Between "founding text" and "literary prank"

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BETWEEN "FOUNDING TEXT" AND "LITERARY PRANK": REASONING THE ROOTS OF NÍSIA FLORESTA'S *DIREITOS DAS MULHERES E INJUSTIÇA DOS HOMENS*

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This article highlights the polemic surrounding the origins of the Brazilian writer Nísia Floresta's first publication, Direitos das Mulheres e Injustiça dos Homens*. It challenges some of the widely differing claims that have been made for the text, and considers the impact of this question on a wider evaluation of Floresta's work.*

Keywords: Nísia Floresta, Mary Wollstonecraft, Brazil, Nineteenth Century, Feminism, Translation.

In 1832 a young woman by the name of Dionísia Gonçalves Pinto published an extraordinary text with the full title: *Direitos das Mulheres e Injustiça dos Homens, por Mistriss Godwin. Tradusido livremente do Francez para Portuguez, e offerecido às Brasileiras e Academicos Brasileiros por Nisia Floresta Brasileira Augusta*.[1] Under this pseudonym, she would go on to become one of Brazil's most significant women writers, living and publishing in Europe for much of her later life and participating in a wide range of social discourses, addressing questions of slavery, the indigenous population and political ideology. However, her first concern, and the subject of the majority of her published writing, was the position of women in society. For this reason, within her native Brazil, Nísia Floresta (1810-1885) has long been and continues to be considered the forerunner

[1] All quotes are taken from Constância Lima Duarte's 1989 re-edition. Henceforth abbreviated to *Direitos*.

of women's emancipation, and her early works to be founding texts of Brazilian feminism (see for example: Seidl 9; Câmara 57; Barreto; Duarte, "A Propósito" 167).

Floresta's first publication is central to this feminist reputation. For example, in his early study of the writer, Roberto Seidl wrote: "lendo-se este folheto conclui-se logo que a Nísia Floresta cabe, sem favor algum, o título de precursora do feminismo no Brasil e quiçá na América do Sul" (9). This text has traditionally been considered to be a translation of Mary Wollstonecraft, but in 1995 research by Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke revealed it to be a direct translation of an earlier English feminist tract, a fact which remains largely overlooked by or unknown to the Brazilian academic establishment.[2]

This article will begin by tracing the shifting interpretations and accompanying polemic that have surrounded *Direitos* and the reception of Pallares-Burke's research amongst scholars of women's writing in Brazil. Its primary purpose, however, is to question some of the claims Pallares-Burke makes regarding *Direitos* and Floresta's motivations for translating and publishing an obscure English feminist tract and, more importantly, to move the discussion and analysis of this translation, which has effectively lain dormant for the past decade, forward towards a less polemical and wider-ranging interpretation. I will then conclude with a brief consideration of what the true origins of the text mean for a study of Floresta's own subsequent work and for her position in the Brazilian canon.

Direitos is the first known work to be published in Brazil dealing directly with the issues of women's intellectual equality and their capacity, and right, to be educated and to participate in the active processes of society on an equal footing with men. Moreover, it is without doubt amongst the most radical and forceful in the claims it makes for women of any such text published throughout the nineteenth century, original or in translation. The title alone is direct and

[2] Pallares-Burke's article was first published in the *Caderno mais!* of the *Folha de São Paulo*, 10 September 1995. All quotes are taken from its re-publication the following year in a collection of essays by the author.

combative and its contents amount to a firm and succinct deconstruction of the traditional arguments for male supremacy and female submission, concluding that women possess all the attributes necessary to play a full and equal role to men in spheres as diverse and elevated as the teaching of the sciences, government and military employment. Furthermore, the text maintains a consistently caustic tone, belittling men's actions and ridiculing their irrational thought processes. With her name attached to such a revolutionary piece of writing, it is not surprising that Floresta has been hailed by many of her commentators as the precursor of women's emancipation in Brazil, as noted above**.**

Yet its surprising content is only the beginning of the significance of *Direitos* in the history of scholarly commentary on Floresta and her work. In fact, it is the question of the text's origins, and of Floresta's motivations for translating and publishing such an extraordinary work, which offer the most valuable insight into the writer's intellectual development. It is also through the continuing tension surrounding its history that *Direitos* has become indicative of the misinformation and mythologisation which continues to surround Floresta, her life and her work.

Ironically, the root cause of the myth that has shaped discussion of *Direitos* for most of the text's one hundred and seventy eight-year history, originates from Floresta's own hand. It is, ostensibly at least, the writer herself who states that the text is translated from the work of "Mistress Godwin", who, it must be concluded, is none other than Mary Wollstonecraft under her husband William Godwin's name. Due, presumably to the partial similarity in titles, it has therefore always been assumed that the text Floresta translated was Wollstonecraft's most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). For many years, studies of Floresta's work made the mistake of describing *Direitos* as a direct translation. This assumption passed unnoticed and without investigation for a hundred and fifty years, despite the fact that even a superficial familiarity with Wollstonecraft's work would have immediately revealed

striking differences between the two books in content, style and length.

After the apparent loss of all surviving copies of *Direitos* some time after 1940, this mistake might have passed unchallenged into the history books, but in the late 1980s the text was relocated and re-edited by Constância Lima Duarte. In the course of preparing the 1989 re-edition, Duarte made the first real comparison of Floresta's text with its purported original, revealing the massive differences between the two works. She therefore concluded that "escapando com ousadia da mera tradução literal", Floresta had assimilated Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas and rewritten them, shaped by her own experiences and motivations and by the specifically Brazilian context which she was addressing ("A Propósito" 19). *Direitos* was in fact, Duarte wrote, "*um outro* texto, o *seu* texto sobre os direitos das mulheres", in which "nossa autora se [coloca] em pé de igualdade com Wollstonecraft e até com o pensamento europeu" ("Posfácio" 107-8). It is not difficult to see the significance of this reappraisal of Floresta's first publication. Whilst the very fact that she had translated the work of the famous English feminist had earned her the title of "precursora do feminismo no Brasil", noted above, as the original author of such an early and powerful text, Floresta's place was secure, not only in the Brazilian canon, but alongside any of the great feminist writers of the period. As a "nova escritura", Duarte could justifiably claim, "temos sim, nesta 'tradução livre', talvez o texto fundante do feminismo brasileiro" ("Posfácio" 108).

Then, in 1995, a fascinating discovery turned all previous comment on *Direitos* upside down. Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke observed striking similarities between *Direitos* and a little known work entitled *De l'Égalité des Deux Sexes*, published in 1673 by a French Cartesian thinker, François Poulain de la Barre.[3] In it she found "*ipsis litteris*, muitos

[3] Translated into English as *The Woman as Good as the Man: Or the Equality of Both Sexes* in 1677 (Seidel 499). See Seidel's article and Clarke's introduction to his 1990 translation of the text for more information about Poulain de la Barre, his work, and the intellectual context in which he was writing.

dos trechos mais incisivos da obra [de Floresta], traduzidos, diga-se de passagem, com grande talento e mestria por Nísia Floresta" (176). However, further investigation revealed that it was not through direct contact with the work of Poulain that the Frenchman's Cartesian defence of equality had found a new audience a hundred and sixty years later on the other side of the Atlantic. In 1739, an English writer, who remains hidden behind the pseudonym "Sophia, A Person of Quality", published a sixty two-page feminist pamphlet: *Woman not Inferior to Man: or A Short and Modest Vindication of the Natural Right of the Fair-Sex to a Perfect Equality of Power, Dignity and Esteem, with the Men* (henceforth abbreviated to *Woman not Inferior*), in which (s)he reproduced, without credit, large parts of Poulain's text.[4] It was this text, Pallares-Burke realised, that Floresta had encountered and in fact translated "*literalmente* e na sua *totalidade*" (177).[5]

Yet this remarkable information, which fundamentally refashions the conclusions to be drawn from Floresta's text, was not well received in Brazil. In fact, to all intents and purposes, it was simply not received at all. Three years after Pallares-Burke's research was first published, an article appeared in response with the title: "Nísia Floresta: Incompreensão em relação à sua Genialidade". In it, Constância Lima Duarte stated that it was not Pallares-Burke's discoveries, but "o tratamento e a utilização dados a essas mesmas descobertas" that she wished to contest ("Nísia Floresta: Incompreensão" 253). It is perhaps not surprising that Pallares-Burke's description of *Direitos* as a "plágio-tradução de outro plágio" and an "ousada travessura literária" (Pallares-Burke 178 & 184) should have caused dismay, and Duarte set out to challenge these polemical accusations, questioning whether a contemporary definition

[4] Sophia's use of Poulain de la Barre appears to have been first noted in 1916 (see Blanchard 381).

[5] It is important to note that when referring to Sophia's arguments, as I will do through the course of this article, many are in fact the arguments of Poulain de la Barre. For simplicity, however, I will take the anonymous English writer as my usual point of reference.

of plagiarism can be applied to the literary practices and authorial conventions of another age, and dismissing the notion of deliberate trickery implicit in the word "travessura" ("Nísia Floresta: Incompreensão" 254).

It is interesting to note here that whilst it is certainly possible to contest the accusation of deliberate deceit, as I will discuss below, the term "travessura" is not entirely without merit, for Floresta has indeed succeeded in hoodwinking the Brazilian establishment, intentionally or otherwise, for the better part of two centuries. It seems probable that it is in large part due to her translation of "Mistriss Godwin", that the genuine *Vindication* remains without a published translation in Brazil. In fact, for the uninformed, this error is still being perpetuated: a search for Mary Wollstonecraft in the catalogues of both the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro and of the library of the Universidade de São Paulo even now brings up Floresta's *Direitos*. (The USP library also possesses English editions of *Vindication*, the Biblioteca Nacional does not.)

It is not the case, however, that Duarte did not seek to contest Pallares-Burke's fundamental discovery. On the contrary, she reiterates the claims she had previously made for Floresta's text (discussed above), focusing only on the influence of Poulain de la Barre's work on the text and apparently treating Sophia's work as nothing more than an additional source of influence ("Nísia Floresta: Incompreensão" 253), thus tacitly denying Pallares-Burke's identification of *Direitos* as a direct translation of *Woman not Inferior*. This is a position she has maintained in subsequent works, most notably her 2005 publication *Nísia Floresta: a primeira feminista do Brasil*. In this text, which contains a short analysis of Floresta's writings on women alongside extracts of her work, she continues to claim *Direitos* as an essentially original text, stating that as well as Wollstonecraft, Floresta "buscou inspiração [...] em outros autores europeus, como Poulain de la Barre, Sophie, e mesmo [...] Olympe de Gouges" (17-8).

Aside from Duarte's article, Pallares-Burke's extremely significant discovery has provoked virtually no response and

knowingly or otherwise, references to Floresta in other recent historical and literary studies also continue to propagate the myth.[6] It is clear that Pallares-Burke's article has not received the coverage or led to the kind of re-evaluation that might have been expected.[7] On the contrary, Floresta's "free translation of Mary Wollstonecraft" remains absolutely central to her construction and reputation. More than that, it has become a sort of epithet from which Floresta seems unable to escape, and the translating of Wollstonecraft is unquestionably, and reductively, the act of writing by which she has come to be known and defined, within Brazil and beyond.

Whilst the limited academic response to Pallares-Burke's research means that many in the field of women's literature and history in Brazil no doubt remain unaware of its existence, it seems possible that the ongoing lack of critical

[6] Two such examples can be found in the second, expanded edition of Emília Viotti da Costa's study of nineteenth-century Brazil, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories*, published in 2000 (257); and in Maria Helena Mendonça's article "Nísia Floresta: romantismo e consciência reformadora" published in the collection *Desafiando o Canône* in 2001 (29).

[7] A very few other references and/or responses to Pallares-Burke's research can be found in the decade following the publication of her article (Frehse; Martins; and Dépêche). The first, published in the *Revista de Antropologia*, is a review of Pallares-Burkes's collection of essays *Nísia Floresta, O Carapuceiro e outros ensaios de tradução cultural* (in which her article on the true origins of *Direitos* appears). The second is a short and for the most part extremely critical commentary on the process of "rediscovering" nineteenth-century women writers, in which the author refers to Pallares-Burke's research but draws attention exclusively to the notion of *Direitos* as a plagiarism. The third is an article looking at the subversive practices of women translators, which takes Floresta and *Direitos* as a central example. However, despite referring to Pallares-Burke's research, the author appears to have misunderstood her findings and in fact takes her lead from Duarte, stating that *Direitos* reveals the influence of Wollstonecraft, Sophia and Poulain de la Barre, and referring to it as "uma montagem toda pessoal" which reveals Floresta's "infidelidade criativa" (Dépêche). To date, the only studies to take Pallares-Burke's findings as a starting point for a wider re-evaluation of Floresta's work and position in the Brazilian canon are Owen's discussion of Floresta's contemporary Ana de Barandas (discussed later in this essay), and Liddell's PhD thesis.

engagement with such a valuable piece of research may also reflect resentment of the implied accusations of plagiarism or deceit contained in Pallares-Burke's article, and more importantly, a reluctance to see Floresta's contribution reduced once more to that of mere translator. As faithful translator of another writer's work, Floresta can no longer be credited with the touches of rhetorical magic Duarte identified in *Direitos* ("Posfácio" 118), nor can she be positioned on an equal footing with great European feminists such as Wollstonecraft (at least with reference to her first publication).

Regardless of this problematic on-going canonisation of Floresta's early literary contribution, the fact remains that at the age of twenty two Floresta encountered, translated and, for whatever reason, misattributed the anonymous Sophia's *Woman Not Inferior*. This act, remarkable in its own right, brings an entirely new set of challenges and implications to an analysis of *Direitos*. Moreover, Floresta would not have made her translation from the English original, but from a French translation, a fact we can be sure of, not only because Floresta states as much in the full title of her publication, but also because she was fluent in French, and possibly Italian, at this time, but not English.[8] That Floresta knew the text in its French version is extremely significant and must influence any consideration of *Direitos*. It is not something that Pallares-Burke takes into account in her aforementioned article, and this omission puts into question a number of the conclusions she draws regarding both the quality of the translation and the circumstances surrounding its publication as the work of "Mistriss Godwin".

In terms of the translation itself, a reading of the French version serves to both enhance and diminish Floresta's reputation as represented by Pallares-Burke. On the one

[8] *Woman Not Inferior to Man* was translated into French in 1750 with the title *La Femme n'est pas Inférieure à l'Homme* and the same edition was republished the following year, this time bearing the title *Le Triomphe des Dames*, (see Garnier 709). I have consulted an example of *Le Triomphe des Dames* (henceforth abbreviated to *Le Triomphe*), from which all quotes are taken.

hand, she identifies two of the most serious errors of translation in which the original meaning is completely lost, but a comparison with the French version reveals that both these mistakes originated there, and that Floresta had faithfully translated the text she had before her (Pallares-Burke 179).[9] However, she also points out several instances in which the Brazilian text differs in some small but significant way from the English original, drawing certain conclusions about Floresta's motivations from these alterations. Once again, a reading of the French translation does much to negate the validity of these conclusions.

One of the most significant alterations noted by Pallares-Burke (179), appears in an accusation of men's lack of reason in matters of religion, and the power of custom as a legitimising tool. Sophia writes:

> Upon the strength of this prejudice, they adhere to it as the only true one, and without ever examining into it, or comparing it with others; they condemn all beside it as erroneous. Is not this the case with most of the *Men*, our clergy not excepted? (5)

In *Direitos*, on the other hand, we find the following:

> Além deste prejuízo eles se ligam fortemente a ela como a única verdadeira, e sem se darem ao trabalho de examinar ou compará-la, condenam todas as outras como errôneas. Eis aqui precisamente o caso em que se acha a maior parte dos homens: os Judeos, os Mahometanos, os Pagãos, todos se conduzem da mesma maneira. (27)

But it is not Floresta who makes this extremely significant alteration. She simply translated, word for word, the French passage: "voilà précisement le cas dans lequel se trouvent la plus grande partie des hommes: les Juifs, les Mahometans, les Payens, tous se conduisent de même" (*Le Triomphe* 13). The question of religion provides a particularly interesting study of the transmission and adaptation of ideas from Poulain de la Barre through to Floresta. The challenge to

[9] The two examples quoted appear respectively on pages 31 & 37 in *Woman not Inferior*, 72 & 86 in *Le Triomphe*, and 58 & 65 in *Direitos*.

question faith presented by the above quote from Sophia is less surprising when we consider that it in fact originates from a Huguenot who began his clerical career as a Catholic priest. Curiously, Poulain also advocated the ordination of women, but this was clearly too revolutionary even for Sophia, who identifies the ministry as the one office rightly barred to women.[10]

Later in her essay, Pallares-Burke notes several alterations which she suggests reflect Floresta's desire to make the text more radical and emphatic in its claims for women's superiority, and to tone down moments which might be used against women (188). Two of the four alterations she identifies for this purpose have their origin in the French text. Moreover, although Floresta is responsible for the shift from "notre Sexe va aussi loin que les hommes" (*Le Triomphe* 88 [Sophia 38]), to "o nosso sexo […] excede muito aos homens" (Floresta, *Direitos* 66), I would suggest that little can be read into this alteration, since it goes no further than the predominant sentiment of the original text, serving only to make the passage cited above more consistent with the claim made in the following paragraph that "plusieurs femmes ont surpassé les hommes" (*Le Triomphe* 89 [Sophia 38; Floresta, *Direitos* 66]).

With regard to a move to tone down the text, however, Pallares-Burke identifies one interesting modification which is borne out in a comparison with the French translation. As evidence of men's tyranny, and more importantly their lack of reason, Sophia recalls witnessing

[10] Having noted women's aptitude for teaching, Poulain goes on to observe that "l'employ le plus approchant de celuy de Maître, c'est d'estre Pasteur, & l'on ne peut montrer qu'il y ait autre chose que la coûtume qui en éloigne les femmes" (Poulain, 1673, 163-4). "[...] no one can show that there is anything apart from custom which precludes women from it [the profession of pastor or minister]" (Poulain, 1990, 106). Sophia, on the other hand, concludes that "with regard [...] to divinity, our natural capacity has been restrain'd by a positive law of God", before suggesting that God arranged it thus in the hope of at least diverting a few of the men from their "general tendency [...] to impiety and irreligion" (45) (*Le Triomphe* 104-5; *Direitos* 73-4).

> a journeyman taylor's beating his wife about the ears with a neck of mutton, to make her know, as he said, her *sovereign lord* and *master*. And yet this, perhaps, is as strong an argument as the best of their sex is able to produce, tho' conveyed in a greasy light. (15)

Pallares-Burke suggests that Floresta softens this tale in order to "impedir que, caindo em mãos erradas, servisse de inspiração para maiores tiranias e grosserias com as mulheres" (188), and it appears that this is indeed what she does. Curiously, we in fact see two stages of softening across the translations. In the French translation the unfortunate woman suffers the proportionately lesser fate of having a loaf thrown at her head (36), whilst in *Direitos* the husband appears to show considerably more restraint. We are told only that he puts "um sinal na testa da mulher" (40). How the mark is made is left to the imagination (a loaf would certainly leave a mark), seeming to confirm the suggestion that Floresta sought to mask the cruelty central to this passage. This concern for her fellow women's welfare is commendable, though it is probably underscored by a desire not to offend yet further a readership which, after all, would have been predominantly male. It shows that Floresta was able to engage actively and thoughtfully with the text she translated, but it should also be noted that in sanitising this particular passage, the power of the original argument, in which such base behaviour starkly proves men's lack of reason and ridicules their imagined superiority, is all but lost from the Brazilian version.[11]

As the above examples demonstrate, a comparison of *Direitos* with the French text known to Floresta reveals her to be an even more faithful and precise translator than Pallares-Burke suggests. Whilst this excuses Floresta from

[11] Several other small but significant variations, which Pallares-Burke does not comment on, but which might have offered an interesting insight into Floresta's own position are also found to have their origin in the French translation. For example, in *Woman not Inferior*, Sophia observes that men mistakenly think women "weak enough to be wheedled out of our liberty and property" (29), but in *Le Triomphe* (67), and therefore also in *Direitos* (55), the specific issue of property has been omitted, replaced by rather more nebulous and less challenging "legítimos direitos".

some glaring mistranslations, it also denies her almost any meaningful input into the text, definitively ending the claim that she moderated her translation to better fit the national context or her own particular concerns and motivations. However, once *Direitos* is acknowledged as a direct translation, the content of the text ceases to be of primary concern in a study of this publication. Instead, what must take precedence is the fascinating and challenging question of why Floresta claimed that her direct translation of *Woman not Inferior* was a free translation of Mary Wollstonecraft and it is primarily to this thorny issue that Pallares-Burke turns her attention in her essay.[12] Once again, though, the mediatory effect of the French translation, missing from the conclusions drawn by the Brazilian scholar, has an important part to play in addressing this question.

Pallares-Burke begins by stressing that Floresta clearly did not seek to claim personal credit as the original author of *Direitos*, something which, it is observed, she could easily have attempted, considering the obscurity of the text (184). However, having cleared Floresta of this potential accusation, the conclusions she goes on to draw are themselves fundamentally accusatory in their tone and nature. As mentioned previously, Pallares-Burke refers to *Direitos* as a trick, or fraud, and a plagiarism. The starting point for these accusations is the belief that Floresta knowingly and deliberately mislead her readers in attributing her translation to "Mistriss Godwin". Her position is also dependent on the assumption that Floresta had encountered and read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In fact this assumption is as central to Pallares-Burke's argument as it was to Duarte's. Pallares-Burke suggests that Floresta chose not to translate Wollstonecraft's text because its arguments were not radical enough for her at that time. Observing the striking parallels between the unconventional, at times scandalous, lives of Floresta and

[12] As a direct translation, an analysis of *Direitos* also demands a detailed consideration of how Sophia's (and Poulain's) ideas influenced Floresta's own subsequent writing, a question which is beyond the scope of this article.

Wollstonecraft,[13] she concludes that despite rejecting her arguments in favour of Sophia's, the Brazilian writer would have felt a profound connection with Wollstonecraft, and therefore attributed *Direitos* to the great feminist writer in homage to and recognition of this fellow independent woman who, like Floresta herself, had challenged the conventions of her time and born the brunt of public disapproval (Pallares-Burke 185-6).[14]

Pallares-Burke does go on to acknowledge that in later works Floresta's approach becomes far less revolutionary, even coming to see Wollstonecraft's ideas as too radical (189),[15] and she attributes this dramatic shift to Floresta's age. Whilst it is true that the ten years that passed before Floresta published an original work of her own saw many changes in the young writer's life, the passage of time does not seem like an adequate explanation for the fundamental differences between Sophia's claim to participation at the highest levels of public office, and the focus on feminine virtue and domestic duty which characterises all of Floresta's work on women from 1842 onwards. Moreover, although Floresta first published *Direitos* in 1832, copies were put on sale in Rio de Janeiro in 1839, only three years before the appearance of *Conselhos à minha filha*, her first

[13] Wollstonecraft had an illegitimate daughter by her relationship to Gilbert Imlay, twice attempted suicide and contracted an extremely unorthodox marriage to William Godwin, when already pregnant with their daughter. (Todd xxxvi). Although details are unclear, Floresta appears to have abandoned her first husband, and later settled with a partner of her own choice, whom it is not known if she was able to marry. The scandal was to follow her for many years.

[14] Pallares-Burke is by no means the only scholar to observe the similarities in the writers' lives. Adauto da Câmara, writing in the 1940s, also suggested that Floresta related intimately with Wollstonecraft's circumstances (and those of her daughter, Mary Shelley) and, believing *Direitos* to be a translation of *Vindication*, concluded that this personal connection lead Floresta to translate her English counterpart's work (Câmara 86).

[15] Floresta's apparent rejection of Wollstonecraft's radicalism appears in her 1853 publication *Opúsculo Humanitário*: "Mas deixemos a Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, Sièyés, Legouvé, etc. a defesa dos direitos do sexo. A nossa tarefa é outra, e cremos que mais conveniente será às sociedades modernas: a educação da mulher" (29).

original work, in which she describes the importance of a solid moral education for girls in order to produce modest, virtuous women. It is unlikely that the role Floresta envisaged for women in society, or even the claims she thought appropriate to publish, had changed so dramatically in such a short space of time.

It therefore seems fair to suggest that it may in fact have been the less revolutionary arguments, those which provide the foundation to Sophia's exuberant claims for women, that held the greatest appeal for Floresta. The fundamentals of female intellectual equality, women's right to education, and men's repression of that right on which Sophia constructs her arguments, are concepts which also provide a constant backdrop to Floresta's own discussion of women's role in society. Moreover (unlike the fractional alterations that Pallares-Burke takes as evidence of the appeal of Sophia's radicalism), the short prologue which Floresta added to her translation offers a genuine insight into the writer's own views and motivations, and it clearly indicates her concern for the dual issues of education and virtue. This prologue is discussed in more detail below.

It is, of course, the notion that Floresta read and rejected the work of Mary Wollstonecraft more than any other factor, which underlies Pallares-Burke's belief that she was attracted to the more radical aspects of Sophia's *Woman not Inferior*. It is this assumption that I now wish to question. Floresta was no doubt familiar with Mary Wollstonecraft as a literary figure; she would not have attributed her translation to her otherwise. However, it is worth noting that Floresta uses Wollstonecraft's married name, yet she was only to become William Godwin's wife in 1797, five years after the publication of *Vindication*, and of its French translation, which was also published in 1792. Had Floresta seen a copy of *Vindication* in English or French (the language in which she would have read it), its author would not have been named as Mistress, or Mrs, Godwin. It therefore seems more likely that the Brazilian writer claimed her translation to be of "Mistriss Godwin" because that was the name by which she knew the writer, through second-

hand reference to her life and her work. In fact, there is no evidence to indicate that Floresta had read *Vindication* or indeed any of Wollstonecraft's work at this time, and the use of her name certainly cannot be taken as confirmation that she had. This idea is confirmed by references to her in Floresta's subsequent writing, by which time it is clear that she was familiar with her work, in which Floresta uses the maiden name by which Wollstonecraft was, and is, generally known as a writer.

Even embracing the assumption that Floresta had read *Vindication* by 1832, there remains another, more obvious explanation for her decision not to translate it, which must be at least considered alongside the notion that its arguments were too conservative. From a purely practical viewpoint, a translation of Wollstonecraft's text would not have been an easy task. It is a far larger work than Sophia's pamphlet, and much less coherently structured and argued. It is disjointed and repetitive, making it difficult to read in comparison to the succinct and well-ordered *Woman not Inferior*. Moreover, in terms of content, Wollstonecraft looks in detail at a specifically British context, dedicating considerable space to a consideration of the relative states of women in different social classes. Sophia, on the other hand, takes a loftier, more universal overview of women, their abilities and their general state of subjection. It is easy to see why Floresta might have seen *Woman not Inferior*, with its simple, clearly expressed ideas, as a more accessible text both to translate and to read, and therefore likely to have a greater impact.

Whatever her reasons for translating Sophia, either in preference to or, very likely, in the absence of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, we are left with the question of why Floresta then attributed the text to Wollstonecraft. It is here that the significance of the French translation of *Woman not Inferior* returns to the fore: the most important factor that must be understood when considering her motivations is that Floresta did not know the name of the English author, albeit a pseudonym. She could not have attributed her work to Sophia, because neither edition of the French translation

includes that name. If the edition to which she had access was that of 1750, all she would have known was that it was "traduit de l'Anglois", if it was the 1751 edition which had made the surprising journey across the Atlantic, this information would have been expanded to "traduit de l'Anglois de Miledi P***" (Garnier 709).[16]

It seems unlikely that Floresta would have genuinely believed the text to be the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, since it would have shown the date of publication as 1750/51 and Wollstonecraft was only born in 1759. However, we cannot be sure of the extent of the still very young Floresta's knowledge regarding the English writer and a genuine mistake of this kind cannot be ruled out. It is also important to note that it is Floresta's subsequent biographers who have assumed that *Direitos* is specifically a translation of *Vindication*. In truth the titles differ markedly in their implication, and if Floresta had, in all innocence, believed the text before her to be Wollstonecraft's most famous work, it seems more likely that she would have reproduced the title accurately in order to attract attention and identify the work clearly.

What is more probable is that, keen to attribute the text to an original author and lacking any indication of who that might have been, Floresta shrewdly opted for a name that would be well-known to her readers, thus enhancing the appeal of the book. As described above, Pallares-Burke observes that Floresta clearly did not wish to pass *Direitos* off as her own work, and naming an original author would certainly have emphasised the fact that the text was a translation. Pallares-Burke makes this observation in order to credit Floresta with some literary honesty (before going on to accuse her of a sort of plagiarism by proxy), but it may, in fact, have suited Floresta very well at that time to highlight

[16] In fact it is unclear who this "Miledi P***" is meant to refer to, for although the P appears to reflect the translator, Puisieux, Garnier concludes that the translator is more likely to have been Philippe-Florent de Puisieux than his wife Madeleine Darsant de Puisieux, to whom the text has traditionally been accredited (711). Moreover, "miledi" was a term of address for upper class English women and therefore seems to be referring to the original author.

the non-originality of her publication. By using a translation to air her own opinions and concerns, Floresta's secondary position as translator would have offered her a degree of protection from the criticisms which she knew would be levelled against her. She was clearly well aware that even to translate another's, and a foreigner's, controversial views would be considered inappropriate, writing in the dedication with which she introduces *Direitos* that she hopes her readers will not criticise her "temeridade" (22). More specifically, by naming the already scandalous English writer as author, Floresta may have hoped to further deflect disapproval away from her own role as messenger. The absence of contemporary critical comment on *Direitos*, observed by Hilda Flores ("Nísia Floresta" 103), may reflect the success of this ploy. Furthermore, by stressing the European origins of the text, Floresta would have tapped into the lucrative market produced by the obsession with French and English products, fashions and ideas which had gripped the educated sections of Brazilian society since the opening of the nation's ports in 1808.

Pallares-Burke suggests that it was not only the famous name but also the infamous details of Wollstonecraft's private life which would have attracted readers to a translation of her work (186), and it is certainly likely that the intimacies of the English writer's life would have been well known in Brazil; perhaps rather better known than her literary production. It is also undeniable that certain clear similarities can be observed between these incidents and Floresta's early life. However, it is for this very reason that I would challenge the suggestion that Floresta's motivation for attributing *Direitos* to Wollstonecraft lay in her recognition of these similarities.

In early-nineteenth-century Brazilian society, where a woman's worth was entirely dependent on her reputation, and more particularly on her sexual reputation, Wollstonecraft's life would have been viewed with horror, and it is certainly possible that this would have biased people's opinion of her writings. Whilst Floresta had certainly had scandal in her young life, and may well have

empathised with the circumstances of Wollstonecraft's private life, it seems extraordinary to suggest that she would have wished to pay homage to these parallels and thus draw the reader's attention to her own history. Her reputation as an adulteress is one from which she would surely have been desperate to escape as she began her new life with her chosen partner and their daughter, particularly if we believe that she was seeking work as a teacher in Recife in the early 1830s, as Duarte suggests (*Nísia Floresta* 24). It therefore seems far more likely that, assuming Floresta was aware that the text she had translated was not Wollstonecraft's work, her decision to falsely attribute *Direitos* to her stems from an astute awareness of the success which such a polemical author would secure her translation, and not a conscious desire to link her own name and reputation with Wollstonecraft's.

There is, of course, a further possible explanation for the confusion regarding the identity of the text and its author, one which would absolve Floresta of any real part in the mystery. Bearing in mind that the French translation of *Woman not Inferior* which somehow made its way across the Atlantic and into Floresta's hands was already eighty years old, it is highly likely that the original title page would have been damaged, perhaps to the point of illegibility, or even missing altogether. It is not difficult to imagine that a bookseller, either in France or Brazil, keen to enhance the saleability of his stock, might have produced a new cover stating the original author to be Wollstonecraft. In this case Floresta could have translated a text which had been presented to her as the work of the famous English writer.[17]

The remaining issue, of course, is why Floresta claimed *Direitos* to be a free translation. Pallares-Burke observes that "a alegação de uma tradução livre" would have afforded Floresta "uma dose de originalidade" (184), and it is certainly not easy to view this particular detail in any other light than as a calculated play for additional authorial credit.

[17] The practice of booksellers adding to or altering the information provided by a title-page has been recorded. See, for example, Finkelstein and McCleery 70; Vliet 256; Brook 143.

Whatever other confusions and obfuscations may have influenced Floresta's knowledge of the text's origins, she was absolutely conscious of the fact that she had rendered a complete and direct translation. The only other possible interpretation is that, doubting her own credentials and fearing criticism of her work, she chose to identify *Direitos* as a free translation to protect herself against accusations of poor translation. This idea finds some support in Floresta's dedication, in which she is at pains to note "a incapacidade de meus talentos para fazer uma tradução digna de vós", expressing her hope that her readers will forgive her errors and recognise her good intentions (21).

What the above discussion reveals, above all else, is that the possible explanations for Floresta's surprising act of authorial misattribution are all but endless. Moreover, none escape the realm of speculation and it is unlikely that evidence will ever come to light to change this unstable, malleable situation. In a moment of unintentional irony, having resolutely side-stepped and thus denied the slip in Floresta's status which inevitably accompanies Pallares-Burke's revelation of the true origins of *Direitos*, Constância Lima Duarte concludes, "sem dúvida, teria sido bem diferente e mais simples, se [Floresta] tivesse realizado simplesmente uma tradução literal e se colocasse como porta-voz servil de discursos alheios" ("Nísia Floresta: Incompreensão" 259).

This is, in fact, precisely what Floresta did do, yet this knowledge has done nothing to simplify an analysis of *Direitos*. On the contrary, it has given rise to a series of intriguing and unanswerable questions, which make Floresta's first venture into the world of letters all the more complex and challenging.

As mentioned above, the one genuinely enlightening feature of *Direitos*, from which it is possible to draw clear and firm conclusions about her intentions, is the brief dedication with which Floresta introduces her translation. This dedication provides a valuable insight into her motivations for publishing *Direitos* and the effects she hoped the book might produce on the "brasileiras e acadêmicos

brasileiros" to whom it is dedicated (21-2). First addressing her female readers, whom she refers to as "caras Patrícias" (21), she urges them to educate themselves and endeavour to remain virtuous at all times, such that,

> sobressaindo essas qualidades amáveis e naturais ao nosso sexo, que até o presente têm sido abatidas pela desprezível ignorância em que os homens, parece de propósito, têm nos conservado, eles reconheçam que o Céu nos há destinado para merecer na Sociedade uma mais alta consideração. (21)

Here we find convincing evidence that Floresta was already expressly concerned with the dual issues of education and feminine virtue, a fact which also contradicts the notion that she might have been prepared to draw attention to her own less than virtuous parallels with Wollstonecraft.

Moreover, the suggestion that women deserve a "mais alta consideração" in society is markedly different from the claims made by Sophia. After all, a higher regard is by no means synonymous with the higher position demanded by Sophia in her declaration of women's equal ability to be professors, lawyers, generals, politicians etc. However, Floresta goes on to observe the miserable condition of women: "que até em pequenos empregos não podemos desenvolver nossos talentos naturais" (22), indicating that she was not opposed to the notion of women participating in the public sphere of paid employment, although such a timid appeal is still a far cry from the demands made by Sophia's English text.

Floresta's appeal to Brazil's academics is equally significant and revealing of her thinking. She clearly specifies that it is to the new generation of young academics, the "mocidade Acadêmica" (21), that she directs her translation. Her hopes for these young men are clear: "algum dia nas vagas horas de vossos altos ministérios, lançareis vistas de justiça sobre o nosso sexo em geral" (22). In addressing the young men who were expected to take responsibility for the direction of the newly independent nation, it becomes clear that Floresta saw in the publication

of *Direitos* a possible means of influencing the way they saw the female condition, and thus in turn influence the future of the laws and norms which maintained that condition. However, she is not seduced by impossible dreams of revolution, immediately going on to qualify the changes she hopes to see: "…se não para empreender uma metamorfose na ordem presente das coisas, ao menos para conseguirmos uma melhor sorte" (22).

This statement, a clear attempt to lessen the challenge posed by the text and reassure her male readers, is in fact a reiteration of a stronger and more surprising disclaimer issued by the English original (and translated via the French by Floresta):

> What I have hitherto said, has not been with an intention to stir up any of my own sex to revolt against the *Men*, or to invert the present order of things, with regard to *government* and *authority*. No, let them stand as they are. (Sophia 56 [Floresta, *Direitos* 89; *Le Triomphe* 127-8])

Moreover, Floresta's own focus on virtue and education, observed above, and her call for women to be afforded a higher consideration, also find an echo in the final pages of the text she translated. Sophia suggests that she means only to show "that they [women] are not so despicable as the *Men* wou'd have them believe themselves" (Sophia 56 [Floresta, *Direitos* 89; *Le Triomphe* 128]), and observes how happy men and women would be "wou'd both sexes but resolve *each* to give the *other* that just esteem which is their due" (Sophia 57 [Floresta, *Direitos* 90; *Le Triomphe* 130]). It is extremely significant that it should be the rhetorical climb-down of the conclusion to *Woman not Inferior* which finds its way into Floresta's foreword, rather than the forceful, revolutionary arguments which characterise the majority of the text. What Floresta's own contribution appears to indicate, then, is that it was the more conservative foundational elements of *Woman not Inferior* which attracted her to the text, and these elements remain in place throughout her own subsequent literary career.

As discussed above, Pallares-Burke's research inevitably changes an analysis of *Direitos* and of the position it affords Floresta in Brazil's feminist canon. In the end, the radical tone and content of the text cannot be claimed for Floresta's own work, and her feminism must be viewed within the context of conservative, nineteenth-century representations of women's domestic and relational identity and value. Most significantly, as a straight-forward translation, *Direitos* can no longer be identified as the "texto fundante" of Brazilian feminism.

In 1837 the gaúcha Ana de Barandas wrote a short Cartesian dialogue, which was published as part of a collection entitled *O Ramalhete, ou flores escolhidas no jardim da imaginação* (1845). This *Diálogos*, in which Barandas defends women's right to political participation, clearly reveals the influence of Floresta's translation, and it is almost certain that the two women were acquainted, and probably friends, since they lived close to each other in Porto Alegre and were related by marriage (Flores, "Ana Euridice" 40-2). Hilary Owen has observed that, based on the notion of a nativist refashioning of European feminist thinking as the marker of the founding of Brazilian feminism, as has previously been claimed by Duarte for Floresta's *Direitos*, it is in fact Barandas' text which initiates this reworking. Therefore it is Barandas who has the strongest claim to the title of "Brazil's first feminist" (Owen 235). It is apparent that the effect on Floresta's status in the feminist canon is multiple and significant, and perhaps explains why Pallares-Burke's research has not breached the wall of conventional scholarship on Floresta, allowing the writer's "first feminist" credentials to continue undiminished.

However, whilst perhaps no longer able to claim the title for herself, Floresta and her translation almost certainly played a central role in the birth of feminist writing in Brazil, and through this connection, the text which could well be Brazilian feminism's new "texto fundante", Barandas's *Diálogos*, also reveals its surprising Cartesian influence. Floresta's status, as it has been constructed to date, inevitably suffers in this reappraisal of the origins and

interpretation of *Direitos*, yet her contribution must still be afforded the value it deserves. Pallares-Burke observes that even to translate such a radical text "era, por si só, um ato revolucionário" (189), and even as a translation, *Direitos* remains the first rallying-cry in the fight for Brazilian women's emancipation and therefore an extremely significant moment in the development of Brazilian feminism.

Furthermore, though always considerably less militant in tone than *Diálogos*, Floresta stands out from Barandas and her other Brazilian contemporaries in one important regard. Unlike them, she continued to write and publish extensively on the subject of women's condition, their right to better education and to a higher regard in society, throughout her life, eventually producing a body of work that represents a concerted, albeit fundamentally conservative, appeal for an improvement in women's condition and status. It is in this sustained concern for and contribution to the discussion of women's position in society that Floresta's influential place in Brazil's feminist canon is secured.

That said, *Direitos* should be afforded no less importance in a consideration of Floresta's work. A number of the core arguments of *Woman not Inferior* can be traced through her subsequent publications, but the use these arguments are put to, and the conclusions she draws from them differ markedly from the English text. A consideration of these similarities and differences is now central to an analysis of Floresta's writing since, as a direct translation, *Direitos/ Woman not Inferior*, and the Cartesian rationalism of Poulain de la Barre, which they carry, must be viewed as an early influence, as well as an early production. Moreover, Floresta's choice of translation offers a valuable insight into her thinking at that early time: whether she was primarily attracted to the most conservative or most challenging aspects of Sophia's work, it must be assumed that she did not fundamentally disagree with the core claims made by the text, including women's ability to fulfil the most difficult and elevated public offices. Her willingness to translate these ideas, taken in conjunction with the details of her own life, in

which she published extensively and openly on essentially male, public discourses, provided for herself and her family, travelled independently, and interacted with some of the most eminent European thinkers and writers of her day, certainly indicates that she did not believe public life to be beyond the capabilities of a woman.

In a study of Floresta's own writing and the increasingly private and familial role she advocates for her fellow women, this insight into her underlying convictions helps us to understand the process by which she arrived at her final position regarding women's place in society. It clearly demonstrates that Floresta does not exclude women from the public sphere because she believes they lack the ability, but because such activity does not fit with the vision of woman that she comes to advocate. In turn, this knowledge helps to demonstrate the force of the various intellectual influences that shaped her work, from Enlightenment thought to contemporary European liberalism, the predominantly Catholic discourse of maternalism in Brazil and Europe, and the growing influence of Positivism through her friendship with Auguste Comte.[18] It is therefore through this widening gap between ability and appropriateness that Floresta's feminism must be evaluated.

To a certain extent, the primary purpose of this article has been to disseminate or draw attention to research that is not my own. Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke's identification of the true origins of *Direitos* overturns one of the cornerstones upon which Floresta's position in the feminist and wider Brazilian canon has always been constructed. As such it could and should have cleared the way for a concerted re-reading and reappraisal of Floresta's work and reputation. That this has not happened in the decade following the publication of that research is a shame, and not only in terms of scholarly accuracy. The seemingly inescapable epithet of "translator of Mary Wollstonecraft" in fact does Floresta no favours. Rather, this association with one of the most famous

[18] See Liddell (44-74) for a full discussion of Floresta's own writing on women and the various intellectual influences that can be traced through it.

names in the historiography of liberal feminist discourse serves to keep Floresta's own work in the shadows, bringing a disproportionate focus to her first, and it must be said unrepresentative, publication. Meanwhile much of her own writing, unique in its scope and volume amongst nineteenth-century Brazilian women's literature, remains largely uncommented upon.[19]

It is therefore vitally important that Pallares-Burke's research is now assimilated into scholarly discussion of Floresta so that her writings on women can be read and evaluated honestly and objectively. Yet it is equally important that discussion and analysis of *Direitos* should continue to move forward. However valuable, Pallares-Burke's research is only the opening shot and is inevitably limited in its focus. As I hope to have demonstrated in this article, a consideration of the French translation through which *Direitos* is mediated is crucial to an evaluation of the transmission of ideas and the circumstances surrounding Floresta's authorial misattribution. More importantly, in the absence of any concrete evidence, it is essential that this particularly thorny issue should be approached openly, with a view to furthering, rather than foreclosing, important wider debates relating to the history of feminist ideas in Brazil. It need hardly be said that the value of any fresh analysis of Floresta's work lies not in its ability to elevate or reduce her status, but in the clarification and demythologisation of the part she played and the position she has earned within the history of social discourse in mid-nineteenth-century Brazil. With this in mind, I hope that the present article can play some part in that process, helping to secure Floresta's place in Brazil's feminist canon, albeit with some inevitable modifications, on an impartial and solid foundation.

[19] Most notably, Floresta's discussions of slavery, the Brazilian Indian and political ideology have received very little attention. In the last 50 years, only two full-length studies, Duarte's 1995 work and Liddell's thesis (2005) have made a comprehensive study of all aspects of her writing.

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