him through his mother's side of the family, these stories can be seen as an attempt to further enlighten himself on the intricacies of this culture. Formerly aware of possessing residual and weak ties with the Azores, through writing, travelling, and learning to communicate in the Portuguese language (in the Azores and through the classes he enrolled in in the USA), he now does his best to redeem this ancestry. This also applies to the children or grandchildren of immigrants or hyphenated-Americans. This is clearly the case with most third-generation American writers of Portuguese descent such as Katherine Vaz, Frank Gaspar, Thomas Braga, Julian Silva or even David Oliveira. And even if Kastin is not sure about which generation he really belongs to given his unusual family background of shifting back and forth between the United States and the Azores, his feelings of excitement, wonder, and discovery are quite similar. These are matters Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have dealt with in a chapter titled, "What Is a Minor Literature?" in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* when analyzing the Jewish literature of Warsaw and Prague and why Prague Jews should or should not write in German. In this particular instance, note both scholars,

The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality. And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a "paper language" or an artificial language; this all the more true for the Jews who are simultaneously a part of this minority and excluded from it, like "gypsies who have stolen a German child from its crib." In short, Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses. (This can be compared in another context to what

blacks in America today are able to do with the English language.) (Deleuze, Guattari, 1986, pp. 16-17)

As such, in an essay on Frank Gaspar's writings, "Of Love and Remembrance – the Poetry and Prose of Frank X. Gaspar," where Alice Clemente views Gaspar as a "Redeemer," she, too, would certainly view Kastin as belonging to the "Redeeming" generation in the sense of someone who upholds it. For Clemente, these include "the grandchildren who seek to reclaim their ethnicity at the same time that they retain their place in the dominant society" as opposed to their grandparents or the original immigrant who, "more often than not, retains linguistic, cultural and affective ties to the country of origin even while struggling to become established in the new land" or even the second generation, the children of the first, "who often deny their ethnic roots in an effort to merge finally into the mainstream" (Clemente, 2000, p. 25). In a colonial context, the ecstasy experienced by the oppressed, argues Frantz Fanon, when rediscovering his cultural roots can be transposed to this "redeeming" generation in a multicultural society as in the United States. In the particular case of the "oppressed" who was imposed an alien language, culture, and values as was the case with French colonialism in Africa and elsewhere, he or she "goes into ecstasies over each rediscovery. The wonder is permanent. Having formerly emigrated from his culture, the native today explores it with ardor. It is a continual honeymoon. Formerly inferiorized, he is now in a state of grace.... The sense of the past is rediscovered, the worship of ancestors resumed" (Fanon, 1988, pp. 41-43).

Initially spurred by the stories his grandmother told him, a central figure in ethnic writing as we have seen above, in "The Conjuror," Valdemar, the grandfather, has appropriated this role. While Jorge's parents are intent on casting aside their ethnic trappings, Valdemar tries to pass them on to his grandson. In several stories composing this short-story cycle, Kastin attempts to explore ethnicity, the diaspora and its dialogue with the old country and what it represents by adding another thread – magic realism – to delve deeper into the heart of its myths, superstitions, and strange, magic occurrences.

The second story in the cycle, "The Last Troubadour of Lusitania" is about a legend which attempts to explain how the Azores and the mainland became separated: "There is a legend, now lost to the extreme vicissitudes of time, that long ago in the area between the Azores and the continent of Portugal lay the most fertile and beautiful of lands. This was long before Portugal was yet a country, when the Lusitanians, a mysterious Celtic tribe, then inhabited the region" (Kastin, 2012, p. 11). His name was Pedro, and he "composed songs and sang like no other" (Kastin, 2012, p. 11). He had a zest for life, "food, drink, conversation, songs and stories, natural beauty, women, laughter, and living life to its fullest... And what he loved perhaps more than anything was the countryside, the land where he was born" (Kastin, 2012, p. 11). This story is replete with historical allusions and attempting to unpack them is clearly not an easy task. This story travels back in time to unearth the roots of Portugal. It seems to be about the Lusitanians – here represented through the figure of Pedro, a troubadour – who is a member of a proud, strong people, who lived in the inner parts of Continental Portugal, in a mountainous region called Montes Hermínios, near where the

cities of Viseu and Guarda and the Estrela mountain are located. After much effort and conniving, they were conquered by the Romans: Viriato, the leader of this tribe, was a courageous fighter, but was betrayed and killed by his companions while he was asleep. This story goes even further back in time to refer to the several peoples who occupied this portion of the globe:

Springs of cool, fresh water bubbled from the ground in holy, sacred places, full of spirits and magic from a time long forgotten in the past. Ghosts of the Jews of antiquity, who had sailed over from the Holy Land, of the ancient Phoenicians, the Celts who had sailed from the north, the Visigoths, then the Romans and, of course, the Moors, the Suevi, and the Gypsies as well. Each of these peoples left their mark, a trace of having lived there, in their words, in their instruments, their food and children, their music – but it was of and for the Lusitanians that Pedro lived, breathed, and sang his songs, calling to the ancient race. (Kastin, 2012, p. 13)

Is this troubadour modelled on a real historical figure from a time ahead of this period? That is, from a period when Portugal had already become an established nation thanks to the leadership of Portugal's first king, Afonso Henriques (1109-1185), who started from Guimarães to push further South the Condado Portucalense. In the previous story, there is a reference to Pedro de Barcelos (1287-1354), who was the son of King Dinis (1261-1325), a poet and troubadour like his own father. Scholars have acknowledged his contributions to Portuguese medieval literature. Or is this a reference to King Pedro I (1320-1367), whose ill-fated love for Inês de Castro ended in tragedy? A political foe, King Afonso IV (1291-1357) ordered her execution in 1355 due to his fear of Portugal being annexed by the King of Castile. In this story, the "King Dom Pedro of old" is depicted as holding a whip in his hand and dancing "through the streets of Lisbon accompanied by his band of musicians, singing and laughing, drinking, to forget his woes" (Kastin, 2012, p. 13). It is quite probable that these "woes" cannot be any other than these of his star-crossed love.

This story ends with Pedro eating the soil and chewing on the "very last stones that remained" and "until the waves flooded the entire region, leaving nothing but a last outcropping of rock jutting from the sea, which for generations would prove hazardous to vessels sailing along that part of the coast. And far off in the ocean, the Azores were all that remained of the western edge of the land that Pedro had consumed" (Kastin, 2012, p. 14). This is clearly a rewriting of the myth of Atlantis, another version of how the Azores became detached from the mainland. What we know for sure is that the author of this short-story collection is the modern day troubadour, both a writer and musician, who is really the one who is enchanted with the land, its myths, and who sees in writing an outlet to search for his roots and identity.

In the third story in this volume, "Dona Leonor's Dress," we are introduced to a modern day Romeo who has fallen in love with Dona Leonor and her beautiful, colorful dress. He follows her around, from the Avenida Diogo de Teive (a navigator and humanist who discovered the islands of Flores and Corvo in 1452), through the Praça do Infante (Prince Henry, the navigator), to her house. Unfortunately, he can only lust after her or treat her dress as some sort of fetish

after taking it off her clothesline during the night. She was the “beautiful youngest daughter of the noble Meneses family” and “could never have anything to do with me, the grandson of a poor dairy farmer, and the son of an even poorer poet” (Kastin, 2012, p. 15). Like his father, he has some talent for writing, but this is not enough due to his lack of social pedigree: “Of course, many things had changed over the years, and though Dona Leonor’s aristocratic family was no longer as wealthy or powerful as it had once been, still her family and mine were separated by an unbreachable gulf” (Kastin, 2012, p. 16). He works as a “clerk in the governmental financial office” (Kastin, 2012, p. 16), a job which his uncle *Gil Vicente* Monteiro arranged for him (*italics added*). As we all know, Gil Vicente (1465-1537), a Renaissance playwright, is considered the father of the Portuguese theater. This historical reference, along with the previous ones above, attest to the notion of ethnic rediscovery in contemporary American literature by way of sprinkling the text with such “ethnic signs” (Boelhower, 1987, p. 83). She, in turn, works in some “office building” (Kastin, 2012, p. 18), which suggests she also works for a living and that her social status is merely an illusion considering she comes from a decadent aristocratic family even if she tries to keep up with appearances. He spends the night by her house, in the street, trying to catch a glimpse of her inside, pining after her, unmindful of the cold, moist night. His “fighting against the urge to climb to the window, wanting nothing so much as to touch that material, to hold it in my hands for a moment and let it whisper its secrets rustling in my ear” reminds us of the balcony scene in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* while attesting to Kastin’s attempt at interspersing his collection with a lighter, humorous story. This is perhaps the first story in this cycle with such a role.

Alfredo Bettencourt is the main character in “Alfredo’s Timeless Death,” and, for years, he “spoke about his impending death so often and for so long that everyone living in the village of Quebrado do Caminho became swept up in the excitement and expectation that grew with each passing day, week, and month. After some time, people forgot exactly what he was dying of, but that only added to the impressive weight and magnitude of his death, until nothing else mattered” (Kastin, 2012, p. 20). People on the island of Pico waited for years but he seemed to be immortal. It seems as if this story is modelled on the following Portuguese folk wisdom – “Morte desejada, vida dobrada” – that is, when yearning for someone’s death, life expectancy is doubled. Moreover, his death was a reason for a round of drinks at the local tavern or a meal and a topic for conversation in such an isolated locale where nothing seemed to happen. How he wanted his funeral to be, where he wanted to be buried, who would be attending, his neighbors’ epitaphs, and other issues that fueled this topic even further. Interesting, though, in this story is how Kastin may have tapped from family biographical elements, when we learn that Alfredo would rather “be buried in Corvo, where his grandfather had been born” (Kastin, 2012, p. 21). Through the years, Alfredo is said to have finally become insane because he is seen speaking to the clouds, the sun, the moon, the goats and cows and even those “aboard the fishing boats observed him swimming with the whales and dolphins” (Kastin, 2012, p. 25).

Possibly, a sudden shift into a brief but representative moment typical of magic realism takes place when we learn that

Seasons changed and brought bright fruits and vegetables of enormous size in winter and in the fall, and flowers that bloomed every other month. *Maracujá* and oranges grew the size of melons, *nêspêras* the size of pears, and fresh water suddenly began flowing from a spring in the ground. The children waded into the ocean and caught fish which leaped into their hands. (Kastin, 2012, p. 26)

This episode brings us back to what Angel Flores had noted about writers' use of time in an indeterminate manner in most magical realist texts, namely that this is "predominantly an art of surprises. From the very first line the reader is thrown into a timeless flux and/or the unconceivable, freighted with dramatic suspense" (Flores, 1971, p. 190). In other words, time "exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality" (Flores, 1971, p. 191). Strangeness crops up in *The Conjurer & Other Azorean Tales* when the reader least expects it.

In a village where nothing seems to happen, the story titled, "Maria Almeida's Miraculous Fate" opens with the local villagers gossiping about "the day Maria Leonor Almeida washed up on the sands of Quebrado do Caminho" and stating that it was exactly when "the devil rose from his foul depths to plague the village" (Kastin, 2012, p. 29). Others insisted it was a miracle, while the old healer (*benzedeira*), Old Palmira, "was summoned in order to remove the evil spell some believed had been placed on the girl" (Kastin, 2012, p. 29). Nobody knew for sure for how long she had stayed in the sea. And how did she make it back ashore? Had she floated on a piece of wood? Had she flown? In due time, she had become some type of amphibian since, on land, she needed water from the sea to keep her alive. Moreover, her protruding belly indicated she had become pregnant – but who was the seducer? Had it been Miguel Carneiro, who had seen her riding on the back of a dolphin when he was out fishing in the sea? Or was it, perhaps, King Neptune, who had won her heart? In my view, the following passage is quite suggestive:

What is certain is that, one week earlier, Maria Leonor had left her home in the late afternoon and walked down to the sea. Voices, she later said, called to her again, and again. Sweet voices, melodic and musical – "angelic voices," Maria Leonor insisted – called her name, whispering their muffled messages, which she had followed as she attempted to decipher their meaning. (Kastin, 2012, p. 30)

This calling of the sea, reminds us of Edna Pontellier at the very end of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899). In this novel about questioning gender issues in Victorian America, adultery, and the moral expectations placed on women of the time, Edna, chooses to commit suicide by swimming out in the Gulf of Mexico. The "voice of the sea," we learn, "is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (Chopin, 1972, p. 189). In both stories, the sea is depicted as a lover, a motif that provides meaning and fulfilment to the protagonists in both pieces of fiction – albeit in different settings and with different aesthetic and literary purposes in mind. The strangeness in this Azorean story is paramount at the very end, when Maria

Leonor gave birth to her baby, in the sea. She “turned on her back” and her “legs came up out of the water, and she gave a short, piercing cry as something silvery flashed and disappeared between her legs, sleek sand agile as a fish” (Kastin, 2012, p. 35). Waving good-bye to the villagers ashore, Maria Leonor prefers to live in the sea with the dolphins and fish – and, presumably, Neptune, or was it Miguel Carneiro, who was “heading out to sea for the first time since he had come back talking about a girl who swam with dolphins” (Kastin, 2012, p. 36).

“The Witches and the Fisherman” is a story where boy meets girl with a little help from the witches. Everyone in the village of Povoação, in the island of São Miguel, knew that Miguel Luís Reis was the best fisherman who “always brought in the largest catch” (Kastin, 2012, p. 37). Unusual occurrences took place during the night and every time he returned to his boat the following day, things were not the same as he had left them there. He started to suspect that “in the hours after midnight and before dawn, witches were using his boat for their own purposes” (Kastin, 2012, p. 37). Intent on resolving this enigma, he spends the night on his boat and, a few hours later, wakes up in the middle of the night, only to find himself in the middle of an adventure – a tour of the world – with the witches at the helm of the boat-turned-airplane, taking him, like a Portuguese navigator, to the “Arabian sands, then India, Timor, China, and Japan” and picking up a black cat along the way, passing through Madagascar, and the Horn of Africa (Kastin, 2012, p. 39). Upon reaching this destination, the witches “screeched one word over and over, like the name of a delicacy they wished to savor: *Adamastor! Adamastor! Asdamastor!*” (Kastin, 2012, p. 39). This funny passage provides an opportunity for the author to revisit the Portuguese discoveries, in a nutshell, as well as the epic of *The Lusíads* (1572), by Luís Vaz de Camões, through the figure of the Adamastor, the sea monster (here turned into a delicacy) that was said to inhabit the Cape of Good Hope, on the very tip of South Africa, scaring the crew of Vasco da Gama on their way to India (1498).

This flight ends on the deserted shores of Santa Maria, where Miguel meets Ana Sofia, bedraggled, frightened, and starving. She buys him breakfast at a nearby coffee shop and when he returns to his boat to travel back to São Miguel, his boat is loaded with fish. It must have been the witches, she says, for they were dancing in the sky: “You know what they say when it’s raining and sunny – that the witches are dancing” (Kastin, 2012, p. 42). He wonders if she had also partaken in the night flight. Within a year they were engaged. Had she bewitched him, he wonders? On occasion, she was “quick to note that it was the witches who had brought them together” (Kastin, 2012, p. 42). Once again, this story recycles Portuguese folk superstitions, in this particular instance, about what witches do when it is raining and sunny while, perhaps, tapping from the author’s personal biography to focus on the theme of meeting the love of one’s life who happens to be from the island of Santa Maria.

The setting in “The Thief Of Santa Inês,” the seventh story in this cycle, is in a tiny village called Santa Inês, on the island of Pico. It is depicted as a peaceful place where neighbors get along with each other and respect each other’s property. Nothing valuable has ever been stolen there, except, maybe, just some chicken gone astray or a knife. Sonia de Melo, however, is believed to be enga-



ged in an usual type of theft. She “stole from everyone, and worse yet, stole what she could not be arrested for. She took what wasn’t hers and coveted these ill-gotten acquisitions, guarding them as if they were more precious than her own children” (Kastin, 2012, p. 43). Instead of providing and caring for her own family, she feels and suffers everybody else’s problems: “She was plagued with fevers, chills, aches and pains; she felt betrayed, unloved, lonely, and endured numerous *saudades* – that famed Portuguese longing, an intense yearning, a fond remembrance laden with melancholy – for things she couldn’t even name” (Kastin, 2012, pp. 43-44). A hypochondriac, she wept in anticipation, fearing that her children would lead terrible lives. She felt all the family problems, frustrations, or tragedies that occurred in Santa Inês. Her house was unkempt, her children neglected, and at some point stopped making dinner or caring for Vasco, her husband, her two sons and daughter. After starting to drink firewater to forget his personal problems, some neighbor suggested that he should look for another wife and perhaps the children could stay with extended family members. Vasco considers relocating to Horta or Terceira or even committing suicide by tripping down a cliff but he did not succeed. He dies seven years later and “rumor has it that she is busy stealing all of Vasco’s heavenly pleasure – along with everyone else’s – right this very moment” (Kastin, 2012, p. 50).

As in some previous stories, this one also foregrounds strange occurrences which are typical of rural life and belief in superstition. Sonia was reenacting a family legacy given to her through her great-grandmother, who “had been known throughout the island as a powerful *feiticeira*, or sorceress, and it was thought by some that Sonia was now paying for the evil eyes which her great-grandmother, Maria Ernesta de Oliveira Moreno, had put on many of the villagers. Or that Sonia had attempted to practice her great-grandmother’s arts before she was ready, and the magic had backfired” (Kastin, 2012, pp. 44-45).

“The Newest Star” focuses on Portuguese superstitions and folk wisdom related to fertility rites and the pressure placed on couples to produce offspring, especially the mother. Incapable of bringing his love for Joana Medroso to fruition, in the long run, Mario helps her in this endeavor. Since childhood, Mario had a crush on Joana, but he was a few years her junior and she ended up marrying a fellow by the name of Joaquim. After a few years, the neighbors started visiting less and less or stopped coming over for dinner as Joana’s “inability to conceive had become more and more a topic of conversation and concern” (Kastin, 2012, p. 54). During a meal, Conceição, Joana’s mother, bluntly asks her son-in-law what he was doing about this situation considering that he seemed to be more concerned with helping himself to the platter of meat or reaching for another roll. “I try, senhora, I cannot work miracles” (Kastin, 2012, p. 55). Later that evening, after the men had gone out, Conceição was “knitting her twentieth baby sweater, for the child that never came” (Kastin, 2012, p. 55). She says to her daughter, “You must try harder, dear. Believe with all your soul. Pray each night to Santo António that he help you to be with child” (Kastin, 2012, p. 55). In Portuguese popular culture, Saint Anthony of Lisbon/Padua is associated with marriages, fertility, and children (represented as a Saint holding a Bible with baby Jesus in his hand).

On a particular day, Mario and his mother also come to pay a visit to the Medroso family. She had brought some herbs and the wings of a butterfly in an envelope. “These are very good for conception,” she tells Conceição, “the wings of a very special butterfly, senhora, one that lives at the top of Pico and nowhere else” (Kastin, 2012, p. 57). From this day on, Mario began to eavesdrop on Joana while she was in her garden. “One day, as Joana danced, humming a pretty melody, a bird flew out from under her dress. It was small, not quite the size of Mario’s fist, and bright blue and yellow. It was the prettiest bird Mario had ever seen” (Kastin, 2012, p. 58). Portuguese folk wisdom or the scatological language often used to refer to a little girl’s or a woman’s genitals is either a birdie or a dove (a *passarinha* or the *pombinha*). Furthermore, the unexpected magic realism in this passage must be underscored. During a moment of distraction, he snatches it from her and takes the bird home, placing it in the bottom drawer of his chest. It turns out that the bird is not a real one but made of glass. As soon as he takes it back to Joana’s house, the bird, “instead of flying...curved and sailed higher, above the house” (Kastin, 2012, p. 60). The bird turned into a glass star, the one he had seen Joana with some other time. Clearly, it is not religion, magic potions or even sexual intercourse, but, instead, the magic Mario is capable of arousing, we learn, that is what actually solves this couple’s problems of infertility:

The star shot forward into the night – a streak of bright light across the sky. Mario remembered how his uncle in Praia Negra had always said a shooting star meant a new baby had come into the world. It hung there among the other stars, glittering and winking, as Mario stood and gasped.

The next day his mother told him he had to go with her to shop for some material, so she would have something made by the time Joana’s baby arrived. (Kastin, 2012, p. 60)

The protagonist in “The Secret Place,” Emilio Borges, has just disembarked at the wharf in Madalena, on the island of Pico, and is determined in climbing to the very top of the mountain. He is dying from cancer and has just returned from a consultation with a doctor in Terceira. He simply wishes to die in peace, all by himself, fulfilling his inmost desire: catch exquisite butterflies on the mountaintop. There is nothing he can do, he tells his wife, and he does not want to go see a specialist in São Miguel. “I met a man in Terceira,” he tells her, who “called himself a naturalist. He told me that at the top of Pico there are butterflies that can be found nowhere else. They live by the warmth of the crater. There and only there” (Kastin, 2012, p. 64). Everyone warns him of the dangers and the cold up there: “There are too many dangers,” his friend Luís reminds him, “Fog or clouds that came up without warning; *furnas* or craters that one could stumble into and fall hundreds of feet; the treacherous steep slopes” (Kastin, 2012, p. 65). This story ends with Emilio at the very top of Pico, happily dancing with what he believes to be butterflies. “He swung the net, but they flew right through it. So many, that some kept falling to the ground, in layer after layer. Just like snow” (Kastin, 2012, p. 69).

“The Blind Man of Praia Negra” tells us the story of Timoteo, who gradually lost his sight and tried to move on with his life, painting, as usual, but now with much greater depth than before. The problem was that his neighbors only saw

dark things and, perhaps, his hand was being guided by the devil. Having nothing else to do, he discontinues painting and promises he will resume it only when he has eyes with which to see. Soon enough, the people forgot about him. His life changes for better when Maria Antonia makes her appearance in Praia Negra. She, we learn,

was a girl who caused waves of disturbances wherever she went. Not by anything she said or did, but by her mere presence – her eyes, for one, her voice, her smile, and her overwhelming and all-encompassing beauty. No one could look at her without thinking that the old stories were true, that she was descended from a creature of the sea; that her mother’s grandmother had washed up on the shores of the island, a mermaid, or siren, or one of the one hundred Nereides said to inhabit the ocean depths. (Kastin, 2012, p. 73)

She takes him for walks around the town and the island. Moreover, she encourages him to resume his painting and even asks him to paint her picture. He starts to paint some of the townspeople, one after the other, but in ways that left them uncomfortable, exposed. Dona Lucia, for example, was painted, not as “she’d been photographed once or twice in her youth. In this portrait she noted the shadows and secrets of her innermost heart, her deepest desires and her deepest fears, all exposed for the entire world to see!” (Kastin, 2012, p. 77). These people “reddened with embarrassment and quickly glanced round, certain that everyone else had seen, and was laughing at them” (Kastin, 2012, p. 77). They were ashamed of how Timoteo, a blind man, could grasp things others could not, especially all “their faults, weaknesses, and vices” which were “shown glaring, exaggerated, and grotesque under the painful illumination of Timoteo’s artistry” (Kastin, 2012, p. 77). Maria Antonia was sent back to Pico and it was rumored that Timoteo “had successfully traversed the strait between the islands” and “found Maria Antonia, and could see perfectly well again with the aid of that girl with the bewitching eyes, whose side he thereafter refused to leave” (Kastin, 2012, p. 78).

“A Night on the Town” tells us the story of Guilherme Gomes, a henpecked husband both in life and – surprisingly – in death, too. His wife, Rosa, scolded him every time he returned home drunk. In this story, however, he is a deceased man, but she still persists in scolding him when visiting his gravesite at the village churchyard. She does so, not because she really loves him, but out of duty and to avoid the local gossiping and badmouthing of her neighbors. “Rosa struggled as she always had to take care of the children, to scratch enough food out of the patch of soil behind the house, to sew, to tend the animals, to cook and go to church” (Kastin, 2012, p. 80). She complains about her plight as a widow, fending for herself and for his children and, she says, “If I’d had any concern for the world I would have drowned your children and myself and wiped out the family name, and this curse, once and for all, instead of prolonging this agony. Then I wouldn’t have to live a life of such misfortune” (Kastin, 2012, p. 81). She went back there every now and then to clean his gravesite and bring flowers. Once, she found one of his bones and took it home with her. Gradually, she reassembles most of his skeleton and takes pleasure in venting her frustrations on him. “What is the point of dying? he wondered. If one only continues to suffer?” (Kastin, 2012, p. 83). He longs for his good-old times of binge-drinking with his

friends but, for some time, has to settle for some visitor dropping some wine on his stretched-out skeleton.

His friends show up at his house. They “had gone out of their way to include their old friend, Guilherme, for a night on the town, just like old times” (Kastin, 2012, p. 84). After so much drinking, his friends cannot locate all of his bones, leaving behind a few, and taking back the remaining ones to Rosa’s house. They return to the bar the following day and are surprised at the new arrangement. This story ends with Guilherme having finally found a much better resting place – Pedro’s bar. “The three men looked up at the grinning skull, perched upon a high shelf behind the bar. Pedro had found it while cleaning, early in the morning. They raised their glasses in one more salute to their old friend, who appeared much happier here, in his new resting place” (Kastin, 2012, p. 86).

“The Wounds” taps from Portuguese rural mentality and superstition regarding the “divine” and “saintly” powers certain people claim to have and which they use to extract money and jewelry from the gullible, ignorant believers. This story focuses on a couple whose marriage starts to crumble due to the horrifying stench emanating from his wife’s wounds. On occasion, he woke up in the middle of the night “and found the woman bent over, poking the sores with inquisitive fingers, lifting them to her nose and sniffing at them suspiciously” (Kastin, 2012, p. 87). Her howling during the night leaves him desperate since he cannot rest, but also “invaded the nearby streets, filling the empty silence” (Kastin, 2012, p. 88). Some of his drinking buddies “were inclined to agree that God in his wisdom had chosen her as a martyr” (Kastin, 2012, p. 88). While she seems to relish “looking at her various wounds with a handheld mirror,” her house was in “terrible shape” and her children neglected, wandering around “half-clothed and filthy” while everything “was falling apart” (Kastin, 2012, p. 88). Fed up with living in such a messy house, he packs his personal belongings and his kids and goes to stay at his sister’s house on the other side of town.

From martyr to saint was just a little step in her career as a charlatan. “Meanwhile people who’d heard rumors of the stricken woman came from all over to see for themselves the miracle of her pain and suffering. They brought their ill, their injured, their blind and needy” (Kastin, 2012, p. 90). His sister tells him that they “say [his] wife’s wounds are now pouring forth a river of black blood” and that some are “saying she’s a saint” (Kastin, 2012, p. 90). To further support the argument of her being elevated to sainthood was the fact that she had died and that a few days later her body was not rotting: “The townspeople told him that proof of the miracle lay in the fact that, here, weeks after she had died, there was still no odor of a rotting corpse” (Kastin, 2012, p. 91). “She sat like a giant stone Buddha, her enormous belly and her legs and arms swollen like tree trunks and all covered with crater-like sores. She hadn’t decomposed at all, but was perfectly intact, as though she slept” (Kastin, 2012, p. 91). As in most reported real life instances of similar occurrences in villages throughout Portugal, this woman, ironically, managed to find a steady income for her family through the alms her “believers” brought to the family, who cash in on the gullible. As soon as he returns home with his children, they assist him in “taking money from the strangers for entrance and selling lottery tickets” while he, at night, lies down

next to her “content with his life, dreaming dreams and smiling the smile of a happily married man” (Kastin, 2012, p. 92).

“The Last Voice” tells us about Celestino Azevedo’s inability to speak and the problems he faced when his uncontrolled voice either uttered romantic, lusty words to Dona Amélia or foul words at the local tavern, badmouthing some friends, and how this ignited an outbreak of fist-fighting. At such moments, he felt uncomfortable. The butcher or even the refuse collector would say to him “in serious tones: Say, I heard your voice last night, over by the graveyard” or “I could have sworn I heard you shouting in the middle of the night down the Avenida da Liberdade, where that irresistible vision of loveliness Maria Almeida lives” (Kastin, 2012, p. 94). Presumably, this reference to Lisbon’s main avenue suggests that, so far, this is the second story where the setting is not an Azorean one. He hoped that Maria Teresa, a schoolteacher he had never spoken to out of shyness, might help him. She had never married but “men certainly did notice her. She had quietly rebuffed each of them, as though she were waiting for a particular suitor who was scheduled to come and marry her at an appointed hour” (Kastin, 2012, p. 96). It looks as if this opportunity had finally arrived. She takes him to a consultation with Maria Ginete Toledo, “the *feiticeira* who was said to be descended from Gypsies or Spanish Jews, and who was renowned for her mystical abilities” (Kastin, 2012, p. 96). Her powers are so effective that some time afterwards, the story ends with Celestino and Maria Teresa bumping into each other by her house, and she, a while later, leading him inside, “shushing him calmly and quietly, as he let all the words that he had saved over the many years, all the things he had longed to tell her, finally have their voice” (Kastin, 2012, p. 98). In this story, at least, losing one’s voice is not such a bad thing after all.

“Constança’s War with the Elements” is another strange story in the sense that we are never sure whether she is meant to be a fictional character or whether she represents natural powers such as those of the earth or earthquakes. The story begins with her waking up from a seven-year slumber thanks to the impact of a strong tremor. Suddenly, it dawns on her that Álvaro, her husband, had been cheating on her with the grocer’s wife, that her daughter was having an affair with a fellow by the name of Carlos Gonçalves, and that her son Francisco’s favorite pastimes were to drink and chase after women’s skirts. In the nick of time, she manages to reform their ways. “Álvaro now waited on the woman hand and foot. Not only did he stay away from other women, but Constança was all he could talk about” (Kastin, 2012, p. 100). Manuela now preferred the silence of the local church and was often seen “making her way to the church, taking each step on her bare knees, as she now did every day” with “tears running down her cheeks” and “clutching her rosary, ignoring the cuts and bruises” (Kastin, 2012, pp. 101-102). The references to her daughter’s penance are rendered in a quite hyperbolic way and both daughter and husband cannot ever eschew her constant gaze and vigilance. Instead of pain, Manuela only felt the “voluptuous pleasures of her knees torn raw by the rocks, the stones and dirt embedded deeply in her flesh” (Kastin, 2012, p. 104). She was on the road to sainthood, Constança believes. She also spends her time reading from *The Unsolvable Enigma*, by Sebastião Augusto do Canto e Castro (a name reminiscent of the author’s grandfather).

Seven years later, Constança falls asleep once again and her husband also vanishes with her. Like the Immaculate Conception, Manuela is said to have “married her virtue and solitude” and “found herself giving birth to two large and silent twins of misfortune” (Kastin, 2012, p. 105). In the meantime, her brother “found a young schoolteacher for a wife” (Kastin, 2012, p. 105). Álvaro and Constança have a say in how they wish their property to be disposed of. They “can rip a hole in the ground” or “move the earth and knock the house to the ground” or with their anger shake the entire island (Kastin, 2012, p. 107). The people react by way of offering alms, praying to the saints, and organizing processions. By creating such a natural havoc with the rain falling for days on end, and the bakery and the market closed down, Constança and Álvaro are finally happy with the outcome: Carlos and Manuela join their lives while her brother immigrated to America. And the story, itself, has, thus, tapped from some of the quintessential traits of the Azores/Azoreans – of a people subject to the whims of nature, their hardships, the importance of owning and securing one’s property or land, their religious fervor and superstitious beliefs, and the never-ending cycle of immigration of its people.

Of all the short stories composing this cycle, “The Exile” is clearly the one that strikes the reader’s attention for at least two reasons. First, it is entirely out of the overall thematic pattern in this volume in that its setting is located in the Portuguese diaspora in California – and not in Portugal as in the previous stories – and second, because it taps from a more realistic, personal, and family background. Moreover, the strangeness and unexpected intrusions of bizarre occurrences on mundane reality prevalent in most previous stories are more subtle in this one. In my view, the characters of Fernando Noronha and his wife, Maria Isabel, are modelled on the author’s own grandparents. This ethnic story also fleshes out the ongoing tension between assimilation and resisting it. This dichotomy is rendered, on the one hand, through the ideals of the pioneer generation and, on the other hand, through their children, the so-called hyphenated Americans. In this story, Fernando Noronha is the representative of the Portuguese immigrant who rejects assimilation. He yearns to return to his country of birth since he cannot adapt to life in the United States while refusing to learn English. His children, instead, speak to him in Portuguese but were learning English very rapidly at school while his wife represents those Portuguese immigrants who wish to succeed and adapt to life in America.

Incapable of holding a steady job and frustrated with life in the United States, Noronha seeks solace in the packages he receives from the Azores, which were sent to him by his friends, Rui Fagundes and Jorge Ribeiro. These either contain soil from his island of birth, Faial, or some shell. Living in San José, California, was spiritually unfulfilling and a burden he cannot easily tolerate:

Here in California he had no friends; instead, there were countless strangers, streams of people seemingly without end – people who cared nothing for what was dear to him...Instead of soil that was dark and in which anything would grow, in which it was impossible to quench life, he saw only the poor dirt surrounding San José, which, by comparison, was dry and barren. He saw endless vistas of dust and sand. It was a desert really. Not paradise, as he had heard.

Instead of the cool ocean breezes, the air was hot and stifling, as if it sprang from the land itself. (Kastin, 2012, p. 113)

If his wife found out he was wasting his money on postage for dirt and shells and not providing for his family, he was sure she would put pressure on him to look for any job. The problem, however, is that he is not used to or good at holding a blue-collar job. He comes from an aristocratic family, now ruined, and is, therefore, accustomed to holding his head up:

He had tried working as a gardener and in a factory, jobs for which he had no experience, no training. It was hard enough to find such a job...Because he couldn't speak proper English, he had to find work among the Portuguese, but there were many Portuguese who wouldn't hire him because of his family name. Unlike them, he hadn't spent his entire life working with his hands. His family had once been wealthy aristocrats, but that had been a long time ago, at the turn of the century, before the revolution that had toppled the monarchy... They couldn't imagine an aristocrat doing menial work. And they themselves were squeamish about hiring him. (Kastin, 2012, p. 116)

He spends most of his time plunged in a torpor of nostalgia – for his previous life in the Azores or the artistic life he had enjoyed as a writer of poems, a painter, or even working at local radio stations, putting on “plays and musical shows at Portuguese halls and high schools up and down the San Joaquin Valley” (Kastin, 2012, p. 116). With no job prospects, bills and some debt to pay, the overall feeling of being a nobody in the United States, a nagging wife and children who are quickly assimilating mainstream values, his garden is what actually provides him with a sense of worth and dignity. “I will not allow the world to crush me,” he says, as he escapes into the “sanctity of the garden,” which had “become an oasis” (Kastin, 2012, p. 120) where he could alienate himself from such a harsh reality. In his garden, Fernando sees, smells, and hears the sight, sounds and smells of the island he has left, and the yard is transformed, becoming more fertile, more lush.

Further indication that this story possesses a few echoes of the author's ancestors is Mr. Noronha's artistic tastes. Kastin's grandparents, we learn in the author's web page but also in two interviews made to the author by Millicent Borges Accardi and Carolina Matos, were educated people who read, studied music and languages, wrote poetry, and had written newspaper articles criticizing Salazar's censorship. Furthermore, at the end of this story, Mr. Noronha's wife tells him that she had rented an apartment in San Francisco and that she was moving out with her children. The theme of the estranged husband in this story might be the author's attempt at reminiscing about his own grandfather who had settled in Brazil by himself while his wife (the author's grandmother) was living in the United States. In his attempt at recycling a few family recollections, Kastin has written an intriguing story about immigration, assimilation, the inability to adapt to life in a foreign country or the price one must pay when starting a new life elsewhere. In this short story-cycle, this realistic story is clearly the one that has no trait of magic or strangeness and is, therefore, an

oddity, some kind of fish out of water due to the volume's overall scope but, at least for this reader, the most interesting and thought-provoking one.

"Eduardo's Promise" recycles the classical theme of waiting patiently for the love of one's life and keeping promises as was the case with, for example, Penelope who awaited Odysseus's return but here rendered in a rather macabre, strange manner. Or maybe just about any Portuguese woman awaiting the return of her husband who was at sea – a navigator or a fisherman. Mad Marisa, we learn, had the habit of going for a walk on the beach and everyone knew her as the "mad woman of Praia Negra, though Marisa wasn't her real name" (Kastin, 2012., p. 123). The locals speculated on why she had become insane, with some saying that

she had always been mad, but most people believed it was losing her husband that drove her mad. Twenty years had passed since Eduardo had disappeared. Most believed he had left the islands and sailed off to Portugal or Madeira after a woman. There were rumors he had been seen years later. (Kastin, 2012, p. 123)

The neighbors looked after her, brought her home if she got lost and even brought her food and blankets. She kept on telling them that Eduardo would keep his promise and that someday he would return to her. One day, she finds a bone and then another and another. Within a few months, she had most of his skeleton assembled, neatly placed on top of a table and later on in his bed. This practice reminds us of such American gothic pieces of writing such as Edgar Allan Poe's story, "The Fall of the House of Usher" or even more so, William Faulkner's, "A Rose for Emily." She was elated and now had a purpose in life for the sea was returning him to her in pieces. She started to speak to him while knitting, relishing his company, a man whose weaknesses and faults, we learn, had been washed away and purged by the years at sea. As hinted above, this story taps from Portuguese cultural traits, namely the saga of endless Portuguese navigators and fishermen who had been shipwrecked, while their mothers or their widows in mourning awaited their return for years on end.

In this story, however, we learn that they had never been married because she started to make her wedding dress. This story ends with them being blessed by the priest during the *Semana do Mar* (sea week) festivities. They were as if dressed up for their own wedding and afterwards both sailed away on his dory, into the horizon, for their honeymoon. Eduardo has, in fact, kept his promise while Marisa, deep inside, had believed in him and waited for twenty long years as was the customary practice for Portuguese women of yore.

The penultimate story in this volume, "The Saint of Quebrado do Caminho," revolves around – and caricatures – the popular sexual dysfunction known as the *penis captivus*, which is said to be a rare occurrence in sexual intercourse when the muscles in the vagina clamp down on the penis more firmly than usual, making it impossible for the penis to withdraw from the vagina. This story begins with Constantino Maldonado lying in bed, incapable of uncoupling himself from Joaquina. Both are afraid of being caught in her house by her mother, Senhora Celestina. Both have different social backgrounds and Constantino cannot help but wonder



Why had he come here to Quebrado do Caminho, involving himself with a woman this far beneath him? She was just a poor country girl, after all, a peasant who didn't know anything beyond her own village... Here he was, a man of education – an aristocrat, if not exactly wealthy – quite literally stuck to an ignorant girl – a most embarrassing situation – unable to free himself, when all he wanted was to be as far away from her as possible. (Kastin, 2012, p. 132)

What seemed to be an attempt at immediate sexual gratification turns into an everlasting physical attachment, a nuisance which nobody is capable of putting an end to. Some country “doctor” is summoned, but is later followed up by a veterinarian, and afterwards Senhora Celestina, whose herbal concoctions are said to be powerful in “ward[ing] off any lingering evils” (Kastin, 2012, p. 135). Unfortunately, all are inefficient. They end up being married by a half blind priest so as to sanction their relationship. Maybe someone had cursed them out, shown them an evil eye, says Constantino to himself. “Perhaps the grandmother was a *benzedeira* of this village. This may all be witchcraft, fashioned to take advantage of my position, my name, my aristocracy” (Kastin, 2012, p. 136). Or was it, instead, “God punishing him for his sins” for having “taken advantage of the girl’s innocence and naïveté” (Kastin, 2012, p. 136). Their constant annoying each other finally ends when she gives birth to their baby and he magically disentangles himself and disappears. The local people began wondering if “Joaquina’s mother had put a disappearing spell upon her son-in-law” or if Joaquina “had taken to cannibalism and eaten the poor man, then fashioned a crib for the baby with the bones of her dead husband” (Kastin, 2012, p. 140). Through the years, Joaquina started to live like a recluse, dressed in black, and groomed her son for the priesthood. In such a parochial environment where people are shaped by their beliefs in superstition and witchcraft mixed in with religious beliefs and spirituality, a legend arose about “how one of the poorest souls in all of Pico, Maria Joaquina, came to be regarded as the Saint of Quebrado do Caminho” (Kastin, 2012, p. 140).

“Night Magic,” the last story in *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales* focuses on the notion of belonging or not belonging to a place where one was born; living a lifetime elsewhere; travelling the wide, wide world; of being uprooted and later on in life attempting to return to the place and original culture where one’s identity was formed. In this story, Gaspar Henriques is an Azorean Everyman who embodies the spirit of most Azoreans, of a people whose migration odysseys bear the imprint of restlessness, nostalgia and longing, of lives that had to shuffle back and forth between the islands and North America. As such, Everyman has his or her own story of success or failure, of adaptation or refusal to do so and melt one’s way into the mainstream. After many, many years, Gaspar Henriques returned to Pico to find out that, after all, he is neither an *americano* nor an *açoriano* and that this could be the epitaph written on his tombstone considering that most of this story takes place at the local cemetery in Quebrado do Caminho. Gaspar, we learn at the outset of this story,

was rootless. He was born on the island of Pico, raised on Faial until his late teens, then dragged by his parents to America, where he learned English, joined the Air Force, and became an American. But after many years working at a Portuguese newspaper, and an unsuccessful marriage, he decided he didn’t

belong in America, so he packed up and left for Europe. After eight months of roaming from one end of Europe to the other, he left. Traveling by boat, he drifted from country to country, from place to place, tried his hand at any number of jobs, to say nothing of relationships with women of every type, every color, every nationality imaginable. (Kastin, 2012, p. 141)

As noted above,

The people on Pico referred to him as the American, although he hardly considered himself as such. He had thought that perhaps he was a European, but he never found a place that could claim him. Part of the purpose of his travels was to find somewhere he felt he belonged. That was why he had come back to the Azores, where he had begun life. The volcano, he decided, was a part of him, and he of it. (Kastin, 2012, p. 142)

Lured by the call of his ancestral roots, after many years of living in Los Angeles, he returns to Pico, embodying the American spirit of a reversed Henry David Thoreau, to live a life of simplicity by his “Walden pond” (read: the Atlantic) he has made for himself: “He had a cow, a few chickens, a couple of pigs, and a scraggly old cat named Fofinho. He grew his own vegetables and fruit. His needs, he found, were few and simple” (Kastin, 2012, p. 141). Misfortune hounded him relentlessly and physically he is reported to have scars all over his body, often joking about being “just a patchwork man” (Kastin, 2012, p. 142).

A citizen of the world, “some compared him to Magellan” (Kastin, 2012, p. 142) with a broken nose and limping from a “lance wound in Morocco” (Kastin, 2012, p. 142). Moreover, we learn that during his travels around the world he had been “swept overboard in the Indian Ocean and lost in the Amazon. He had trekked through Nepal, island-hopped through the south Pacific, and crisscrossed Africa numerous times” (Kastin, 2012, p. 143). These passages underscore this character as someone who embodies an adventurous impulse, the navigator’s soul represented by the Portuguese explorers, namely during the Age of European Discoveries considering that these are all symbolical names and places in Portuguese history. Furthermore, these references attest to his desire in upholding his Portuguese roots even if he is torn between two cultures and, in the Azores, learning he actually belongs to none.

A visitor to the local cemetery, he befriends the ghost of Mariana, with whom he speaks to and, eventually, falls in love with. Nonchalantly, we learn she had died about a century ago, way before Gaspar Henriques had been born. Undoubtedly, the strangeness in this story lies in its lack of fictional mimesis but not so much in the moods and knowledge both fictional characters possess. Mariana personifies quite well the so-called *alma portuguesa*, the temper which is said to define most Portuguese while Gaspar Henriques’ scrapbook evinces his connoisseurship of Azorean geology, history, and culture. Mariana, we learn,

sang quietly, hushed words of bittersweet love, of parted lovers, of sorrow-filled lives and unfulfilled dreams, the haunting melodies and lyrics of the *fados*. She sang beautifully. And as she sang the wind swept up tiny fragments of tender partings, of early deaths, of steep, cobbled streets and ports of call in distant

lands, of loved ones sailing in the crowded holds of ships, of longing, intense undying longing and streams of tears. (Kastin, 2012, p. 150)

As for Gaspar Henriques' scrapbook, it was referred to as a "treasure" which contained

pictures of the island off Capelinhos, in Faial, and a list of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that had occurred on the islands over the centuries. There were numerous clippings of newspaper and magazine articles, with dates and locations, as well as pictures of ruined buildings, notations concerning the explosion in 1444 of the mountainside on São Miguel that resulted in Sete Cidades, as well as the 1563 eruption, which created the Lagoa do Fogo... (Kastin, 2012, p. 151)

Vamberto Freitas has noted that this book is a gem replete with literary allusions, music, and magic from the ill-fated King Sebastian. Furthermore, he argues, it even resembles a poem or prayer to the saints who are perfumed with incense and illuminated in the darkness of Azorean homes. Moreover, "Night Magic" is a sort of primer on Azorean culture, history, superstitions, folk tales, and geological occurrences for a mainstream American audience or even Portuguese American. The same applies to most of the remaining stories in *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales* discussed in the previous pages. Even if Kastin refuses to consider these stories as representative pieces of magic realism, his own unique version of 'magic realism' has enabled him to plunge into the very heart of Azorean mysticism and spirituality while tapping from the very soul of Azorean/Portuguese American ethnicity and, in the process, fleshing out some of the intricacies of this culture while maintaining a transatlantic dialogue.

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## Abstract

This essay attempts to contribute to the ongoing critical discussion on the short story-cycle and its tradition within the framework of emergent contemporary American literatures, more specifically American writings with a Portuguese ethnic resonance. The collection of stories which will be the basis for discussion in the ensuing pages is Darrell Kastin's *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales*, published in 2012.

This genre was conveniently appropriated by Latin-American writers and, more recently, has thrived with the emergence of postcolonialism, diasporic studies, multiethnic literatures, and hybridity. In the case of Darrell Kastin, an American writer of Portuguese and Russian descent, he finds in ethnicity, strangeness, folklore, tales, exoticism, and upholding his Azorean ethnic roots as rhetorical, fictional outlets to write mostly about the Azores and, sporadically, its diaspora in California. In this volume, he draws from his Azorean/Portuguese heritage when visiting his mother's and grandmother's country of birth and, in the process, crafts stories replete with mysteries, strangeness, myths, and folk tales he has heard about there and blends these with traits akin to magic realist writings.

## Resumo

O presente ensaio propõe-se contribuir para a discussão sobre o género do ciclo de contos e a sua tradição no quadro das literaturas emergentes contemporâneas norte-americanas, mais especificamente de textos norte-americanos contendo ressonâncias étnicas portuguesas. A coletânea de contos em apreço, de autoria de Darrell Kastin, que servirá de base para análise nas páginas seguintes, é *The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales*, publicada em 2012.

Este género literário foi inicialmente apropriado por alguns escritores latino-americanos, embora, mais recentemente, também se tenha desenvolvido na senda da crítica pós-colonial, dos estudos sobre a diáspora, das literaturas multiétnicas e do hibridismo. No caso concreto de Darrell Kastin, um escritor norte-americano de ascendências portuguesa e russa, descobriu no seio das temáticas étnicas, do estranho, da cultura popular, das lendas, do exotismo, assim como do seu apego às suas raízes açorianas, uma forma ficcional para escrever sobretudo sobre os Açores e, esporadicamente, a sua diáspora na Califórnia. Nesta coletânea, Kastin explora o seu legado açoriano/português aquando das suas visitas à terra natal da sua mãe e avó, de maneira a escrever histórias cheias de mistérios, de estranheza, mitos, e lendas que por lá ouviu e, assim, mistura estes elementos com outros inerentes à estética do realismo mágico.